

## Closure of the Claretian Spirituality Congress

The concluding words of our Claretian Spirituality Congress will, above all, be those in today's Eucharist of Jesus, the anointed and sent from the Father to announce the Good News to the poor. He, having explained to us the meaning of the scriptures and shared with us the bread, would send us his Spirit and we would return to our communities to be witnesses and to announce the power of his resurrection.

Having concluded our sessions of meetings and work, I wish to interpret the common feelings of all and express out loud the sense of satisfaction that fill us for having brought about the Congress and the way that it has gone. I believe that they come together both the opinion of its opportuneness and the suitability of its celebration, and the expectation that it may be an important point of reference for the missionary life of our Congregation, which wishes to progress constantly in faithfulness to the gift and the mission it has received. Although there is always room for improvement, we have seen that the objectives, which we proposed, have been sufficiently achieved. We can say with the Psalmist: "What marvels indeed the Lord did for us, and how overjoyed we were!" (Ps 126: 3)

The presence of Mary, mother and foundress of the Congregation, has left us feeling throughout these days as an inspiration, sign of hope, model and stimulus for listening to the Word and to communicate it with urgency. It comforts us to be in her motherly heart. With her, we have learnt to be disciples of her Son and missionaries of the Kingdom. We continue fulfilling the canticle of the Magnificat from generation to generation.

I offer you some reflections on the Congress.

**1. The experience of communion.** The Congress has been the fruit of a communitarian and congregational effort with its many forms of participation at the different stages which were pointed out at the start. To the congregational 'us', in a relatively short time, there has been incorporated new agents who are making their voice heard, as well as their sensibilities, their traditions, their customs. The climate of communion in the diversity of aspects, which constitute and articulate the missionary life of our Institute, has been very obvious during these days. Despite the peculiarities and differences, we are so used to experiencing the serenity and the harmony among us, that we might not appreciate sufficiently the gift of God in our being together, the sharing and the planning.

It is to be hoped that the Congress harvest other fruits but the one of communion in missionary brotherliness is one which we are obliged to tell others about because we have felt it and

enjoyed it here. Is it not beautiful to see that despite some being priests and others brothers, some from the east and others from the west, some from the north and others from the south, that although we come from such different places, we speak such different languages, we work in such different ministries and yet we all see ourselves as moved by the same ideal of missionary life and coinciding in the inspirational nuclei, dynamisms and means of growth in it? The openness, the acknowledgement of the diverse contributions, the respectful acceptance of other sensibilities and of the nuances in understanding other ways and expressing the same project of life, are signs of maturity which comes to us from on high as a gift. For this we have to give thanks to the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ who has made us feel the fraternity and the desire to grow in the service of the Kingdom of God.

*Without any special effort, the interest of all to integrate and not exclude has been notable.* I highlight this fact because it confirms the process of renewal in the Congregation which, guided by the Holy Spirit, has been progressively growing in the reconciliation and in the communion, so decisive for evangelisation. 1) We were able to reconcile ourselves with the name: Missionaries, Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary – Claretian Missionaries. We saw that one cannot be Claretian without being a Son of the Heart of Mary, just as it was understood and lived by Fr. Founder. 2) We reconciled ourselves in fraternity and mission of all the members of the Congregation: priests, deacons, students and brothers 3) We reconciled ourselves in the diversity of apostolates: we are all missionaries. 4) We have been reconciled with the fundamental options of our missionary life. It was not actually brought into discussion. Interculturality is presented today as a special challenge. Here, during these days we have had a powerful experience of this fact and we have been able to figure out where we have to go in the future to progress in communion in this area without exceptions. The future of the mission of the Congregation will depend a lot on the capacity to make real among us the reciprocity of gifts, which presupposes a decentralisation and accepting differences.

## **2. The centeredness of the mission in our spirituality and the prophetic cry, which cannot be silenced.**

Our encounter here has not been simply a fraternal gathering, but a resolve to renew our missionary commitment. In this sense, it cannot be considered as an isolated happening in the journey of the congregation. If, as Claretians, we are concerned about our spirituality, it is because, being missionaries of the Reign of God, we want to respond to the challenges that face us in the beginning of this new era. Spirituality and Mission, we have verified in these days, are the two faces of our missionary vocation.

