



COMILLAS

UNIVERSIDAD PONTIFICIA



FACULTAD DE TEOLOGÍA

**PRAYER IN THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF SAINT
ANTHONY MARY CLARET AND ITS REFLECTION IN
CLARETIAN CONSTITUTIONS AND DOCUMENTS**

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Visto bueno del director
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Fdo.

Madrid,

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Abbreviations

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- CCC *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. New Delhi: Rekha Printers, 1994.
- CCM *Constitutions of the Congregation of Missionaries*. Claretian Missionaries. Rome, 2000.
- CPM Constituciones Para los Misioneros de la Congregación del Inmaculada Corazón de María. Roma, 1982.
- DV *Dei Verbum*. In The Documents of Vatican II. Edited by Walter M. Abbott. New York: Guild Press, 1966.
- ET Pope Paul VI. Apostolic Exhortation. *Evangelica Testificatio*. Rome 1971.
- GC XVII Claretian Missionaries General chapter document XVII. *Declaration on our charism*. Rome, 1967.
- GC XIX Claretian Missionaries General Chapter Document XIX. *The Mission of the Claretian Today*. Rome, 1979.
- GC XX Claretian Missionaries General Chapter Document XX. *The Claretian in the Process of Congregational Renewal*. Rome 1985.
- GC XXI Claretian Missionaries General Chapter XXI. *Servants of the Word. Our Missionary Service of the Word in the "New Evangelization*, Rome, 1991.
- GC XXII Claretian Missionaries General Chapter Document XXII, *In Prophetic Mission*, Rome, 1997.

- LG *Lumen Gentium*. The Documents of Vatican II. Edited by Walter M. Abbott. New York: Guild Press,1966.
- MC Pope Paul VI. Apostolic Exhortation. *Marialis Cultus*, Rome 1974.
- MN Pope Pius XI. Apostolic Exhortation. *Menti Nostrae*. Rome, 1950.
- OPM José Maria Viñas Colomer CMF, José Cristo Rey García Paredes CMF. *Our Project of Missionary Life, Commentary on the Constitutions*. Vol II. Translated by Joseph C. Daries, CMF. Claretian Publications Quezon City: Philippines, 1992.
- SC *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. In The Documents of Vatican II. Edited by Walter M. Abbott. New York: Guild Press,1966.

2. Others

- BAC Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid
- Cf. Confer.
- Ch. Chapter
- dir. Director
- ed. editor
- eds. Editors
- Ed. Edition
- Ibid. Ibidem
- no. Number
- vol. volume

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Introduction

Prayer is a fundamental component of religion that cannot be separated from the person who believes in God. Similarly, prayer occupies a central place in the Church's life, emphasising that prayer is necessary to grow in faith. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that prayer is the gift of God and that it makes encounters with God possible; such encounters through prayer transform the person into a man of prayer¹. Prayer has various forms and methods, providing ample opportunities to practice and grow in prayer. In the history of the Catholic Church, many holy men and women have contributed profoundly to explain the richness and sacredness of different forms and methods of prayer.

The Church always reminds Christ's followers to develop a healthy prayer life. Throughout its history, many holy men and women vividly contributed to the prayer lives of the faithful. Studying the theology of prayer in the Spirituality course inspired me to study the prayer life and writings of St. Anthony Maria Claret, our beloved founder. His prayer life and writings inspired many young men and women to be the missionaries of Christ. In the 19th century, Claret was an apostolic missionary and ardent preacher of the Word of God. It is a fact that a missionary must be rooted in prayer, and the grace of God was active in him through prayer. My curiosity about prayer life and Claret's writings inspired me to do this study. I also admit that studying Claret and his writings was challenging due to my lack of language fluency. I use English as the primary language to elaborate my work, and my main citations are from the original language, Spanish.

¹ The Catechism of the Catholic Church regarding the significance of prayer states: "If you know the gift of God! The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: there, Christ comes to meet every human being. It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him": *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. New Delhi: Rekha Printers, 1994, no. 2560.

A) The Centre of Interest

The centre of my work is prayer in Claret's life, the writings of Claret, the Claretian Constitutions and the Documents. The search for details and authentic information made the study enjoyable and fruitful. My search findings reveal Claret's desire to imitate Jesus closely and invite others to know, love, praise, and serve Him. My research experience made me understand that I did not present complete work on the theme, yet it opened the door for me to continue studying this theme. Claret, a man of prayer, kept learning and growing to understand prayer at different stages of his life. The study reveals the maturity in prayer and his profound relationship with God.

B) Methodology and the structure of the Chapters

The investigation consists of three chapters linked together and developed according to themes. The first chapter focuses on Claret's early life and his practice of different forms and methods of prayer in the various stages of his life. This presentation provides a glimpse of information about the religiosity of his times. As a child, a young boy seminarian, priest, missionary, founder and archbishop, he was consistently rooted in the habit of prayer and grew in the union with the Lord. The first chapter continues to provide the richness of the spirituality and the methods of prayers that the Church gave to the faithful.

The main findings were from the *Autobiography*, a primary source for the other findings related to Claret's life and prayer practice. The chapter explains how devotion to popular piety influenced the young boy and how the devoted family and environment of his time contributed to the early formation of his spirituality. As the chapter progresses, it provides precise details of his growth, understanding, and conviction of prayer in the different stages of his life, formation, and mission. I find it essential to know the gradual growth in his prayer life and how he transmitted his personal experiences into missionary actions and founded the Congregation to continue the great project initiated by the grace of God.

The second chapter presents the doctrine of prayer in Claret's writings. I must admit that Claret is not a theologian but a great apostolic missionary of the 19th century. His writings and teaching on prayer greatly attracted the missionaries and the simple people because of their simplicity and practicality. The chapter presents Claret's ideas on different forms of prayer that influenced his spiritual life and contributed to his spiritual growth. He sees all these as the pathway to a better relationship with God and the people. After studying the spirituality course, I am convinced that a sound prayer life is essential to grow in spirituality and respond to the call of God. While working on this project, I observed Claret intending to present this idea profoundly to all.

In his writings on prayer, he used various methods and creative forms of presentation, using all the available means of his time. He made his teaching available to many by publishing, preaching, teaching, giving retreats, writing pastoral letters, and giving conferences to different groups of people. The central teaching on prayer we could find in his writing is imitating praying, working, and suffering Jesus.

The third chapter contains the prayer in the Constitutions and Documents of the Claretian congregation. Claret, our founder's prayer life, purely inspires the Congregation's teaching on prayer to its members. It presents the essentiality of prayer in the Congregation's life, formation, and mission and serves as the missionary's lifeline. The reading and study of the Constitutions and Documents in light of the founder's teachings and instruction shed light and added more profound meaning to the Congregation's teaching.

The Congregation is fully aware of keeping the charismatic spirit of the founder, which God gave and animated by the Holy Spirit, alive and active in the Congregation's life and mission. The aim is very clearly expressed by incorporating the charismatic spirit of the founder, which is closely imitating Jesus in praying, working, and suffering. The third chapter continues to explore the Claretian way of praying and participating in the invitation of the Church. The study made me understand that the congregation is generously open to adopting the teaching of the Church on prayer and flexible to the renewal that the Church proposes. The missionaries need to know the congregation's interest and the founder's spirit to grow in holiness. The study of prayer in the Constitutions

and the documents indicate that learning and practising the different forms and methods of prayer enrich spirituality and help us participate in the people's piety and spirituality. Prayer serves as the powerhouse of missionary communities and a means of sanctification for all.

I include the important years and events in Claret's life to provide a clear and brief synthesis that will help readers better understand his life and mission.

Chronological Synthesis of Claret's Life and Works

The following chronicle synthesis is taken from the *Autobiography* of St. Anthony Mary Claret: (St. Anthony Mary Claret. *Autobiography and Complementary Writings*. Transcription and Introductions by José María Viñas and Jesús Bermejo. Bicentennial Edition. Claretian Publications: Bangalore, 2011.). It provides an overall view of life events and missionary work.

1807: Claret was born in Sallent (Barcelona) on December 23. On December 25, he received the Sacrament of Baptism.

1813: Attends the school of Don Antonio Pascual. Learns the Catechism by memory. Leads the recitation of the rosary in church and his father's shop.

1814: Receives Confirmation in Sallent at the hands of the titular Archbishop of Palmira, Don Félix Amat de Palou y Pont.

1817: Receives First Communion. Great love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. A tender devotion to the Virgin. He frequently visits the Sanctuary of the Virgin of Fusimanya with his sister Rose.

1819: He begins to study Latin with Don Juan Riera. His father makes him an apprentice in the family business.

1825: He travels to Barcelona to perfect his skills in the textile arts. In La Lonja, he studies drawing, grammar, and French.

1827: Is freed from the temptations of a wrong woman by invoking the Virgin. An unfaithful friend cheats him.

1828: A house collapses in Sallent during a dance. 28 people die. Anthony had been there just before it happened. He is saved from drowning at the beach of the Barceloneta of Barcelona. Crisis evoked by the question "Quid Prodest."

1829: He is admitted to the seminary in Vic. He lives in the house of Don Fortián Bres. He makes a general confession.

1830: He decides to enter the Carthusians of Montealegre (Barcelona); but a furious storm makes him change his mind.

1831: During his second year of Philosophy, he is tempted against chastity. The apostolic vocation is awakened in him while reading the Bible and the Lives of the Saints. He joins various confraternities in Vic. He strikes up a friendship with Jaime Balmes.

1832: Receives tonsure at the hands of the Bishop of Vic, Don Pablo de Jesús Corcuera, and takes possession of the benefice of St. Mary's Church in Sallent. Finishes the third year of Philosophy. Stands out in science and mathematics. Begins Theology.

1833: Receives minor orders at the Church of St. Philip Neri in Vic.

1834: On May 24, he receives the subdiaconate at the same ordination in which Jaime Balmes is ordained Deacon. On December 20, Claret is ordained Deacon at the Church of the Presentation in Vic.

1835: On June 13, in the episcopal palace, the Bishop of Solsona, Fray Juan José de Tejada, Mercedarian, ordains Claret to the Priesthood. On June 21, in Sallent, he celebrates his first Mass. He is named parochial vicar and then administrator of St. Mary's Church in Sallent.

1839: In September, he travels to Rome to offer himself to the "Propaganda Fide." On October 2, he travels by boat from Marseilles to Civitavecchia. On October 6, he arrives in Rome. In November, he enters the novitiate of the Society of Jesus.

1840: The Father General of the Jesuits advises him to return to Spain. On May 13, he is named regent of Viladrau. On August 15, he asked to be freed from his responsibilities to dedicate himself more freely to giving famous missions.

1841: On January 23, he moved to Vic to dedicate himself completely to preaching. On July 9, he received the title of Apostolic missionary from Rome.

1842: Adverse political circumstances prevented him from preaching. In June, he is named vicar of Sant Joan d'Oló.

1843: The political situation eases. On March 1, he begins his intensive missionary activity in Catalonia. Publishes *The Straight Path*.

1844: Preaches May in Santa María del Mar, in Barcelona. A large crowd is moved to hear him. His missionary campaign continues with great conversions.

1845: Missionary activity continues. He establishes in Mataró the "The Spiritual Society of Mary Most Holy against Blasphemy."

1846: In Tarragona gets to know Don José Caixal. With him, he established the Brotherhood of Good Books. In May, he preached the famous mission in Lérida. During this mission, the people began to call him "Father Claret." A campaign of defamation began.

1847: He founds the *Librería Religiosa* with Don José Caixal and Don Antonio Palau. In March, he retired to Victoria. In August, he founded the Archconfraternity of the Heart of Mary in Victoria.

1848: On March 6, he embarks for the Canary Islands from Cádiz. On March 11, he arrives in Santa Cruz de Tenerife, and on the 14th, he arrives in Las Palmas and preaches missions throughout the Grand Canary Island. He becomes known as "El Padrito."

1849: On July 16, he founded the Congregation in a cell at the seminary in Vic. On August 11, he received his nomination as Archbishop of Santiago, Cuba, and on October 4, he accepted the nomination.

1850: He is dedicated to missionary preaching while awaiting his episcopal consecration, which takes place in Vic on October 6. The bishop, Luciano Casadevall, ordains him. On December 28, he embarks on a trip to Barcelona for Cuba.

1851: On February 16, he arrives at Santiago, Cuba. On March 3, he visits the Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre shrine. On April 2, he begins the diocesan pastoral visitation.

1852: In October, there was a great cholera epidemic, which claimed almost 3,000 lives in three months. Claret visited hospitals, confessed, counselled, and distributed alms.

1853: Claret continues untiringly his pastoral activity in Cuba.

1854: On February 15, he establishes savings banks.

1855: On January 8, he begins the Agricultural Farm of Puerto Príncipe. On July 12, he finishes a letter about the Immaculate Conception. On August 25, he issues the decree of the foundation of the Claretian Missionary Sisters.

1856: On February 1, he suffers an attempted assassination in Holguín. On the 23rd, he writes to the Pope, putting his mitre at his disposition. Pius IX suggested that he continues in the archdiocese.

1857: On March 18, he receives a letter from Queen Isabel II asking him to return to Madrid. On April 12, he leaves the island of Cuba. On May 18, he enters the port of Cádiz, Spain. On May 26, he arrives in Madrid. He is interviewed by Queen Isabel II, who has chosen him as her Confessor. On June 5, the official nomination arrives. In the fall, he gives various spiritual exercises in Madrid.

