

## **Concluding Address**

### **General Chapter 2021**

Dear brothers,

We read in Psalm 127:1, “Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain; Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.”. Unless a Claretian is rooted in Christ and allow God to be audacious with our lives, our commitments will be frivolous. This Chapter experience itself during these pandemic times has been a manifestation of the Lord leading us by the hand.

The life of our Founder is an example of how rootedness and audacity are interconnected. On the Foundation day itself he prepared his companions for an extraordinary life ahead inviting them to meditate on Psalm 23 which says, “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me”. The congregation gave birth to audacious missionaries to the Church because of her roots in the Lord.

The preparation and celebration of this Chapter were designed to be a transformative journey together. We discovered that through generative conversations in the presence of the Lord about what has been happening in and around us and finding the light of His Word to illumine us about them, and being nourished by the Eucharist, we have our hearts burning and our enthusiasm for the mission enkindled. We discover the true beauty and joy of our missionary vocation.

I came to the Chapter with mixed feelings and with a growing unwillingness to accept any responsibilities. The human voice in me was repeating, “basta, be free to do what you would like to do as a Claretian. Why burn your fingers again”. While there was joy and gratitude in me for all that the Lord was doing in our Congregation and the wonderful lives of most of our brothers, I was collecting some amount of burdens and resentments which I have not unpacked enough before the Lord. In the busy preparatory phase of the Chapter, I thought I was fine and I needed to be strong, the Tarzan in me was still holding on. The three days of retreat helped me to unpack the joyful and sorrowful mysteries of my own missionary life. My companion on the Emmaus walk offered me Jesus’ Presence to unburden my heart and view from a distance the folly of my way of carrying the cross. I was present to his pain, and, I believe, both of us felt the Lord in our midst.

Let me share about my own transformative processes that I have been going through during the preparation and celebration of the Chapter. They were perhaps more conceptual than actual and we (including me) wanted them to happen externally in the Congregation going forth, in the communities and in

spirituality and formation. The subject was I and we, and the object was the congregation and the mission in abstract.

My transformative journey during the Chapter touched all the three levels and there was the wresting of my ego with the Lord and his Word.

The first struggle was to drop my need to have everything go as we have planned. The Pandemic taught a big lesson and it invited us to weave our story with the Lord's designs for us rather than just calling the Lord only to bless our designs. The difficulty to hold in-person conversations, the hurdles to get visa for about 16 of our brothers and the unexpected appearance of the Virus in the Chapter community were not in our plans. At the core of the whole journey, there was the invisible presence, not of the virus, but the abiding presence of the Risen Lord and the abundance of his love spilling over through events and from the hearts of our brothers.

I learnt that we do not have to be in control of everything happening, we need only to walk with the Lord of History and listen to his word spoken in manifold ways. God is Love and love happens and not produced. We are loved immensely and unconditionally, and walking in God's love makes the whole difference.

Love is seeing things differently, seeing through God's eyes. It opens up new horizons of life and mission. I believe this is the contemplation that Pope Francis was asking of us. Our commitment to stay rooted in Christ is the foundation for all the other commitments. Are we committed to giving time and energy to stay daily anchored in the Triune God of relationships? I have seen the difference it makes in the lives of many Claretians.

Claretian life is rooted in our charism, God's gift to the Church which unites us into one family. We are bound together in community by the love of God and love for our brothers poured into our hearts (CC 10). Love generates proximity, generosity and sacrifice from each of us, and compassion and tenderness towards others. We experienced it during the Chapter. I admire the generous commitment of our redaction committee, the moderators, the facilitators, the communication team, secretariat, logistic team and others. They spent many extra hours each day for the smooth running of the Chapter. I think of Sr. Jolanda, a responsible Superior General dedicating one month away from her Congregation to be with her brothers and the community giving her that space! When we love, we do not count the cost. Authentic audacity is born of love and it acts without trumpets.

The weeds that choke generosity are often the logs in our eyes that distort the vision and deform the image of God in the other. We need audacity to get down from the judgement seats from where we evaluate each brother, sister and each event according to one's own standards. There were weeds in the Chapter process too in different forms such as generalized judgements and frustrated expectations that at times choked the seed of its thrust to bloom, but love and patience could take care of them. I think of our communities and the dynamics of our relationships where weeds of judgements, gossips and prejudices choke the

capacity of generative conversations. We need audacity to learn and practice compassionate and empowering communications among us and with others especially those who think and act different from us.

Our missionary service is rooted in the love for the Church and the people of God especially the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters. Audacious apostolates arise from that love. Are we able to see in the face of our sisters and brothers the image of a loving God and love them with the heart of God? At that depth there is no place for spiritual worldliness, clericalism, and sexual or financial abuse. The deadly viruses that disfigure humanity are spiritual and mental viruses that cripple the human mind and heart and create systems that normalize corruption and exploitation persons and creation. As they are invisible, we need proper tools to detect and deactivate them from our own hearts. Our Constitutions offer many of them.

Audacious commitments will take place in each context when we are able to dream together God's dream for us, discern designs in the Spirit of Christ as we have done in this Chapter.

Dear brothers, We are at the end of the XXVI General Chapter. As I have said in my letter of announcement of the Chapter, it is more a responsibility rather than a privilege to represent your Organisms, though some privileges come with it such as knowing our brothers from others parts of the world or meeting the Pope personally.

The Chapter fulfils its mission in the measure its effects transform each of us and how effectively we transmit this transformative process into our Major Organisms. Effective planning and coordination of our life and mission as an authentic missionary response to our times take place from that zone.

I invite you to greet each of your community members, the Claretian family and lay people working together in shared mission with you and give them the warm greetings from me and the Chapter community. Please, in my name, offer a warm embrace to the elderly Claretians with due respect for covid protocols. Tell them that we share their dreams and find energized by their sacrifices and prayer. Greet the young Claretians in your communities and theformandi in the houses of formation and share the joy of our shared vocation and mission and invite all our brothers who mission in different platforms of evangelization to join together to weave a beautiful story of God's love for humanity through Claretian life and mission in the world. Though small in size, God can do great things through us in the Church.

We bring the Chapter sessions to a close now and conclude the Chapter with the Holy Eucharist presided over by our Beloved brother and Cardinal Aquilino Bocos.

Let us commend ourselves and our forward journey with the discovery, dreams, designs and commitments we made during the Chapter to the Heart of our

Blessed Mother who cherishes us, her sons, in the forge of her heart and accompanies us in our life and mission. We are fortified by the intercession of our Founder and brother Martyrs and the Claretians who are called to the home of the Father.

We glorify God the Father Son and the Spirit with all our lives.

Mathew Vattamattam, CMF

Superior General

11 September 2021.