The Congress has been a shared experience of the concern that we carry within to give a response to the challenges, which we as missionaries of the Reign face, from the world, the Church and the Congregation. In our prayers, celebrations and deliberations, we have been able to appreciate how the Spirit, in the beginning of this era, moves us to prophetic service lived out in the witness of our lives and the proclamation of the Gospel. We have asked ourselves if we are up to the challenge to synthesize, put ourselves in solidarity and collaborate

in the transformation of our contemporary world.

Our spirituality is missionary and in the future we have to give emphasis more and more to mission as the center for life and live this out in all its aspects. Passion for the Reign of God, which suffers so many setbacks, and where there are so much evidence of signs of that Anti-Reign, bring us to make radical choices an option for the poor, of non-violence, of defending life, of dialogue with religions and cultures and of being present in the new ‘areopagos’. We are urged to exercise our prophetic function and become “voice for those who are voiceless”.

We need to cultivate the unity of life, avoiding any dispersion and dichotomy that make our ministry lifeless. It is necessary to recuperate and keep alive the original experience of our call, which is fruit of the Spirit. If we do not have this experience of the Spirit, who empowers us for the proclamation of the Reign of God and who gives us comfort in moments of difficulties, the mission remains reduced to a simple human activity and lifeless for service of the Gospel. When the mission is the “cantus firmus” in our missionary life, the coherence between our style of life, our universal brotherhood, our dialogue, our solidarity, our government and our formation is assured.

Reviewing the acknowledged frustrations, lack of fulfilment and escapisms due to the fact that we give importance only to the immediate, to the efficacious activity and instant success, we find also the invitation to think deeply and extensively about *the mission* in order to make of it the key and cornerstone of our life, since everything else goes around it. Experience tells us that it is the mission and everything it brings, like assignments, revision of positions and ministries etc., where we check till what extent is our *quality of life*. We can have long and nice talks about acts of piety and fraternal relationships but the true test comes when we are given a new assignment or experience changes in structures in which we are very much involved. When asked to break attachments and be free for more urgent and well-discerned tasks, the deep motivations that move our life come out. It is then when it becomes obvious the crossroad of our decision to follow Jesus in a radical way.

**3. The following day, the re-founding.** We end our Congress the following day, after having celebrated the anniversary feast of the foundation of our Congregation. This coincidence makes us look up towards the future. Be aware that the **day after of the foundation** implies to discover in the today of God the destiny of our Congregation that was not born for itself but to serve and make the Kingdom grow. After the past 152 years, we are invited to open ourselves to new horizons and convoked to new challenges.

The **following day of the foundation**, today, asks us to speak of re-foundation, understood as “deep personal and communitarian conversion to the Claretian mission, here and now, and as sincere and courageous revision of those positions that cut the wings of our missionary spirit. Re-founding asks from us to drink with greater enthusiasm from the congregational sources and to respond swiftly to the prompts of the Spirit who is always engaged ‘in making all things

new' (Ap 21,5"<sup>[1]</sup>)

Based on what we have observed during the Congress, the re-foundation demands a dense and rich spirituality. In order that a community will appear united, in solidarity, enthusiastic and available, it is not enough to put ideas in common; it is necessary that the charismatic gift, the interior energy, enter into the movement that makes our life in common come true. Only the Spirit liberates us from attachments, make us able to transform structures, induces us to start new projects. When we put in common the Spirit that motivates us, it is easy to overcome crisis, to solve conflicts, to remove obstacles; in summary, to make possible that the glory of God shine brightly.

Everything that our lips have said came up from the heart of men filled with the missionary spirit in harmony with Claret. It has been a constant affirmation and profession of faith in the spirit that animated the first Claretian community. Based on what we have heard and shared, we can say that in the beginning of the third millennium the sons of Claret feel animated by the same spirit, as he used to say about his co-founders (cf. Aut 489). This is the secret of our hope and joy. As long as we keep alive this spirit we can trust in the future of our living together and working united for the Gospel.