1858: In May, he travels with the Queen to Levante; in July and August, to Castile, León, Asturias, and Galicia. On September 19, the Queen named him president of the Escorial, the royal monastery. On November 1, he establishes the Academy of St. Michael.

1859: He travels to Catalonia and Valencia in May with the King and Queen. On May 28, he presides at the First General Chapter of the Congregation. On July 11, he moves with the King and Queen to their summer residence in La Granja (Segovia).

1860: In June, he finishes *The Well-instructed Collegian or Seminarian*. On July 13, he is recommended to be Archbishop of Trajanópolis. In September, he travelled with the King and Queen to the Balearic Islands, Catalonia, and Aragón.

1861: In July, he travels with the royal family: Valladolid, Palencia and Santander. On August 26, he receives a critical mystical grace of the sacramental species in the Church of the Rosary in La Granja.

1862: From January to May, he is dedicated, by obedience, to writing his Autobiography, begun in the final months of the previous year. From July 7 to 14, he presides over the second General Chapter of the Congregation of Missionaries

in Gracia (Barcelona). In September-October, he travels with the Queen to Andalucía, continuing our activity.

1863: Established the "Congregation of Catholic Mothers."

1864: In July, he presides at the third General Chapter of the Congregation in Gracia (Barcelona). Throughout the year, he is slandered and persecuted by the secular press.

1865: On July 15, Isabel II recognises the Kingdom of Italy. On July 20, he leaves Madrid for Catalonia. On November 7 and 23, he was received by Pius IX, who informed him about Spain. On December 1, he arrives in Barcelona, and on the 22nd, by order of the papal Nuncio, he returns to Madrid to continue his post as confessor to Queen Isabel II.

1867: On May 14, he travels to Extremadura and, in June, to Burgos. In October, God reveals to him the time left in his life: "two years and ten months."

1868: On May 31, he submits his resignation as president of the Escorial, which Isabel II accepts on June 22. In August, he travelled with the King and Queen to San Sebastián. On September 30, the Queen is exiled to France. Fr. Claret accompanies her. He resides in Pau (France). On November 6, he arrives in Paris. Resides in the school of the sisters of St. Joseph of Bourg.

1869: In Paris, he lived a poor and simple life. March 30, he decides to separate himself from the court. Leaves Paris for Rome. On April 2, he arrives in Rome. It is at the Mercedarians of San Adrián rectory at the Roman Forum. On April 24, Pius IX receives him. He is dedicated to prayer, study, writing, visiting hospitals, and preaching in Rome. The book *L'egoismo vinto* (Selfishness Conquered) is published in Italian. On December 8, he attends the opening of the First Vatican Council.

1870: He continues his participation in the Council. On May 31, he delivers a moving address in defence of infallibility. On July 23, the Council is interrupted. He arrives in Prades (France). On August 6, he finds refuge in the Cistercian monastery of Fontfroide, near Narbonne, where he dies on October 24, at 8:45 a.m. He was 62 years and 10 months. His funeral was celebrated with simplicity on October 27. His body was placed in a tomb in the monastery cemetery. The

words of St. Gregory VII graved on a simple memorial tablet: "I loved justice and hated iniquity; for this, I die in exile."

CHAPTER 1

Anthony Mary Claret: A man of prayer nurtured in the providence of God

Saint Anthony Mary Claret, a man of God, sought God's will from an early age. Divine interventions coloured his life, and he constantly desired to connect himself with God. From the beginning, he allowed himself in the hands of God to be moulded and designed for His mission, like that of the prophet Isaiah's words: "But now, o lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand". (Is 64:8).

Claret was born into a family of John Claret and Josephine Clara; he writes: "... they were upright, and God-fearing people, very devoted to the Blessed Sacrament and Mary most Holy"². He was born in the village of Sallent, deanery of Manresa, dioceses of Vic, province of Barcelone³, on December 3, 1807.

Claret comes from the era of work. The people of Catalonia had a great passion for work, and industrial and commercial growth was rapid; it enabled them to compete with other European countries. This happened after the war in 1814, "On June 11, 1814, after the war against Napoleon, the Claret family moved to the house at number 1 Grant Street... Work was picking up, and the small family business was already enlarged. It was a fairly common case in the region"⁴. In the *Autobiography*, he writes about his work and his learning in the

² St. Anthony Mary Claret. *Autobiography and Complementary Writings*. Transcription and Introductions by José María Viñas and Jesús Bermejo. Claretian Publications: Bangalore, India, 2011, 4. (The following citation from the *Autobiography* will be cited as "Aut").

³ Cf. Ibid. 3.

⁴ J.M. Lozano. *A Life at the Service of the Gospel*. Translated by Joseph. C. Daries CMF. Chicago: Claretian Publication 1985, 8.

factory, revealing that hard work and passion for learning were already taking place in the early environment⁵.

Father Claret's family did not lack basic facilities; the parents could provide their children with elementary needs like food, shelter, and education⁶. The providence of God enabled them to progress in their work and fulfil their duty as parents. The vocation stories in the Bible tell us of Divine intervention in each call. The family, culture, socio-political set-up, and faith provoke the person to be open and passionate about God's call and mission. From this fertile Catalan soil, he taught the heritage of hard work, a sense of order, creativity and productivity⁷.

Claret attained two sets of attitudes from his family that played a significant role in his life and mission. His attitude towards hard and disciplined work was inherited from his father's cotton-weaving industry, and his attitude towards nature, human virtues like simplicity, love for people and animals, and great admiration for God's creation were inherited from his mother's family, who were farmers⁸.

The 19th century was a revolution, and Claret grew on this soil of revolution. Historians call this period a century of revolutions, especially for Spain; he was born, grew and worked in this period⁹. Without addressing his origins, writing about Father Claret's life, spirituality, and mission would be unfair. All these social, cultural, religious, and political contexts influenced his life, thoughts, and mission.

“Durante los 62 años y 10 meses exactos que alcanzó su vida, hubo una serie de acontecimientos, de cambios y de transformaciones, en la historia de Europa y en la historia de España, cuyo resultado definitivo fue la transformación completa de la faz social, religiosa y cultural de Europa y también de España”¹⁰.

Understanding the context and history is essential to understanding the vitality and passion of the apostolic missionary father Claret. His life, spirituality, and mission reflected the changes and challenges of this time. He is a man of

⁵ Cf. Aut. 56 – 65.

⁶ Cf. J.M. Lozano. *A Life at the Service*, 3.

⁷ Cf. Ibid.3.

⁸ Cf. J.M. Lozano, *A Life at the Service*, 3.

⁹ Cf. Cyriac Njayarkulam, CMF. *St. Anthony Mary Claret, Work and Suffer for Jesus Christ*. Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2nd Ed., 2010, 29.

¹⁰ Jesús Álvarez Gómez. *Misioneros Claretianos I Retorno a los orígenes*. Madrid: Publicaciones Claretianas, 1993, 39.

connectivity, and he immersed himself in the reality of his time, which provoked and pervaded him to be a man of God's love and spread that fire of love until the end of his life¹¹. Socio-political changes and disorders have prepared the way for changes and reformation. Undoubtedly, they flagged the way for the reformation in the life and spirituality of the church in Spain. It is appropriate to present a study on early Christian formation in the family.

1.1 A brief outlook on 19th-century spirituality, which influenced the early life of Fr. Claret

From 1800 to 1875, the history presents Fr. Claret as a man of this era and sheds some light on his spirituality. The liberal ideas and the Industrial Revolution played directly and indirectly in the changes and renewed traditional religious thoughts and practices. The anti-clericalism could signify the cry for renewal and interior and structural reforms. On the contrary, the hierarchical nature of the Church is not aware of the seriousness of the cry for reforms in the church's life, spirituality and mission. The church's response was not creative, the attention was inadequate, and it was not ready to face the challenges posed by the new era.

This reality of the time was the call for renewal in the church and the religious orders in the church, which were living with accumulated wealth, disproportionate power and lifestyle. Furthermore, the church was not prepared to dialogue with the intellectual uprising of the new ideas, which provoked Father Claret to respond creatively to the needs of the time. The action of the Holy Spirit was actively present in the formation of this great missionary.

This crucial reality in the church of Spain is looking for a new path for spirituality and evangelization. The suppression of religious orders and the disappearance of traditional methods raised the concern and need for spiritual

¹¹ J. Álvarez observes perfectly in his book, presents the social, political and religious context of Father Claret, and proves the Divine intervention in the call of Claret. It is interesting to note that the missionary cannot be ignored about the reality of his time and life. Cf. J. Álvarez. *Misioneros Claretianos I Retorno a los origenes*. Madrid: Publicaciones Claretianas, 1993, 39.

formation for the lay faithful. The spirit of God triggered Father Claret to participate in the great mission of the Church¹². Emerging from this soil, full of awareness and faith in the Divine Providence, he started his journey as a man of prayer, to do everything for the greater Glory of God and the salvation of humanity¹³.

The negative factors of that time provoked the people of God, bishops, clergies, and religious people to stand as witnesses to their faith and tradition. The majority of the people persevered in their faith. Many priests, including Claret, came up to defend their faith, zealously doing their pastoral activities, living and encouraging Christians to keep their faith and Christian values alive¹⁴. In the 19th century, occurrences paved the way for the new spring of sanctity. Through the conflict and humiliation, the grace of God raised men and women to be rooted in their spirituality and brought renewal to life and the mission of the Spanish Church¹⁵ Observing an era in which Claret bloomed as a spiritual and apostolic missionary can help us understand his early Christian formation in his native land.

1.1.1 Early Christian Formation and Influence of Religious Piety

The providence of God was with him to have a fruitful formation; God had already prepared the fertile land, which is his family. The family showed great love for spiritual formation and commenced their day with participation in the Holy Eucharistic celebration. He writes that he participated in two masses, Low and High

¹²Cf. J. M. Lazano. *A Life at the Service of the Gospel*, 93; The Church had a higher mission, which could only be compromised by their continuance. This is what the experience of Anthony Claret, as a missionary had taught him. Called to evangelize, he could not have followed his vocation if he had chosen to fight either form of state.

¹³ Cf. Aut. 325, “My objective was always to seek God’s greater glory and the salvation of souls.”

¹⁴ Cf. Cyriac Njayarkulam,36: “The bishops, priests and many secularised religious were characterised the great zeal and thanks to their pastoral care, the people could keep their faith and Christian values. Many priests, including Claret, published apologetic writings to help people to defend their faith against the attack of the protestants and socialists”.

¹⁵ Cf. J. M. Lozano, CMF. *Mystic and Man of Action*. Translated by Joseph. C. Daries. Chicago: Claretian Publications, 1977, 42: “All these innovations display great vitality. In effect, although the 19th century was a time of conflict and humiliation for the church, it also occasioned the blossoming of a new springtime sanctity... The vast majority of these saints were founders”.

Mas, and was always in his father's company on feast days¹⁶. The deep and sparkling religiosity of the family is incredible, and the constant reminder of Divine presence captures the thoughts of little Claret. He is impregnated with the thoughts of heaven and eternity. Especially the eternal torment of the sinners and the life in hell. His concern and kindness towards them troubled his thoughts and sleep:

“This troubled me deeply, for I’m by nature very compassionate. The idea of an eternity of torment made such a deep impression on me, either because of the tenderness it evoked in me or because of the many times I thought about it; that is surely the thing that to this day I remember best”¹⁷.

Italian writers, undoubtedly St. Alphonsus Liguori and St. Leonard, greatly influenced the religious piety of the 19th century¹⁸. There was regular contact and formation in Italy, and all these factors played a significant role in the religious piety of the Spanish church. The popular piety and devotional aspects are not included in the liturgy, but undoubtedly, they are part of the spirituality and life of the Catholic Church. Claret himself writes in the *Autobiography* on particular devotions¹⁹. Romanticism and Italian influences were strong and reflected very much in literature and music. People were encouraged to have personal piety centred on Christ, Mary, Rosary, Saints and other personal devotions²⁰.

Talking about the individualistic aspect of popular piety, individual salvation is over-stressed, and on the other part, the communitarian, ecclesial and liturgical aspects were lacking:

“This trait of piety is a consequence of the culture relating to Renaissance, baroque and Romanticism. There is a lack of communitarian as well as ecclesial and liturgical aspects. The aspect of an individual is overstressed. By gaining

¹⁶ Cf. Aut. 36: “On feast days I usually attended two masses, a Low Mass and a high Mass always together with my beloved father”.

¹⁷ Ibid. 9.

¹⁸ Cf. J. M. Lozano, CMF. *Mystic and Man of Action*, 50, “This was only to be expected, for in the 18th century, when the spiritual tone of the rest of Europe was quite mediocre, Italy was passing through a religious age of a certain splendour. St. Alphonsus, St. Leonard, and the two centuries before them came to be known throughout Europe and particularly in Spain”.

¹⁹ St. A. M. Claret speaks of some particular devotion to the saints in this particular number he lists the name of the saints that he had practised: cf. Aut. 654.

²⁰ Cf. Juan Maria Lozano, CMF. *Mystic and Man of Action*, 47, “In those days, the year came to be divided not into liturgical seasons but into months, novenas, and triduum. Popular piety thus came into look upon the year as made up of the month of St. Joseph, of the Blessed Virgin, of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, of the rosary, of the poor souls, etc”.

indulgences, salvation could be guaranteed; this was the predominant mentality among the faithful”²¹.

Christocentric piety is one of the profound expressions of faith and ardent love for Christ, “The Christ-centred piety had three main poles: Eucharist, Passion and Sacred heart... The imitation of Christ is an important theme in the Christocentric devotion of the last century”²². The aspect of reparation and consolation comes to the fore in the devotion to the Sacred Heart. One of Claret's favourite themes is the imitation of Christ²³. These intense practices also significantly contributed to shaping his prayer life.

Apart from Christocentric spirituality, Marian devotion played a significant role in the people's spirituality. For Claret, the two fundamental devotions that never departed from his childhood were the Eucharist and Mother Mary²⁴. The short information on Claret's early life and historical and religious background reveals that his spirituality and Christian formation are timely and effective. To understand his love for prayer and its forms and methods, we can put it in the following way.

1.2 Claret, a praying child, pregnant with the thought of eternity

The concept of prayer begins in childhood. From the beginning, he was in the school of God. The mystical thought of “forever” is evidence that he was pregnant with the thoughts of eternity:

“The first idea I can remember is when I never have been much of a sleeper. I used to think about eternity. I would think forever, forever, forever. I would try to imagine enormous distances and pile still more distances on these and realise that they would never come to an end. Then, I would shudder and ask myself if those

²¹ Cyriac Njayarkulam, 42.

²² Ibid.43.

²³ Cf. Aut. 648: “I resolve always to walk in God’s presence, referring all things to Him, never seeking my praise, but only greater grace to imitate Jesus”.

²⁴ Cf. J. M. Lazano. *A Life at the Service of the Gospel*, 9: “Thus we come to the two fundamental aspects that stand out in his piety from his childhood onward; the Eucharist, and the Mother of the Lord”.

who were so unhappy as to go to an eternity of pain would ever see an end to their suffering. Would they have to go on suffering?”²⁵.

When Claret was five years old, the journey towards holiness was already initiated by God. It is interesting to note that extraordinary grace was active from the beginning of his life. The idea of saintly life, heaven and hell came from hearing the spiritual readings and life stories of saints narrated by his father, but the action of the Holy Spirit moved him to the stage of holy thoughts and prayer²⁶. Later, when he realized the grace of God, he wrote, “This idea of a lost eternity that began to move me so vividly at the tender age of five and that has stayed with me ever since and that, God willing, I will never forget is the mainspring and goad of my zeal for the salvation of the soul”²⁷.

He spent a good part of the night praying and pregnant with the thoughts of unhappiness of men and the danger of being lost forever. It was from this early Divine experience and this early prayer that the first flame of his zeal for missionary vocation bloomed: “Even as a child, he spent a good part of the night praying: he used to compare the passing world of time with the endless world of eternity... it was from this early prayer that the first flame of his zeal broke forth”²⁸.

The reading and sharing of devotional and edifying books kept the fire of holy thoughts alive and active. The family of Claret had the same practice, and his father was very particular about this traditional practice. There are two books mentioned, “*Bon Dia* and *Bona Nit*”. Don José Roquer wrote these prayer books, and they contain a series of reflections, conversations and prayers for all the days that helped the family and the children to abide by the holy thoughts²⁹. These two prayer books were quite famous in the region, and they had a significant influence in the early stages of his spirituality³⁰.

²⁵ Aut. 8.

²⁶ Cf. Juan Maria Lozano, CMF. *Mystic and Man of Action*, 104.

²⁷ Aut. 15.

²⁸ José Maria Viñas Colomer CMF, José Cristo Rey García Paredes CMF, eds. *Our Project of Missionary Life, Commentary on the Constitutions*. Vol II. Translated by Joseph C. Daries, CMF. Claretian Publications: Quezon City, 1992, 450.

²⁹ Cf. Cyriac Njayarkulam, 49.

³⁰ Cf. Aut. Complimentary reading, 198: “It deals with two different prayer books written by Don José Roquer (born around 1755 in Sant Joan de Fàbregues [Barcelona] and deceased in Vic in 1835). In Vic, the second edition of each was preserved. The first is titled: *Bon Día del cristià empleat en varios exercicis de pietat* (Vich 1828) 272 pp.; and the second: *Bona Nit empleada en*

Dwelling on the state of prayer and holy thoughts is grace to the holy men and women seeking God's presence. In the same way, Claret was also given the grace to dwell on the sacred thoughts. For example, in the *Book of Life*, Saint Teresa of Jesus refers to the thought of eternity,

“It astonished us greatly to find it said in what we were reading that pain and bliss were everlasting. We happened very often to talk about this; and we had the pleasure of frequently repeating, “Forever, ever, ever” Through the constant uttering of these words, our Lord was pleased that I should receive an abiding impression of the way of truth when I was yet a child”³¹.

The thought “forever” begins to follow as the mainspring of his apostolic zeal and is very important at the mystical level³². The spirit of prayer, holy thoughts, and God's grace made him sensible to the Divine presence in his life. Reading spiritual books played a vital role in shaping his spiritual life and understanding of prayer, meditation, and contemplation: “Lord, how many good things I was ignorant of, My God, my Love, who could ever help loving you?”³³.

1.3 The love for Holy Eucharist and Blessed Sacrament, A favoured Prayer of Claret

Saint Claret gives enough emphasis to the Holy Eucharist to record its importance in life and the church's mission. The Eucharistic devotion started at a very early

piadosos exercicis y conversas familiars, molt utils per fomentar la devoció y la verdadera alegria (Vich 1834) 241 pp. The fourth edition of *Bon Día* was published in 1827 and was modified in 1828 (cf. M ELENDRES, MIGUEL, *Una monja y un siglo* (Barcelona 1960) p. 100). The *Bon día* brings a rule of life, Christian prayers, meditations, sacraments, and a summary of spiritual life through a dialogue between the confessor and the penitent. All of it is impregnated with the spirit of Saint Alphonsus Mary Ligouri. The *Bona nit* contains a series of reflections, conversations, and prayers for all the days of the week, distributed in the following manner: Monday: pride and happiness; Tuesday: greed and confession, cause of happiness; Wednesday, lust, meditation, and prayer; Thursday: anger and the need and the efficacy of prayer; Friday: the passions, gluttony and eternity; Saturday: envy and devotion to the most Holy Mary; Sunday: well-governed family, sponsorship of Mary, laziness and perseverance. In *Avisos, a un Sacerdote* (Vich 1844), Claret includes the *Bon Día* in the list of the best books that confessors could use to counsel their penitents”.

³¹ St. Teresa of Jesus. *The Life*. Translated by David Lewis. London: Thomas Baker, 1904, 4.

³² Cf. Cyriac Njayarkulam, 50.

³³ Aut. 41.

stage of his life. The practice of early devotion to the Holy Eucharist was inherited from the family:

“Ever since I was a small boy, I have been attracted to piety and religion. I used to attend the Holy Mass on all feasts and holy days and on other days, too, when I possibly could. On feast days I usually attended two Masses, a Low Mass, and a High Mass, always together with my beloved father. I cannot remember ever playing, looking around, or talking in church.”³⁴.

He records his devotion and zeal for piety and love for Jesus and Mary; he was always so recollected, modest, and devout, full of attention and heartfelt passion for religious practices. His life and personal experiences show his extraordinary devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and his love for the Holy Eucharistic celebration. He says, “The services I liked best were those connected with the Blessed Sacrament, and I attended these with great devotion and joy”³⁵.

His early inspiration was his father; he records his joy and enthusiasm in attending the Holy Eucharistic celebration with his father, “Beside the constant good example of my father, who had a great devotion to the Blessed Sacrament”³⁶. The joy expressed during his first Holy Communion testified to his longing to receive Christ into his heart³⁷. From the beginning, the centre of his spirituality was the Holy Eucharist. Receiving Jesus for the first time into his heart brought unerasable joy and an ever-quenched thirst for Jesus.

The holy life of Claret is consciously centred on Christ; this is vividly expressed in participating in the Holy Mass, receiving Holy Communion, making personal visits, and participating in Benediction³⁸. He made use of all the possible ways to reach out to Christ. Being in the presence and expressing his love in the forms of prayer and devotional practices created connectivity with the Lord; he puts down the following lines to express his desire to meet and talk with Jesus, “In addition to attending these morning and afternoon services, I used to enter the

³⁴ Ibid. 36.

³⁵ Ibid. 37.

³⁶ Ibid. 37.

³⁷ Cf. Ibid. 38: “When I was ten years old, I was allowed to make my First Communion. Words cannot tell what I felt on that day when I had the unequalled joy of receiving my good Jesus into my heart for the first time”.

³⁸ Cf. Cyriac Njayarkulam, 51: “The Devotion of Anthony was centred upon the Sacrament of Eucharist; assisting at Holy Mass, receiving Holy Communion frequently and attending the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament”.

church at nightfall, when hardly anyone was there, and talk alone with the Lord. With great faith, trust and love, I would speak to God, my good Father”³⁹.

The Holy Mass is the most favoured prayer, and he received many consolations. The consolations he received during Holy Mass and meditation are solid, and when his confessor asked him, and later his spiritual guide, Fr. Joseph Xifré, to record these profound experiences, he did. The following experience occurred when he was in Cuba as archbishop, On January 15, 1857, at 5:00, while meditating on Jesus: “For several days since this happened, I have been feeling many spiritual consolations, especially during mass and in meditation”⁴⁰. He finds that Jesus's real presence is the spring of humility, meekness, obedience, and charity. These virtues shone from the Holy Cross and the Blessed Sacrament on the altar. Praying for the virtues from where they spring is a consolation for him⁴¹.

Claret was ordained on June 13, 1835, and as a priest, he knew that celebrating Holy Mass was a rule and an essential component of his spiritual life. The celebration of the Holy Eucharist is a genuine place of prayer, where he connects himself with Jesus and others. He made it an obligation, showing that he faithfully observed this prayer time. He called these resolutions *The Plan of Life and Resolutions I will Strive to Keep with God's Help*. He consciously include in his plane of life which is also a requirement for the consecration, “Celebraré la Santa Misa y después estaré media hora en dar gracias y en pedir otras gracias para mí y para los demás”⁴². His love for the Eucharist was growing very deeply and steadily. First Holy Communion, he received Jesus; in the first Holy Mass on the 21st of June in the year 1835 in his home town Sallent, he touched Jesus; a few

³⁹ Aut. 40.

⁴⁰ Aut. 675; “From 1856 until his death (1870), St. Anthony Mary Claret, following the order of his confessor, Don Paladio Currius, and later his spiritual guide Fr. Joseph Xifré, jotted down the locutions and interior movements that he kept receiving concerning his sanctification and the apostolate. Some are cited here, and others come after the Autobiography and are written separately (cf. Mss. Claret, II, 167-223; “Lights and Graces,” 1855-1870)”. (The explanation is given in the footnotes of the same number in the *Autobiography*, p,504.)

⁴¹ Cf. Jose Maria Viñas y Jesus Bermejo. *Sant Antonio Maria Claret, Escritos Autobiográficos*. BAC: Madrid,1980, 428: “Humildad, obediencia, mansedumbre y caridad; estas virtudes brillan singularmente en la Cruz y en el Santísimo Sacramento del Altar. Oh, Jesús mío, haced que os imite”.

⁴² Cf. Jose Maria Viñas y Jesus Bermejo. *Sant Antonio Maria Claret*. Madrid: BAC, 645,10. (This life plan and its resolutions are fundamental for episcopal consecration (1850), with some variations imposed by the new office of confessor to the queen of Spain Isabela II. This can be seen in the section on Resolutions. This explanation note is found in the footnote in the *Autobiography*, p, 489.)

years later, the Virgin Mary placed the child Jesus in his hand, and as the expression of love, the Lord granted him the unique grace of being present in his heart in the form of Sacramental Species,

“On August 26, 1861, at 7 in the evening, while I was at prayer in the church of the Rosary at La Granja, the Lord granted me the great grace of keeping the sacramental species intact within me and of having the Blessed Sacrament always present, day and night, in my breast”⁴³.

The celebration of the Holy Eucharist was done with profound care and love. The people could witness and experience the great devotion and passion for the Holy Eucharist. Participating in the mass of him is a divine experience, and the fire of Divine love transforms him. Such a Divine environment is created when he celebrates the Holy Mass⁴⁴. He records in his writing that the Divine presence he felt during and after Holy Mass was leading him to seek and do His Holy will. The presence of God processed him, and in Him he possessed everything, and God became everything for him⁴⁵.

The people around him know his love for the Blessed Sacrament: one of the Co-founders of the Claretian Congregation, Fr. Clotet, gives a testimony about his devotion: hardly people find him in the room; the love of Christ draws him and offers himself in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, kneeling close to the altar and praying⁴⁶. When he is in God's presence, this devotion is extraordinary; he is fully devoured by Divine consolation.

Without any doubt, anyone can say that the first key to Father Claret's spirituality was his love for the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist, the Holy Sacrament on which he centred his heart throughout his life. This love led him to a growing desire to be transformed into a Christ-like person and learn to be a

⁴³ Cf. Aut. 694.

⁴⁴ Cf. Cristóbal Fernández. *El Beato P. Antonio María Claret, Historia documentada de su vida y empresas*. Madrid: Coculas, 1946, 755: “Muchas veces oí su misa, que celebraba con grandísima devoción, y alguna vez, al darnos la sagrada comunión y hablando con la Hostia en las manos, se le observaba como transformado y verdaderamente ardiendo en fuego de amor divino”.

⁴⁵ Cf. Aut. 754 – 756.