#### **4. Some virtues that we must cultivate**

Besides the evangelical counsels and the virtues indicated in our Constitutions, there are other dynamisms, which spring up from our charism, and must be cultivated in special way if we want our ministry to be prophetic. They have been mentioned with different words during the Congress. I will just enumerate them.

a) *Vigilance and "looking into everything"*. To live with our eyes open according to what is happening in our world, keeping our eyes and hearts open according to what is emerging as the most urgent for the Kingdom and its justice, in order to save, what is exposed to danger or to loss, to accomplish the will of God our Father. How could we be good missionaries without perceiving the cries and the murmurs of the surrounding reality? This attitude of looking for according to everything implies a double attitude: that of contemplation and that of compassion, as it were highlighted during these days. Those, seeking sincerely, will arrive to be converted and to take new initiatives.

b) *Interior liberty, selflessness and availability for the mission*. Nobody is able to fly without the wings opened, if he is affected by egoistic concerns. The great aspirations come from hearts which are free. The prophets were the freest men in their hearts. The free missionaries are always ready to leave what prevents them to undertake new ways: the prophecy of renewal is being transformed in itinerancy.

c) *The generosity and giving of ourselves to the Cause of Jesus*. The missionary zeal, the

apostolic charity, about which we are meditating in the Eucharist.

d) *The collaboration, working together, sharing the mission.* It is not a matter of strategy to afford efficiency, it is a dynamism, a virtue proper to any Claretian. The best form to root out individualism is to promote the collaboration supposing openness, dialogue, tolerance and generosity in order to sustain all what is there as positive in our life and work.

e) *Our fortitude and persevering fidelity.* Our mission is filled with risks and difficulties. There we need much renouncing and a lot of courage. A strong missionary is somebody who has his face turned to the future, knowing where he is going to, not being stopped in front of risks and traps. He tackles them with earnest mind and hope. The perseverance to which I refer to is in relationship to creative fidelity, which helps us to give priority to who is essential and to try to obtain it. What is important for our world is the prophesy of fidelity.

I am sure that you have your own considerations about this Congress. I think we all agree that what we have seen and heard helps the whole Congregation to grow in its missionary life in the beginning of the third millennium. May the Holy Spirit who has enlightened our mind and enkindled the hearts of our brothers in order to share their spiritual experiences, continue helping us to journey with the People of God among whom we want to be witnesses and servants of the Reign. The Congress comes to an end but the task to renew our spirituality goes on.

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I conclude giving my sincere thanks to those who have made the Congress possible. First of all, we have to thank the cooperation of those who, in a spontaneous manner, shared experiences about their spiritual life while answering the questionnaire. Thanks to the members of the First International Commission who gathered and articulated the data given. Thanks to Fr. Jose Cristo Rey García Paredes for the text presented to the communities for further reflection. Thanks to the Major Organisms and all the persons who have sent their contributions. Thanks to the Second International Commission that prepared the Working Document for the Congress and the members of the General Curia who have collaborated with Fr. José Felix Valderrábano, Executive Secretary of the Congress, who carried out so many and detailed works.

The Buen Suceso community and the Province of Castilla were very much cooperative, since the very moment the General Government asked for their help, looking for the venue and organizing the welcoming, means of transportation, visits and everything needed by the Secretariat. We mention especially Frs. Vicente Sanz and Justino Martínez, and Bros. Mariano Martín and Eduardo Avila of the Curia of Castilla and the members of the Segovia Community.

Within the Congress itself, besides giving thanks to the Salesian Sisters for their exquisite

attention, we thank each and every participant for the exemplary participation and for their valuable contributions. Thanks, members of the Claretian Family for accompanying us during these days and being united with us in prayer, in fraternal life and reflection. Thanks to those who prepared the Liturgical celebrations and moments of prayer. Thanks to the efficient moderators, the secretaries and the members of the different commissions: drafting, message, communications and recreation commissions. Thanks to the hard working translators.

Finally I would like to mention the valuable contribution of Fr. Gustavo Alonso and Msgr. Luis Gutierrez, bishop of Segovia, and to thank them for their availability and enlightenment.

Therefore, I, together with all the members of the General Government, thank all of you and pray that you have a safe trip back home. To you and your respective Organisms, I wish peace, joy and hope in the future as foreseen here.

Majadahonda, July 17, 2001

Aquilino Bocos Merino, CMF  
General Superior

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[\[1\]](#) Cf CICLA Boletín, 8, p. 2.