⁴⁶ Cf. P. José Puigdessens. *Espíritu de San Antonio María Claret arzobispo y Fundador*. Barcelona: Graficas Claret, 1950, 293. “De sus años de misionero y arzobispo refería el reverendo Padre Clotet, tan diligente observador como escrupuloso narrador de los hechos del venerable, que cuándo éste permanecía en casa y no se le hallaba en su cuarto, todos sabían que debían irle a buscar a los pies de Jesús Sacramento, ante el cual estaba siempre de rodillas y casi siempre próximo al altar como para recibir más de cerca las influencias de su Amado”.

sacrifice like Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament⁴⁷. The love for the Eucharist was always alive in Claret's heart.

In the Eucharist, he found everything, even the conversation during his participation in the holy mass; this happened as a young student studying in Barcelona, a commercial city⁴⁸. Eucharist became an integral part of his spirituality, and after this conversion experience, there was no turning back to worldly life. It is interesting to note that his love for the Holy Eucharist made him one of the Eucharistic saints of the 19th century⁴⁹. He was so fascinated by the love and presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and he wanted to unite with the Blessed Sacrament as the body is connected with the head. He wrote in his retreat resolutions in the year 1870, «Tengo de ser como una vela que arde; gasta la cera y luce hasta que muere. Los miembros gustan de unirse a su cabeza, el hierro al imán, y yo a Jesús deseo unirme en el Sacramento y en el cielo»⁵⁰.

The thought of the Blessed Sacrament was ever-present in his soul. He would connect his thoughts even when he is in bed to sleep and ask the angels to keep vigil for him, «En la cama dirigiré mi corazón al templo más cercano para pensar en el Señor Sacramentado, suplicando a los Ángeles que velen por mí y así, mientras yo dormiré, para hacer la voluntad de Dios, mi corazón vigilará»⁵¹.

This mindful prayer shows that he never departed from the thoughts of his loving Jesus, who is in the Blessed sacrament. As it is recorded, he was consumed by the love of Christ. From childhood till the end of his life, Holy Eucharistic celebration and the Blessed Sacrament remained his first favourite form of prayer. The devotion towards the Blessed Sacrament was an essential characteristic of his spirituality that accompanied him throughout his life. The life history of Claret

⁴⁷ Cf. Josep Àngel Saiz Menesses. "Claus de l'espiritualitat del Pare Claret". In *Studia Claretiana*. Vol. XXIV. 116-118. Roma, 2008-2009.

⁴⁸ Cf. Aut. 68.

⁴⁹ Cf. João De Castro Engler. "Influencias de autores portugueses sobre la espiritualidad de Santo Antonio Maria Claret". In *Studia Claretiana II*. 19, 1964. "Uma gloria nao menor dessa preciosa publicação do fervoroso Carmelita foi certamente sua profunda influência na vida espiritual de Claret, um dos Santos mais eucarísticos do século pasado".

⁵⁰ Jose Maria Viñas y Jesus Bermejo. *Sant Antonio Maria Claret, Escritos Autobiográficos*, 588.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 581.

tells us how much he loved this form of prayer, and till the end of his life, he cherished this connectivity⁵².

1.4 Vocal Prayer: A preferred form of Prayer

The prayer life of St. Claret is incredible from the beginning of his life. His persistent search for advancement in spiritual life is evident in his writings and practice of prayer. “The Vocal Prayer” occupies a special place in the form of prayer. He dedicates quality time to engage in the vocal prayer:

«Sobre las oraciones vocales sabemos con toda certidumbre que, además de las tres partes del rosario, rezó cada día el trisagio a la Santísima Trinidad, el vía-crucis breve, los siete Padre-nuestros y Ave-Marías a nuestra Señora del Carmen, otros tantos a los Dolores de la Virgen, la decena del rosario viviente y la coronilla a nuestra señora, formada de las jaculatorias: *Dignare me laudare te, Virgo sacrata*, etc»⁵³.

In his writings, he expressed that he preferred vocal prayer, which helped him to know God more. In his life, he has dedicated time to engage and develop it and gained the conviction to recommend to others, for their spiritual well-being:

“Vocal prayer suits me better than strictly mental prayer, thank God. At each word of the Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory, I glimpse an abyss of goodness and mercy. Our Lord has granted me the grace of being very attentive and fervent when I say these prayers. The Lord, in his goodness and mercy, also grants me many graces during mental prayer, but in vocal prayer, I have a deeper awareness”⁵⁴.

This form of prayer helped him to grow deeper into mystical experiences in the later stage of life; he continued with contemplations. In the vocal prayer, he experienced that God revealed Himself to him and made him clear about the missionary journey. In the state of vocal prayer, he paid attention to the words, where his mind dwells in the presence of God. For Claret, it is not just repetitions

⁵² Cf. Aut. 196 (Additional notes for the number 52): “Devotion to the Eucharist was an important characteristic of his spirituality that accompanied him throughout his life. It is one of the symbols on his coat of arms: “The Host that is pictured in Mary’s heart signifies both her being the mother of God and the faith and devotion I wish to have towards the Blessed Sacrament” (letter to a religious sister in Manresa, II,179).

⁵³ P. Jaime Clotet, CMF. *Vida Edificante del Padre Claret, Misionero y Fundador*. Traducido por Jesús Bermejo, CMF. Madrid: Publicaciones Claretianas, 1999, 759 – 760.

⁵⁴ Aut. 766.

of words but somewhat conscious attention to the prayer. He was unequivocal in his purpose of practising this prayer; it is also an alternative for those who find difficulty in practising the meditations. This will help the person to train and get into prayer and meditation properly. The following themes will explain the different vocal prayer methods that St. Claret practised in his spiritual life.

After seeing the context and early life experience from which Claret learned to pray and began his journey on prayer, the following presentation will throw some light on the forms of prayers that he practised in his life.

1.4.1 Prayer to Mary: An Expression of filial love of a son

The devotion towards Mary is explicitly recorded in Claret's writings. From a tender age, love for Marian's devotion bloomed in his heart. From the beginning, he lived with the sentiment of filial relationship. He developed this practice by praying the rosary, praying Angelus, visiting the sanctuary of Fussimaña, and visiting his parish church in Sallent⁵⁵. The historical background of Claret gives clear evidence for the practice of Marian devotion in the family, "During these years of my childhood and youth, I had a very warm devotion toward the Blessed Virgin Mary"⁵⁶.

He and his sister Rose made many visits to the shrine of the Blessed Virgin Mary called Our Lady of Fussimaña, and he visited as an archbishop, too. When he describes his deep-rooted love for Mary, as soon as he can see the outline of the chapel, he breaks into tears, and they keep praying the rosary⁵⁷. With tremendous attachment and love, Mary became everything to him after Jesus: "I added the sweet name of Mary because Mary Most Holy is my mother, my patroness, my mistress, my directress, and my all after Jesus"⁵⁸, and the rosary was his school of prayer and contemplation⁵⁹. He placed her perfectly in the order

⁵⁵ Cf. Ibid. 43-55.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 43.

⁵⁷ Cf. Ibid. 49.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 5.

⁵⁹ OPM, 533.

after God the Father and the Son, and in the presence of Mary, he found the maternal face of God⁶⁰.

The gift of the rosary he had received as a boy was a treasure; he could spend time praying while other boys were playing⁶¹. It is an extraordinary grace that kept him motivated himself and others by learning and practising⁶². From his school days onwards, his devotion to Mary and desire to dwell on prayer grew. He visits the Marian shrine and is always sure of Mary's accompaniment. His prayerful attention to Mary moved deeply, and he firmly believed that Mary listened to him and that the prayer to her is the connecting line to heaven, "I never tired of being in the church before the image of our lady of the Rosary, and I talked and prayed so trustingly that I was quite sure the Blessed Virgin Heard me"⁶³.

For Claret, Mary is the perfect model for living in God. His prayerful attention to Mary kept on growing, and he felt Mary's presence as a place of learning. He called her "my teacher," and her heart was the forge where he was formed by the love of Mother Mary: "O virgin Mother of God... you are well aware that I'm your son and minister, formed in the forge of your mercy and love"⁶⁴. For Claret, the presence of Mary is very tangible; whenever he calls Her, She renders the necessary assistance. The profound experience of escaping from life danger happened when he was studying manufacturing in Barcelona in the years 1825 to 1828:

"That last summer, the Blessed Virgin saved me from drowning in the sea. Because I had been working so hard, I didn't feel very well during the summer. I began to lose all my appetite, and the only relief I could find was to go down to the sea, wade in it, and drink a few drops of the salt water. One day, as I walked along the beach to the "old sea" on the other side of La Barceloneta, a huge wave suddenly engulfed me and carried me out to sea. I saw in a moment that I was far from shore, and I was amazed to see that I was floating on the surface, although I didn't know how to swim. I called out to the Blessed Virgin and found myself on shore without swallowing even a drop of water. While I was in the water, I had felt exceedingly

⁶⁰ Cf. José Cristo Rey García Parades CMF. *María en la espiritualidad claretiana*. Roma: Secretariado Claritano, 1998, 21. "María es siempre «un después»; pero María también para Claret es la más excelente «transparencia» de Dios Padre. Diríamos, que en María Claret descubre el rostro materno de Dios Padre".

⁶¹ Cf. Aut. 44.

⁶² Cf. Ibid. 45, 47.

⁶³ Ibid. 48.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 270.

calm, but afterwards, on shore, I was horrified at the thought of the danger I had escaped through the help of the Blessed Virgin”⁶⁵.

The prayer and seeking assistance to deliver from the possibility of committing sins and abuses, Mary stood by him, and he records, “... I waited for little and realised that her intentions were passionate, as her words and gestures made clear. I called out to the Blessed Virgin and escaped from her hands...”⁶⁶.

When talking about the presence of Mary in Claret's life, it is important to note his vision at the age of 23. The day began with offering himself, his thinking, words, and actions to the Lord and the Blessed Virgin Mary⁶⁷. In the seminary, when he was down with sickness, he called out to Mary, and she consoled him with the vision and promise,

“Finally, I turned over on my other side to see if the temptation would go away when I saw the Blessed Virgin Mary very beautiful and gracious... the Blessed Virgin Mary spoke to me and said, *Anthony, the crown is yours if you overcome ...* I saw myself crowded with roses in the person of that little child, and even after this I was speechless”⁶⁸.

With great zeal to become an apostolic missionary, Claret came to Rome to offer himself to the Propaganda Fide and applied, but the plan of God was different. The cardinal in charge was out for a visit, and Claret decided to make his annual retreat with the Jesuits and gain the reputation the superior general permitted him to enter the Society of Jesus on November 2, 1839⁶⁹.

In the time of novitiate⁷⁰, his devotion to Mary grew further; even in the time of recreation, he engaged in the conversation about Virtues, Mary and the apostolic zeal that would save the soul, “Since during our recreations we talked of nothing but virtues, devotion to Mary, and means for winning souls for heaven, the flame of zeal for the greater glory of God and the salvation of the souls took

⁶⁵ Ibid. 71.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 72.

⁶⁷ Cf. José Marías Viñas y Jesús Bermejo. *Sant Antonio María Claret, Escritos Autobiográficos*, Madrid: BAC, 412. “Al momento arrodillaba y ofrecía a Dios y la Santísima Virgen todas, las obras, palabras, y pensamientos; acto continuo tenía media hora de meditación sobre la vida, pasión y muerte de Jesús”.

⁶⁸ Aut. 96.

⁶⁹ Cf. Cyriac Njayarkulam, 85.

⁷⁰ Cf. Aut.137 – 152. “Claret always wanted to be a missionary. He was passionate to go all over the world and preach the Good News. He made his journey to Rome to offer himself as an apostolic missionary. In Rome, after consulting and discerning he decided to join the Society of Jesus and entered the Novitiate. After the guidance and accompaniments of the priests, he was directed to return to Catalonia and started his missionary activities”.

fire in my heart and consumed me”⁷¹. He was in the novitiate of Jesuit and reflected on his priestly life and mission. The heresies of the world hurt him because these evils were devouring the children of God⁷². He identifies himself with the people of God and pleads for his perseverance and fidelity: “... O my mother, how much I love you and esteem you, and firmly trust that you will grant me perseverance in your holy service and grace until death”⁷³. The faith in Mary’s intervention is crystal clear and sure. She can do to Her son and can ask Her son Jesus to intervene: “O most gracious Virgin that you have the power to end them all”⁷⁴. The Prayer to Mother Mary is not a momentary emotion but a constant growth and expression of love.

Mary's presence is felt and nourished at every stage of his life. He could call Her and place Her in the journey as an accompaniment and feel the warmth of Her heart. Imitating Mary and attributing Her missionary characters to the missionaries shows that he takes Mary as the perfect model to follow Jesus. He named the missionaries as the sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary⁷⁵, putting all the necessary emphasis on his personal experiences and presenting Mary as an active and passionate missionary. All these attributions to the Blessed Mother and prayers to Mother Mary express Mary's personal experience in his life and mission.

Claret lived profoundly in communion with Mary in his last life stages. The Communion with Mary was something natural. The presence of Mary did not divert him from the fundamental desire of imitating Jesus. But he realised that he was called to be a propagator for the devotion to the Holy Rosary⁷⁶. All the prayers he attributed to Mary, the evidence of his Marian spirituality and filial affection, cannot be separated from his life and mission.

⁷¹ Aut.153.

⁷² Cf. José Cristo Rey CMF, *María en la espiritualidad claretiana*, 36.

⁷³ Aut. 154.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 155.

⁷⁵ Cf. Ibid. 494: “A son of the Immaculate Heart Mary is a man on fire with love, who spreads its flames wherever he goes... His only concern is how he can best follow Jesus Christ and imitate Him in working, suffering, and striving constantly and single-mindedly for the greater glory of God and the salvation of the soul”.

⁷⁶ Cf. José Cristo Rey CMF. *María en la espiritualidad claretiana*, 53.

1.4.2 Divine Office: A communion with the Church

The recitation of the Divine Office is common practice according to the spirit of the liturgy in the Church. This was a constant practice in the life of St. Claret, and he always valued the priest's better practice of this duty than the faithful. The words of St. Claret on praying the prayer of the church can reveal the intensity of his faithfulness in praying the office, "I had said Vespers and Compline, so as not to be praying distractedly during all those manoeuvres that have to be done during the first few hours at sea, and also just in case I might get seasick and not be able to pray"⁷⁷. He recorded this on his voyage to Rome by ship, and he explained his faithfulness in praying the church's prayer. Nothing stopped him from fulfilling his duty. He was regular and on time for praying the prayers of the church; he records it in his spiritual directory in the year 1862:

"Every day in winter I ordinarily rise at 3:00, sometimes earlier, because always I get up when I can't go to sleep and never in bed unless sleeping. Then I begin the Divine Office reciting Matins and Lauds, after which I say the Trisagion, read scripture prepare for mass..."⁷⁸.

There is clear evidence that St. Claret was delighted in praying and participating in the church's liturgical tradition. This constant practice of prayer remains an expression of his love and faithfulness to the Holy Mother Church. As a pastor, he requested his priests and missionaries to be faithful in praying the church's prayer and wrote excessively about its importance.

1.5 Prayers to the Invisibles: A Communion with Heaven

The devotion to the Invisibles is sturdily visible in his writings. From childhood, he had developed a sincere devotion towards angels and saints, and this connection persisted till the end of his life. The profound example of his devotion

⁷⁷ Aut. 129.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 637.

is explained in the narration of his temptation and how the angels and saints assisted him. This unique experience of overcoming temptation explains his constant devotion and faith in the teaching of the church:

“I had the following experience while I was in my second year of philosophy at Vic. That winter I caught a bad cold and was ordered to bed; so, I obeyed. One day as I lay there at about ten-thirty in the morning, I felt a terrible temptation. I turned to Mary, called on my guardian angel, and prayed to all my name- saints as well as to those to whom I have special devotion”⁷⁹.

The saint's life history and spiritual richness tell us the deep connection with the supernatural world of faith, and special veneration and devotion are expressed in celebration and the missions.

1.5.1 Prayer to Holy Angels

The devotion to Holy Angels is very much visible in Claret's writings. His profound devotion to the archangels is expressed vividly in his writings and instructions to the people. The book *Escritos y Sermones Sobre Los Santos Angeles* explains the devotion and the prayer he articulated to Holy Angels: “Angel Santo, bajo cuya tutela y custodia Dios me ha puesto por su infinita bondad, iluminadme, defendedme, regidme y gobernadme. Amen”⁸⁰.

Claretian co-founders also recorded his devotion to the Angels. In the writings of father Jaime Clotet, cmf, one of the co-founders' records this: «Era asimismo muy devoto de los Santos ángeles, y singularmente de arcángel San Miguel y cotidianamente los invocaba. Siendo aún estudiante escribio unas cartas asceticas de los ángeles, que prueban su devoción y su ingenio»⁸¹. Saint Claret consciously recognizes the friendships with the angels and sees them as companions, forerunners and friends of missionaries. Having experienced the sure protection of Angels, he never hesitated to write about it, which served as the testimony of his relationship with angels:

⁷⁹ Ibid. 95.

⁸⁰ Guillermo Pons. *Escritos y Sermones Sobre Los Santos Angeles*. Archivum angelicum: France, 2012, 33.

⁸¹ P. Jaime Clotet, CMF. *Vida Edificante del Padre Claret*, 767.

“If hell’s persecution was great, heaven’s protection was far greater. I experienced the visible protection of the Blessed Virgin and the angels and saints, who guided me through unknown paths, freed me from thieves and murders and brought me to a place of safety without my ever knowing how”⁸².

Both in his teaching and mission, Claret expressed the help from angels. That cognizant made him invoke their assistance and guidance in the time of mission: “I never forgot to invoke St. Michael and the guardian angels, especially my own, and those of the kingdom, the province, the city in which I was preaching, and of each present”⁸³.

The attachment and the holy devotion made him articulate and address them with “Aspirations” (for example, “Who is like the Angel of heaven?). The tangible protection and presence provoked him to counsel people to invoke the assistance of the guardian angels in times of trial and persecution: “I have had visible knowledge of the protection of the holy guardian angels. I want to list here some of the aspirations I have every day. I have counselled others to say them, and they have told me that doing so has been of much benefit to them”⁸⁴.

When we talk about his devotion to the angels, we cannot neglect his devotion to the archangels. Keeping the tradition and faith of the church, he related them with love and confidence. In the list, archangel Michael comes as his favourite; in honour of him, he named his academy after his name, St. Michael, “while I am on the subject of books, I must mention the support given the Librería Religiosa by the Academy of St. Michael, approved by His Holiness, Pius IX and by the royal character”⁸⁵. In the same way, he had written a novena to honour him: «En honor de san Miguel escribió el arzobispo Claret un opusculo titulado «Excelencias y novena del glorioso príncipe san Miguel»⁸⁶. The devotion and constant intercession show the true angelic experiences of Claret, who offered the missionary congregation under the protection of holy angels.

⁸² Aut. 464.

⁸³ Aut. 268.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 269.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 332. (Pius IX blessed the Academy of St. Michael on February 28, 1859, and approved by Isabel II on the 16th of March of the same year.)

⁸⁶ Guillermo Pons. *Escritos y Sermones Sobre Los Santos Ángeles*, 46.

1.5. 2 Devotion to Saints

His devotion and communion with saints cannot be neglected or left out of his spirituality. From childhood onwards, many references are found for his devotion and familiarity with the life of the saints. He never failed to celebrate the tradition and faith of the Holy Catholic Church, and in this line, he was deeply connected to this devotion. The tradition of reading the life of the saints and spiritual books was practised from home.

When he joined the seminary of Vic in the year 1829, he had this practice of reading the saint of the day: “Every day at the table, we read the life of the saint of the day”⁸⁷. During his temptation and crisis, he called all his saints and Blessed Mother, and they all extended their help to overcome it. The profound experience of seeking help from saints occurred during his second-year philosophy in the middle of February 1830, and he writes, “... I felt a terrible temptation. I turned to Mary, called my guardian angels, and prayed to all my name saints as well as to those to whom I have special devotion”⁸⁸. He never stopped with the popular devotions; the life, spirituality, and missions of the holy men and women were the real source of his holy life and dedication:

“Besides my unfailing love for poor sinners, another force that has driven me to work for salvation is the example of prophets, of Christ Himself, of the Apostles, and of the many men and women saints whose lives and histories I have often read, noting down some of more salient passages for my use and profit and as a stimulus to work harder”⁸⁹.

From the Old Testament to the New Testament, he admired the call and dedication of the prophets and the Apostles⁹⁰. He also said he took much heart from reading the lives of the fathers of the church and prayed to them for apostolic zeal and vigour:

“I also took much heart from reading the lives and works of the Fathers of the Church: St. Ignatius Martyr, St. Justine, the philosopher martyr, St. Irenaeus, St. Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, St. Cyprian Martyr, St. Eusebius, St. Athanasius, St. Hilary, St. Cyril, St. Ephraim, St. Basil, St. Gregory Nazianzen, St.

⁸⁷ Aut. 87.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 95.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 214.

⁹⁰ Cf. Ibid. 215 – 224.

Gregory of Nyssa, St. Ambrose, St. Epiphanius, St. Jerome, St. Paulinus, St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine, St. Cyril of Alexandria, St. Prosper, Theodore, St. Leo the Great, St. Caesarius, St. Gregory the Great, St. John Damascene, St. Anselm, St. Bernard”⁹¹.

When he writes about the inner forces that moved him to run from place to place and preach the lives and works of the saints, this practice was active and alive during his missionary activities. The devotion and the constant meditation on the work and the life of the saints provoked in him a holy fire that never allowed him to rest but instead urged him to move from place to place to proclaim the word of God:

“In the course of meditating on the lives and works of these saints, I used to feel such a burning within me that I couldn’t sit still. I had to get up and run from one place to another, preaching continually. I can’t describe what I felt inside me. Nothing tired me; I wasn’t terrified at the awful calumnies being levelled against me or afraid of the greatest persecutions. Everything was sweet to me, as long as I could win souls for Jesus Christ and heaven and save them from hell”⁹².

The life of the saints and their spirituality are lengthily recorded in his writings⁹³, these numbers 214 – 267 in the *Autobiography* explain the devotion and inspiration he drew from their life. He never hesitated to call them in their time of need and was sure of their helping prayer: “I also prayed and had people pray to the saints in heaven that they might intercede with Jesus and Mary to obtain these same graces. I especially prayed to those saints who, during their earthly lives, had shown the greatest zeal for God’s glory and the salvation of souls”⁹⁴.

1.6 Mental Prayer: A way to inflame the soul with the Love of God

Mental prayer is one of the highest forms of prayer. The practice of mental prayer occurred daily in the life of Claret, “Every day I made a half-hour of mental prayer”⁹⁵. He treated all forms of interior prayer as mental prayer. The experience of practising mental prayer eventually led him to experience living in the presence

⁹¹ Ibid. 225.

⁹² Aut. 227.

⁹³ Ibid. 214 – 267.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 267.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 86.

of God. The practice of mental prayer began when he was a small boy at home and attained constant growth throughout his life: “Every day before leaving the house I made my mental prayer alone since I rose so early”⁹⁶.

The personal experience and the benefits of mental prayer made him recommend it to others, and whenever possible, he could practice with his priests and co-workers when he was in Cuba as an archbishop: “We got up every day on schedule and together made a half-hour's mental prayer, which no one ever missed”⁹⁷.

Saint Claret was aware of the necessity of this form of prayer, which always helps the soul be connected and occupied with divine thoughts. Mental prayer generates and inflames the soul with God's love. The following themes will reveal the significant details of mental prayers and St. Claret's experience practising these spiritual treasures.

1.6.1 Spiritual reading: A means to attain sacred knowledge

Spiritual reading occupies a decisive place in the life of Fr. Claret. It is not a random reading but part of spiritual practices. The habit of spiritual reading is found in his childhood; he writes that apart from his great devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, he had the good fortune of discovering some books entitled *Courtesies of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and Good Day and a Good Night*, which helped him to discover the love and goodness of God: *El Roser*, from which he learned the mysteries of the Rosary⁹⁸. The spiritual readings awakened his religious piety, especially his devotion to the Holy Eucharist, the Rosary, and the thought of soul salvation. He remembered the spiritual readings' positive impacts as he travelled through his life.

Reading the Holy Scripture takes the first and favourite place from the seminary till the end of his life among all the spiritual readings. The lives of the

⁹⁶ Ibid. 108

⁹⁷ Aut. 610.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 37, 41, 45.

saints helped him to discover his vocation. He wrote: “The lives of the saints, which we read daily at the table, and my spiritual readings all contributed to this. But what moved and stimulated me most was reading the Holy Bible, to which I have always been very strongly attracted”⁹⁹.

Talking about his spiritual activities in the year 1864, he talks about the work of St. Teresa of Avila that helped him to understand the pain, suffering, and spiritual trials, and God offered him knowledge and spiritual help¹⁰⁰. These records show that he faithfully practised this habit of spiritual reading from Childhood to the end of his life. Therefore, it is said, “Spiritual reading is a central feature of Claret’s spirituality, a feature that almost equals that of mental prayer”¹⁰¹. He records the effects of reading good books, and he did not keep this joy and realization within him, but this prompted him to distribute them generously to his neighbours so they may enjoy the same goodness from reading good books¹⁰².

This prayerful reading, especially the Holy Bible, helped him discover several other fundamental aspects of his spirituality, such as his deep-rooted desire to imitate Christ, the mystical grace and spiritual illuminations¹⁰³. Fr. Jesus Bermejo writes in his book on Claret about how much the body needs food to live; in the same way, the soul needs good books to sustain itself¹⁰⁴. Therefore, Claret makes reading an essential component of his spiritual journey.

1.6. 2 Examination of Conscience: A path to holiness

In the church tradition, the daily examination of conscience is recommended in the spiritual journey. J. M. Lozano writes about the themes of prayer in the life of

⁹⁹ Ibid. 113.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Aut. 797.

¹⁰¹ Juan Maria Lozano, CMF. *Mystic and Man of Action*, 177.

¹⁰² Cf. Aut. 42.

¹⁰³ Cf. M. Lozano, CMF. *Mystic and Man of Action*, 178.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Jesús Bermejo, CMF. *Antología Espiritual*. Madrid: Cocusa, 1973, 277. “Son los libros para el alma lo mismo que los alimentos y medicinas para el cuerpo.”

Fr. Claret and records spiritual examinations, which occupied third place¹⁰⁵. The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius presents the importance of daily particular examination of conscience¹⁰⁶. This practice occurs three times daily: in the morning, afternoon and after supper «Tres tiempos y dos veces examinarse»¹⁰⁷. This practice was a great help in disciplining the soul and spending the day with the thoughts of God. Fr. Claret faithfully followed this practice, which comes under the mental prayer he started doing from the Jesuit novitiate and was doing twice a day till his last breath¹⁰⁸.

In his journey towards perfection, he used this Christian practice as a tool to attain holiness. To understand the importance of this practice, he included it in the resolutions of the exercises every year. He writes in his *Autobiography* that to become a genuinely apostolic missionary, he needs virtues, and he wants to start with humility, which he regards as a foundation for all other virtues and includes in the examination¹⁰⁹The additional notes in the *Autobiography* describe his words on the particular examination of humility that he mentioned in the cathedral of Gerona. This practice has plentiful grace in itself. Its impact was felt throughout Claret's entire spiritual journey.

This practice helped him to overcome faults and direct his thoughts and actions: “Otro de los mejores medios de enmendar los defectos y adquirir las virtudes es el examen particular de conciencia. Llamase particular por ser su objeto corregir un vicio particular y alcanzar la virtud opuesta a éste”¹¹⁰. This Christian practice was highly recommended in Claret's time and environment. It helped people who desired to lead a holy life to do and direct everything to God's greater glory and neighbours' salvation.

Therefore, it is clear that the particular examen was essential in Claret's spiritual life and writings. His book «Mana del Cristiano» offers help practising this exercise. It is clear that he adopted this practice from the Ignatian method, and he had written a book on *Ejercicios Espirituales*. There is a recommendation

¹⁰⁵ J. M. Lozano, CMF. *Mystic and Man of Action*, 179.

¹⁰⁶ George E. Ganss, S.J. *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*. A Translation and Commentary. Bilbao: Ediciones Mensajero, 2021, 33.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Ibid*, nos. 24,25.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. J. M. Lozano, CMF. *Mystic and Man of Action*, 179.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Aut. 342,351.

¹¹⁰ Jesús Bermejo. *San Antonio María Claret, Escritos espirituales*. BAC: Madrid, 1985, 85.

to make the Examen in the afternoon, especially predominate passion and in the night as preparation for the next day's meditation¹¹¹.

He says many had asked him for a book to do the spiritual exercises well and, if they cannot get the director, to do it personally. Understanding its importance, he published this handbook¹¹². This evidence shows that he enjoyed numerous graces and was ever ready to transmit to others. He made the salutation to the Blessed Mother by praying the Hail Mary; St. Alphonsus influenced this practice¹¹³. These acts of prayer and recollection kept his heart connected with God and helped him live and do everything for His greater glory.

1.6.3 Aspiratory Prayer: A Warm Human Approach to oneness with God

The jaculatory prayer is a tradition of the church. It is explained that many persons who are serious about their relationship with God and striving for holiness and intimacy with God venture into this prayer. St. Claret was a man of God who wanted to do everything for the Glory and love of his neighbours; without doubt, he made it his custom.

For St. Claret, the journey towards perfection is central to his spirituality. In his writing *Explicación de la Paloma*, he explains that the soul must attentively seek to do everything for the Glory of God and the good of the neighbour¹¹⁴.

The tradition recommends that the faithful, throughout the day, invoke the Holy Name of God. From this tiny information, anyone can understand the effect of this prayer and can imagine that with how much desire the saints would have practised it in their lives. St. Claret was not exceptional and was very fond of this method of prayer. He frequently occupied his thoughts with God's love and his

¹¹¹ San Antonio María Claret. *Mana del Cristiano*. Madrid, 1958, 10.

¹¹² San Antonio María Claret, *Ejercicios Espirituales*. Madrid, 1955, 5.

¹¹³ Cf. Juan Maria Lozano, CMF. *Mystic and Man of Action*, 179, "Under the influence of St. Alphonsus, he added to this the hourly salutation to the Blessed Virgin, together with a Hail Mary and spiritual communion".

¹¹⁴ Cf. Jesús Bermejo. *San Antonio María Claret, Escritos espirituales*, 81.

love for God. He says that he engaged in it countless times, and to add more fervour, he said the holy name of Mary, too¹¹⁵.

In the retreat resolution in 1855 he writes about his desire to live in the presence of God and do everything for the greater Glory of Him: “Andaré siempre a la presencia de Dios. Todo lo hare a la mayor gloria de Dios, y en concurrencia de dos cosas, haré lo que me parezca mejor”¹¹⁶. This practice enabled the saint to be in the loving presence of God and set his heart on the goal of Divine union. He expresses his thirst and says that he wants to be like Maria at the feet of Jesus, listening attentively to His voice¹¹⁷.

All these expressions convey the details of his spiritual development and the strong act of his will that desires God alone. He used this method as a shortcut to attain holiness, and for him, it was like a mantra: he ruminated upon the Divine word and connected himself with God.

1.6.4 Meditation: A Road to Perfection

Today, different meanings are attached to the word meditation and its practice. The words of Pope Pius XII in *Menti Nostrae* are about the importance of daily meditation in attaining perfection¹¹⁸. It is interesting to note that Claret made it part of his prayer method and recommended that mental meditation is also necessary in Christian practice to achieve salvation. His writings emphasise that Meditation is an essential tool for him to keep the flame of love burning and moving from place to place to preach the gospel. This fire is like fuel that adds a

¹¹⁵ Cf. J. M. Lozano, CMF. *Mystic and Man of Action*, 179.

¹¹⁶ Jose Maria Viñas y Jesus Bermejo, *Sant Antonio Maria Claret, Escritos Autobiográficos*, 544.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* 549.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Pope Pius XI. Apostolic Exhortation. *Menti nostrae*. Rome, 1950, 47: “We, therefore, consider it Our grave duty to exhort you, especially to the practice of daily meditation, a practice recommended to all the clergy also by Canon Law. For just as the desire for priestly perfection is nourished and strengthened by daily meditation, so its neglect is the source of distaste for spiritual things, through which piety is lessened and grows languid, and the impulse towards personal sanctification is not only weakened or ceases altogether, but the entire priestly ministry suffers great harm. It must, therefore, be stated without reservation that no other means has the unique efficacy of meditation and that, as a consequence, its daily practice can no wise be substituted”.

more loving desire to walk in the presence of God, «En mi meditación se avivará el Fuego»¹¹⁹.

Meditation is part of his daily spiritual routine, and he wrote it down to present to his spiritual director as the retreat resolution in 1864: “At 5 a.m. we begin meditation, which lasts until 6 a.m.” Meditation on the word of God was a grace-filled time for him to understand the word and the invitation. For example, in 1859 he wrote:

“March 21. While I was meditating on Christ’s words to the Samaritan woman, *Ego sum qui loquor tecum*, I understood some great, very great things. He gave the woman faith and she believed; He gave her sorrow for her sins and she repented; He gave Grace and she preached Jesus. He has done the same in my case, giving me faith, sorrow, and a mission to preach to Him”¹²⁰.

He elaborates that his sentiments were very tangible and made him feel the flame's heat. This is the holy flame that never allowed him to rest. Instead, he moved him to the divine will, that is, to preach Jesus everywhere. This was the time in 1841, after returning from Rome, that he entirely dedicated himself to preaching and the missionary fire was instigated by meditation on the work and the life of the saints, «en esta meditación se encendía en mi un fuego tan ardiente, que no me dejaba estar quieto. Tenía que andar y correr de una a otra parte, predicando continuamente»¹²¹.

The ordinary theme of his meditation revolves around the name of Jesus, and he loves to select reading from the gospel and commentary on the gospel. This helped him to meditate on the life and the mission of Jesus and imitate Him to respond and to act in concrete moments in his life and mission. “And so, I constantly reflect on Jesus – in the crib, the carpenter’s shop, and Calvary. I meditate on His words, sermons, and actions; on how He ate, dressed, and travelled from town to town”¹²². In the meditation, he could connect himself with the apostles' journey, how they suffered for Christ and offered their entire lives for preaching.

¹¹⁹ D. Anthony María Claret y Clara, eds. *El Colegial Seminarista, Teórica y Prácticamente Instruido*. Madrid: Editorial del Corazón de María, 1924, 93.

¹²⁰ Ibid.681.

¹²¹ Jose Maria Viñas y Jesus Bermejo, eds. *Sant Antonio María Claret, Escritos Autobiográficos*. n. 227,190.

¹²² Aut. 356.

Claret also underwent rejection and persecution and shed his blood for Christ. For example, on the 1st of February 1856, he suffered an attempted assassination in Holguín, Cuba¹²³. The other slanders he suffered in the Royal Court as a confessor of Queen Isabel II in the year 1857 tell that he suffered great sufferings, slanders, and persecutions, and hell has conspired against him¹²⁴. Meditation helped him generate a generous readiness of spirit to commit himself to the Glory of God and the salvation of people. «... No sentía fatiga, ni me arredaban las calumnias más atroces que me levantaban, ni temía las persecuciones más grandes. Todo me era dulce con tal que pudiese ganar almas para Jesucristo, para el cielo, preservarlas del infierno»¹²⁵.

The imitation and inner contact with Jesus actively present in the meditation. It helped him to enter into the spirit of Jesus and enabled him to understand the mystery of Christ and the necessary virtues to participate in the mission of Jesus: «Cuando rezamos o meditamos de la vida, pasión y muerte de nuestro señor Jesucristo, debemos en espíritu entrar en el interior de Jesúcristo, a fin de participar de las virtudes que Él mismo práctico en aquel misterio»¹²⁶. He treated meditation as a divine power that led him to charity and the proclamation of good news. Knowing the need and its effects, he proposed this practice to others.

1.6.5 Contemplation on the name of Jesus: A search for Christ in his spirit

The Christocentric spirituality is the spark in the life, prayer, and mission of Saint Claret. The concern is clear: he wants to imitate Jesus in all possible ways. The contemplation of the name of Jesus is the other symbol of his mystical life. He likes to gaze at Him, listen to Him and contemplate Him. His writing has numerous expressions, and multiple titles are given to Jesus. The contemplation on the name of Jesus is a tool to bear in God's image. It is said that effective

¹²³ Aut. 575.

¹²⁴ Ibid. 687.

¹²⁵ Cf. Jose Maria Viñas y Jesus Bermejo, *Sant Antonio Maria Claret, Escritos Autobiográficos*, n. 227,190

¹²⁶ Ibid. n.7, 606.

contemplation is impregnated with love. Saint Claret defines it as a *fervent devotion* and frequently equates it to *fire*¹²⁷. The practice of contemplation and active thoughts on the name of Jesus made him feel the presence of God and his union with the Divine master.

This contemplation was purely a mystical experience for him, and Christ was always close to him, and his soul was in the presence of Jesus. The contemplation of the mysteries of Christ and constantly recalling His name created an intimate feeling of union in him. In contemplation, he always felt it was a mixed action where Divinity and humanity mingled in a state of union. The unique way of contemplating the name of Jesus is to live fully in the passion, death, and resurrection, which unite himself in the mystery of Jesus. In learning and practising contemplation, Claret had used the methods and teaching of St. Teresa of Ávila and St. Ignatius of Loyola.

Interestingly, he was in love with contemplation, where he had the feeling of dialogue with the lover, and always felt that it helped him bloom the presence of God in his soul. Therefore, the state of mental prayer in Claret is an affectionate contemplation. Recalling the teaching of Jesus and constantly contemplating on it is a way he found to keep himself connected to Jesus¹²⁸. Juan María Lozano records this perfectly by meditating on the state of contemplation in the life of Claret,

“The initial act of faith in the presence of God is not just a simple means for attaining a state of recollection, or for summoning up a religious sentiment in the soul, but rather a means of encounter with the person whom one wishes to contemplate and with whom one wishes to converse”¹²⁹.

1.6.6 Spiritual exercise: For conversion and Grace

The Ignatian spiritual exercises mostly attracted St. Claret. He was very faithful in doing it every year and encouraged people to benefit from it, “As I have

¹²⁷ Cf. J. M. Lozano, CMF. *Mystic and Man of Action*,176.

¹²⁸ Cf. Aut. 362.

¹²⁹ J. M. Lozano, CMF. *Mystic and Man of Action*,174.

mentioned elsewhere, I have made the Spiritual Exercises every year of my life since I was a student”¹³⁰. As a contribution, he wrote and explained the Ignatian spiritual exercises, *Ejercicios Espirituales*, for ordinary people to easily use¹³¹. His love for this spiritual practice began when he was at the Jesuit Novitiate; while participating, it made a lasting impression on him, “The Jesuit fathers themselves conducted these, which were the ones that made the most lasting impression on me”¹³².

It is made even more clear that, knowing the benefit of it, while leaving the Novitiate community of Jesuit, he received a copy of the Ignatian spiritual exercises with an explanation from Father Diertins; from that day onwards, he followed the method in doing and preaching the spiritual exercises. His passion for spiritual exercises made him help other priests to experience the same spiritual nourishment. Many began to ask him for a copy of this book, and he reprinted it to distribute to priests in Vic¹³³.

The habit of doing eight days of spiritual exercise in the season of Lent in the seminary was a profiting experience for Fr. Claret¹³⁴. He says that it benefits not only him but all those who faithfully follow this practice. When he was an assistant pastor in his village, Sallent, he said that he followed the regular plan for the spiritual life, and the spiritual exercises were an essential annual action for him¹³⁵. As an archbishop in Cuba, the time of the spiritual exercises was a grace-filled time for him every year. He observed it with due attention and away from all other activities that can hinder the spiritual atmosphere, “... during the retreat, we never broke the silence not received visitors, letters or business calls... at the

¹³⁰ Aut. 306.

¹³¹ St. Claret wrote this book entitled *Ejercicios Espirituales explicados* en Madrid, enero 1859, at the request of people for spiritual formation. The words of Claret tell that he did everything for the salvation and the glory of God, « Sea todo para la mayor gloria de Dios, alabanza de María Santísima y salvación de las almas. Amén ».

¹³² Aut. 306.

¹³³ Cf. Ibid. 307: “When I have to leave the Jesuits because of illness, I was given a copy of the aforesaid Exercises of St. Ignatius, with explanations by Father Diertins, and I followed that text ever after when I gave the Exercises. The esteemed clergy of Vic asked to borrow the book to have it reprinted. Trullas Printers handled the job”.

¹³⁴ Cf. Ibid. 92.

¹³⁵ Cf. Ibid. 107.

closing of the exercise I kissed the feet of everyone present... this was very moving, imposing, and most profitable gesture”¹³⁶.

Knowing the need and the benefits of this spiritual practice, which contributes immensely to the conversion and to obtaining necessary graces, without failing, he included it in the resolution every year, “Every year I will make the spiritual exercises”¹³⁷. All the resolutions were discerned and taken in a prayerful environment. With his profound spiritual experiences, he emphasised the importance of spiritual exercises and encouraged others to treat this gift with due care.

* * *

Claret, a man of God, was undoubtedly given the grace to participate in the plan of God in the given time and space. The chapter shows how Claret progressed in his prayer and became aware of God’s presence. The attitude he developed over time towards Divine action was possible by the constant practice and implementation of forms and methods of prayers. The first part of the chapter presents the early life of Claret and its contribution and influence on the growth and understanding of this spiritual journey. The methods and forms of prayer that he learned, participated and used in his life are clear signs that from the beginning of his life, the providence of God was very actively present in him.

His determination to walk in the presence of God drove him to seek methods and forms of spiritual activities that connected and kept the missionary fire burning. His genuine approach towards prayer shows that he had received the grace to pray heroically and use all the possible means to unite with God. It’s a sign of pure imitation of Christ, who prayed heroically to His Father and accomplished the will of the Father. Gabino Uríbarri Bilbao explains the importance of prayer in the life of Jesus:

«Uno de los datos firmes que nos ha transmitido la tradición evangélica, de la que no se duda por parte de ninguna teología ni de ningún investigador histórico acerca

¹³⁶ Ibid.611.

¹³⁷ Ibid. 644, 740, 780.

de Jesús, es el hecho de la oración de Jesús... Así pues, sin necesidad de recorrer ahora todos y cada uno de los textos pertinentes, y somerterlos a un examen crítico, podemos partir de este hecho: Jesús oró a Dios»¹³⁸.

The chapter also tells us that Jesus becomes his reference for prayer, not only for prayer but in all that the missionary should do, as explained in the definition of missionaries. The prayer journey was not an essay journey for him, yet the grace of God guided and formed him to be His missionary son. The grace of God, Blessed Mother, Angels and Saints accompanies the road towards perfection. Having presented the early life and the prayer in the life of Claret, the second chapter will present the Doctrine of Prayer in the writings of Claret.

¹³⁸ Gabino Uribarri Bilbao, SJ. *La mística de Jesús*. 2ª Edición. Sal Terrea: Maliaño, 2017, 92.

CHAPTER 2

Doctrine of Prayer in the Writings of Claret

Claret was a man of prayer and writing. In the short span of his life, he contributed a lot to people on different levels and different categories of people. He is not only known for his traditional way of preaching but soon became a creative missionary and tried to apply what was primarily available at the time. In his book, John M. Lazano CMF writes about Claret's capacity to create his methods of communicating his ideas and teaching: "But he soon came to discover on his others means of apostolate that looked to the future, because they would be fully developed only in the future, practically in our century"¹³⁹.

The creative launch into a mission and to the writing world helped him to present his concepts and teachings on prayers to the people of his time. He knew that people were very rushed and had no time to read long writings, so he decided to publish them in small sizes with fewer pages so people could read them fast:

"Nowadays, there is twice the need for circulating good books. But these books must be small because modern people rush about so much and are pressed on all sides by a thousand different demands "la concupiscentia oculorum et aurium" that has reached such a point that people have to see and hear everything and travel everywhere so that a thick tome is just not going to be read. It will merely sit around gathering dust on the shelves of bookstores and libraries. It is because I am so convinced that, with God's grace's help, I have published so many small booklets and pamphlets."¹⁴⁰

The writings of Claret were very effective in communicating his methods, forms, and doctrine of prayer. He discovered these methods of doing apostolate

¹³⁹ John M. Lozano CMF. *Anthony Claret A Life at the Service of the Gospel*, 95.

¹⁴⁰ Aut. 312.

gradually and wanted to leave behind some continuity after his preaching mission. He also found prayer as a common need for all the people and he tried his best to leave something for their use:

“In 1843, perhaps because he wanted to leave a souvenir of the mission in towns he had preached, he published short books of prayers and devotions, which was to become the extremely popular *Cami Dret I Segur per Arribar al Cel* (The Straight Path, Sure Path that Leads to Heaven)’”¹⁴¹

The above references set the base for the study in the second chapter. Claret already intended to transmit the faith, and he began to put it into action.

2.1 Prayer is essential for Christian life and Definition

Is prayer essential? This is the question that Claret records in his *Dialogos sobre la oracion* and the first dialogue. He confidently said prayer is necessary to lead a good and virtuous Christian life. He invites the people to imitate Jesus, who always prayed:

«¿Es muy necesaria la oración? Lo es, y mucho, y por esto, Jesucristo, con su ejemplo y palabras, nos exhorta tan encarecidamente a tenerla, diciéndonos: «Conviene siempre orar». «Orad para que no caigáis en la tentación»; y Santo Tomás, sobre aquellas palabras del Evangelio: *Habiendo sido bautizado Jesús y estando en oración, se abrió el cielo*, dice que a los bautizados les está abierto el camino que va al cielo, pero para entrar les es necesaria la continua oración»¹⁴².

The teaching of prayer is very practical, and it needs action. Claret explains the practical ways of praying, and in the technical sense, he was not a theologian, yet his supernatural ways of understanding prayer and spirituality are appreciable. Claret's spirituality is very Christocentric, and imitating Jesus in prayer becomes essential in his teaching.

What is a prayer for Claret? For him, it is an elevation of the soul and a time of grace. He gives his ideas of prayer in his book *El Colegial o seminarista instruido* and tries to define prayer as an elevation of the soul. What he has

¹⁴¹ John M. Lozano CMF. *Anthony Claret A Life at the Service of the Gospel*, 96.

¹⁴² San Antonio María Claret, *Escritos espirituales*. Dirigido por JESUS BERMEJO. BAC: Madrid, 1985, 95.

written as a definition is not originally from Claret. Yet, he has given it to fulfil his purpose, and it contains a good flow of explanation: “The definition is hardly original, nor could it be”¹⁴³. Knowing the importance of it after studying and reading from several books, he presents the idea of prayer to young people who are aspiring to learn about prayer and other spiritual practices:

«La oración es una elevación del alma a Dios, alabándole por ser quien es, dándole gracias por los beneficios recibidos, pidiéndole los auxilios que necesita y suplicándole el perdón de los pecados»¹⁴⁴.

The general concept of prayer is expressed in his writing. Elevating the soul to God is a familiar concept and an essential foundation for the spiritual life. Its simple expression contains all the necessary components of prayer. Raising the heart, mind and soul to God is the soul's desire to be connected with the Divine attitude of gratitude and praise for Him for blessings and graces. Humility is accepting human disabilities, trusting the abilities and greatness of God, and pleading for His healing. General prayer formats are total surrender and asking for pardon for sins and wrongdoings.

The understanding of prayer is profound in his life and mission. The prayerful dialogue with the Lord, offering to God without reserve and busying oneself with prayer can balance the life of mission, study and spirituality:

“I offered my all to God without reserve. I was continuously thinking and planning what I could do for the good of my neighbour, and since the time had not yet come for me to set out on my work, I busied myself with prayer”¹⁴⁵.

Prayer is a necessary element of Christian virtues, mission and life. To give evident importance to prayer in his first volume, *El Colegial o Seminarista instruido*, he dedicated a chapter to the prayer of Christ and in the second volume, he presented it with a well-articulated chapter on *Christ's love of prayer*, including Biblical texts to emphasise the practice of prayer and imitation of Christ in prayer¹⁴⁶.

¹⁴³ J. M. Lozano, CMF. *Mystic and Man of Action*, 167.

¹⁴⁴ San A. M. Claret. *El Colegial o Seminarista instruido*, Tomo I. Madrid: Editorial Coulsa, 1951, 66.

¹⁴⁵ Aut. 153.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. J. M. Lozano, CMF. *Mystic and Man of Action*, 168: “In the well-instructed Seminarists, he devotes a chapter to an elucidation of the prayer of Christ. In the second volume of the same work, he returns to this theme in a chapter on “Christ's love of Prayer,” recalling those biblical texts that most vividly impressed on Claret the image of Christ in prayer”.

Claret's definition of prayer, which is said to be elevating the mind to God, is influenced by the Patristic period. This concept is explained by St. John Damascene: «La oración es, la elevación de la mente a Dios»¹⁴⁷. St. Augustin also presents the same concept and says: «La conversión de la mente a Dios con piadosa y humilde afecto»¹⁴⁸. When Evagrio tells, he presents two ideas of prayer: «Coloquio con Dios» y «Elevación de la mente a Dios»¹⁴⁹. It is clear that Claret was a man of books and modern reader; he always made use of the available resources to improve his knowledge. In the same way, the reading had contributed to his thoughts and writing. The writing of St. Teresa of Ávila significantly influenced the understanding of prayer in the life of Claret. The loving relationship he expressed in all his ideas and writings of prayer: «No es otra cosa oración mental, a mi parecer, sino tratar de Amistad, estando muchas veces tratando a solas con quien sabemos nos ama»¹⁵⁰.

This shows that prayer is an inseparable component in the life of Christians. Therefore, he never failed to instruct them with enough emphasis on the necessity of prayer and always invited the people to imitate Christ, who prayed always. He explains that prayer is the time that grace is poured onto people and they find the mercy of God and obtain forgiveness from Him:

«La oración nos es del todo indispensable, porque Dios ha hecho inherentes a ella muchas gracias que de otra manera no se pueden obtener. Rodeados como estamos de tantos enemigos y peligros, sintiéndonos débiles e incapaces de resistir por nosotros mismos a los atractivos, ¿Cómo podríamos vencer sin el auxilio de la gracia, ni cómo podríamos esperar este auxilio sin no lo pidiésemos a Dios? Por eso el orar es un precepto formal intimado a Jesucristo: “Es necesario orar dice orar siempre y no cesar nunca de orar”; y además lo enseño siempre con su santo ejemplo»¹⁵¹.

The writings and the development of the prayer theme show that Claret valued prayer as an essential criterion for the true Christian life. This was why Claret took a great interest in practising, teaching and writing about prayer. The setting of the Christological tone in his writing expresses the imitation of Christ in prayer:

¹⁴⁷ Saturnino Gamarra. *Teología espiritual: Serie de Manuales de Teología*. Madrid: BAC, 1994, 163.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 163.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 163.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. 163.

¹⁵¹ San A. M. Claret. *El Colegial o Seminarista instruido*, 67.

“... for Saint Anthony Claret, prayer is Christological in a third sense as well: not only because prayer reproduces an attitude of Christ, nor because it is united with his prayer, but also because, in a certain way, it has Christ as its exclusive theme.”¹⁵²

According to Claret, the necessary graces for the body and the soul are obtained through prayer. When the prayer is directed to God and requests Him, He never leaves us empty but instead fills us with grace, not only for us but also for others¹⁵³. Prayer is very essential to continue the Christian life. Claret is aware of the grace that all of us receive at the time of baptism, yet prayer keeps the grace alive and helps the follower of Christ to win against pride, which is the root of all other evil. It is a loving action of a child that they go to the father out of affection and love and requests for the needs. Therefore, prayer is an essential criterion to have a healthy dialogue with the Lord:

«Además de esas autoridades, para mí tan convincentes, ¿me podría usted dar algunas razones? Las daré con mucho gusto. La primera razón es porque Dios, que sabe lo que nos conviene, así lo ha dispuesto; la segunda es para que así el hombre sea humilde y no dé lugar a la soberbia, que es el principio de todo pecado; la tercera es para que con fe y confianza acuda a Dios como un tierno hijo que acude a su padre amoroso y cariñoso, que por eso le dice: Padre nuestro que estás en los cielos. De ahí es que en la oración se ejercitan la humildad, la fe, la esperanza, la caridad, la religión y otras virtudes»¹⁵⁴.

In his writings, *Dialogos Sobre La Oracion* mentions that prayer is the key to heaven and unlocks heaven's door for the people. Prayer serves as a weapon to defeat the efforts of Satan. In the first dialogue, he gives a list of recommendations to be free from temptation and to be holy and one should be a man and woman of prayer:

«Si quieres hallar las malas aficiones, seas hombre de oración. Si quieres conocer las astucias de Satanás y vencerle completamente, seas hombre de oración. Si quieres vivir alegre en medio de las penas, trabajos y aflicciones de este destierro y valle de lágrimas, seas hombre de oración. Si quieres adelantar en el camino del espíritu y no dejarte arrastrar de la corriente de las pasiones, seas hombre de oración. Si quieres espantar y apartar lejos de ti las moscas de los malos pensamientos, seas hombre de oración. Si quieres que tu entendimiento quede lleno de santos pensamientos y tu corazón de grandes y eficaces deseos de

¹⁵² J. M. Lozano, CMF. *Mystic and Man of Action*, 168

¹⁵³ Cf. San A. M. Claret. *El Colegial O Seminarista Instruido*. 67. «¡Cosa admirable y digna de todo nuestro reconocimiento! Que, siendo la oración tan necesaria, la ha facilitado Dios de tal manera, que el alma, ayudada de la gracia, basta que quiera y ya ora; se dirige a Él, le invoca, y puede exponer...»

¹⁵⁴ San Antonio María Claret. *Escritos espirituales*, 95.

perfección y de fervorosos afectos de devoción, seas hombre de oración. Si quieres tener un espíritu varonil y un ánimo constante en el servicio de Dios, seas hombre de oración. Si quieres extirpar todos los vicios y adquirir todas las virtudes, seas hombre de oración»¹⁵⁵.

Claret is clear about it and tells Christians to adopt a prayer life to find joy and peace amidst the challenges and temptations. In the world, it is difficult to find satisfaction in the service of God, but it is possible when the heart is trained to pray and united with God, the soul finds consolation and satisfaction: Si quieres tener un ánimo constante en el servicio de Dios, seas hombre de oración¹⁵⁶.

Claret is very clear in his teaching of prayer as a progressive act. It is not passive or barren, but it has its fruits. It leads to a higher form of prayer: contemplation and union with God. If a person aims to practice and attain a contemplative state, he must be a man of prayer. He never fails to remind the accompaniment of the Holy Spirit in this process. His personal experience and conviction in prayer made him to suggest many practical ways and its benefits for the readers:

«Finalmente, si quieres subir a la contemplación y a la mayor unión con Dios, seas hombre de oración, pues que en la oración se recibe la unción del Espíritu Santo, que ilustra el entendimiento, y por el ejercicio de la oración se adquiere la contemplación y el gusto de las cosas celestiales»¹⁵⁷.

The idea of prayer in the Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds all to be ardent practisers of prayer. The Church never loses its attention to remind its faithful to engage in this holy practice without seeing. Engagement in prayer leads to abiding in the dwelling place of God, and it awakens the faith:

“*Entering into contemplative prayer* is like entering into the Eucharistic liturgy: we ‘gather up’ the heart, recollect our whole being under the prompting of the Holy Spirit, abide in the dwelling place of the Lord which we are, awaken our faith in order to enter into the presence of him who awaits us. We let our masks fall and turn our hearts back to the Lord who loves us, so as to hand ourselves over to him as an offering to be purified and transformed”¹⁵⁸.

The most common ideas about the importance of prayer for the Christian life are explained straightforwardly in his writings. We cannot deny that he is not a theologian in a technical sense but a practical apostolic missionary who always

¹⁵⁵ San Antonio María Claret. *Escritos espirituales*, 96.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 96.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.96.

¹⁵⁸ CCC, no. 2711.

looks for simplified ways and means to take the Christian virtues to ordinary people. Especially knowing the intensity of the time and the need for holy priests and missionaries, he believed the breeding ground was a sound spiritual formation in the seminaries. Claret presented his thoughts in writing to the seminarian without a second thought. This is clear evidence of his love for the church and people:

«Sí, señor; por eso a los jóvenes que siguen la carrera eclesiástica se les educa en los seminarios, que son los semilleros de buenos clérigos, en que se les instruye en las ciencias y virtudes, y singularmente en la oración mental y vocal, ya que éstas son las armas de su milicia; y a la manera que a los soldados se les instruye en el manejo de las armas, así a éstos se les instruye y se les debe instruir en el ejercicio de la oración»¹⁵⁹.

2.1.1 Seminarians Need Prayer to grow in holiness

Claret was very particular in reminding the seminarians about the prayer and encouraged them to get into the regular practice of prayer. As young men, they need to become aware of evil, and Claret needs the grace of God very much. He says it is like David fighting against Goliath with five stones. The seminarians must train themselves to face the evil that opposes the holy life:

«A todos es necesaria la oración, pero de un modo muy especial es necesaria al seminarista. Él es joven, y buen seguro que no vencerá a los enemigos de su edad si no se procura las armas de la oración»¹⁶⁰.

In the *Autobiography*, section *Autobiographical Document III*¹⁶¹, he elaborates on his idea of bringing his experience as a student in Vic and instructing his seminarians to adopt a practice of prayer in their lives. According to him, all those who aspire to become priests or religious should

¹⁵⁹ San Antonio María Claret. *Escritos espirituales*, 97.

¹⁶⁰ San A. M. Claret. *El Colegial o Seminarista instruido*, 68.

¹⁶¹ Cf. Aut. Page no. 581: “Besides his Autobiography, Saint Anthony Mary Claret left us several other Autobiographical Documents dealing with a great number of subjects. Some of them relate to the apostolate, others aim at fostering his piety, others are meant to serve as an aide-mémoire, while others are connected with the demands of his office. All of them serve to round out the Autobiography which, since it was written to set an example for the formation of Claret’s Missionaries, often passes over some otherwise important events, while dwelling at great length on the traits of an ideal Missionary. This volume contains sixteen autobiographical documents derived from various sources that are specified in their respective places. Concerning their content, they can be classified (although not quite adequately) into two groups: historical and spiritual”.

imitate Jesus in prayer. They should become true friends of prayer: “It is not surprising that Claret, while speaking of Jesus as a Model and Master of prayer, should recall his years as a seminarian in Vic, presenting his own prayer life at that time as a model for his seminarians”¹⁶².

Claret instructs that when the practice is genuine, praying is easy. As a friend of prayer, he says he can visualize the image of Jesus, Mary, and saints and connect them with prayer. He says that prayer is the faster mode, like a telegram that reaches heaven immediately and is recorded in heaven. Prayer is the way to perfection; there is no shortcut to perfection. Therefore, his writings to the seminarians is obvious and direct¹⁶³.

He explains the weapons that can help the seminarian in the time of the fight against evil and make their journey towards perfection. He writes these weapons as the frequency of the sacraments, the reading of the pious books and the prayer¹⁶⁴The prayerful participation and reception of the sacraments and the staff of the Holy Eucharist are inevitable; they help and console the soul in times of temptation.

«La Primera ha de ser frecuencia de Sacramentos. Dice el mismo David en el salmo 22,4: *Virga tua et baculus tuus ipsa me consolata sunt*. La vara de la penitencia o confesión y el báculo eucarístico le servirán de grande consuelo, ya por los consejos que la dará el confesor, ya por la gracia sacramental que le causarán dichos sacramentos...»¹⁶⁵.

In the prayer teaching, he made sure that the Holy Eucharist was an important practice and that they should draw inspiration from the first Christian community. The Holy Eucharist is a celebration and remembrance of Jesus Christ's life, passion, death, and resurrection. Prayerful Participation in the Holy Mass

¹⁶² Aut. Autobiographical documents III, 592. (Please note: An autobiographical document is an addition to the Autobiography itself. The number denotes the page number)

¹⁶³ Ibid.593: “But when he prays at home or in some other place where the Blessed Sacrament is not present, but where there is an image of Jesus, Mary or some Saint, he likes to imagine that he is in a telegraph station with a line to heaven, where Jesus, Mary or the Saint he is praying can hear him perfectly. And just as earthly telegraph messages reach from the farthest part of the realm to the king’s court in the shortest time, so his prayers travel instantly from the image before which he is praying to the court of the King of Heaven. And in this way, he prays with great devotion, knowing that he is being heard and that his prayers are being written down in heaven, just as words are transmitted by telegraphs on earth.”

¹⁶⁴ Cf. San A. M. Claret. *El Colegial o Seminarista instruido*, 69.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. 592.

provides innumerable graces and knowledge to help future priests lead virtue-filled lives¹⁶⁶.

The Reading of the pious book serves as the second weapon. The first chapter dealt with his practice of spiritual reading and recommended engaging in prayerful reading of the Holy Scripture and pious books. He made it an obligatory practice for the seminarians: “Their professor or teacher should be informed whether and how they are fulfilling this duty. They will also have a period of spiritual reading every day”¹⁶⁷. Spiritual reading had a significant impact on Claret’s vocational journey. The reading of the Sacred Scripture helped him to discover the missionary vocation:

“St. Anthony Mary Claret was a voracious reader... certain books influenced his conception of the apostolate, methodology or specific aspect of the spirituality, such as devotion to the Eucharist or the Blessed Virgin”¹⁶⁸.

The third weapon he speaks of for spiritual warfare is prayer. He never hesitates to record this as a weapon to defeat the enemies of the Lord. It is through mental prayer we come in contact with the Lord. Through prayer, the seminarians receive the grace to be chaste and holy. If one cannot be a chaste man, it is impossible to become a Priest. Knowing its benefits, he recommends it to seminarians. He believed that if he could master mental prayer, he could prayerfully participate in other spiritual activities. He says that mental prayer granted him graces. The Lord, in his goodness and mercy, also grants me many graces during mental prayer, but in vocal prayer, I have a deeper awareness¹⁶⁹.

He writes that it is so important for seminarians to grow in virtues. Faith, humility, reverence and purity of intentions spring from the mental prayer. He makes it a foundational practice and exercise to involve and participate in other pious activities. The mental prayer brings the aid of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. The virtues for the Christian living are given in the prayer. When a person enters into mental prayer, the soul is gifted with the virtues that are needed for holy life:

«Si la oración mental es tan necesaria, no es menos excelente, pues que en ella se ejercitan los actos de las virtudes más principales de la vida cristiana; por eso San

¹⁶⁶ Cf. *Ibid.* 69, 172.

¹⁶⁷ *Autobiography Document*, 663.

¹⁶⁸ J. M. Lozano. CMF, *Mystic and Man of Action*, 55.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. *Aut.* 766.

Juan Crisóstomo comprara la oración mental a una gran reina que entra en una ciudad acompañada de muchas damas y de los grandes de la corte, con innumerable muchedumbre de gente de guarda que la sigue; así, cuando la oración entra en un alma, entran con ella todas las virtudes»¹⁷⁰.

His doctrine is clear: seminarians should learn and master all forms of prayer, especially mental prayer, as the foundational discipline. A young man can't become a friend of God if he is not a friend of prayer. Prayer is the bridge to obtain the graces and virtues that can help young men and women respond to God's call and lead a holy and virtuous life.

To conclude on mental prayer for the seminarians, Claret writes repeatedly on the necessity of such great practice. This practice helps the seminarians to improve their quality of life:

«De lo dicho se desprende que el ejercicio más propio del seminarista es la oración mental: él debe aprender y formarse en todas virtudes, para poder servir muy de cerca al Rey de las virtudes, pues por medio de la oración mental las obtendrá; él debe ser como un ángel del señor, y en la oración mental es donde se aprenden las cualidades angelicales»¹⁷¹.

2.2 Claret and his Six Talents of Prayer

This is one of Claret's spiritual writings, a minor work yet considered spiritual writing. To add a little more clarity about the writing of Claret, one must refer to the instructions he had written for the seminarians. This brief treatise on the talents of prayer is contained in the first volume of *El Colegial Instruido*, published by the Librería Religiosa, Barcelona, in 1860¹⁷². The beauty of the writing is that it is very simple and saved as a formation manual for seminarians and priests in Spain and Latin America. The presentation is filled with a practical spirit and guides the person to attain the spirit of prayer and union with the Lord:

«Siguiendo la explicación clásica de los grados de oración en orden creciente, desde la oración vocal hasta la oración de contemplación y de unión, el P. Claret expone con sencillez y claridad el contenido y la importancia de cada uno de esos

¹⁷⁰ San A. M. Claret. *El Colegial o Seminarista instruido*, 74.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.* 75.

¹⁷² San Antonio María Claret. *Escritos espirituales*, 107 – 112.

talentos y, guiado por su espíritu siempre práctico y concreto, ayuda al cristiano entregado a la oración a descubrir el grado al que ha llegado y el talento que ha recibido en ese largo y espinoso camino de la oración»¹⁷³.

2.2.1 First Talent: Vocal Prayer

In the first talent, he deals with the Vocal Prayer, beginning with the question, what is vocal prayer? He presents the prayer as a gift from God and one should know what he has received from God as a gift. It is important to know the value and usefulness of the talents that one has received. The vocal prayer is the gift and one should know how to practice it and master it. Claret himself favoured the vocal prayer:

“Vocal prayer suits me better than strictly mental prayer, thank God. At each word of the Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory, I glimpse an abyss of goodness and mercy. Our Lord has granted me the grace of being very attentive and fervent when I say these prayers. The Lord in his goodness and mercy also grants me many graces during mental prayer, but in vocal prayer, I have a deeper awareness”¹⁷⁴.

First is to identify the gift and then master it. If the person has the gift of meditation while praying and yet loses the connection if he stops speaking or praying and is distracted by many other things, he needs practice to develop the skill of prayer. Claret says he dares to take advantage of the gift that he received and make a move to practice it:

«La persona que recibido de Dios este don estará contenta con él y se aprovechará cuando pueda del mismo de manera siguiente: Cada día, medio hora o más tiempo, en casa, en iglesias u otro lugar, arrodillada o en pie... con fe y humildad rezará el padrenuestro, y en cada palabra se detendrá más o menos tiempo, según le sea posible»¹⁷⁵.

The vocal prayer that is prayed in full of awareness has its benefits. This prayer can be done in any position, for example, standing, walking, working, or kneeling, and it is done with the opportunity provided by faith and humility. This is the mindful recitation of the words; each word that is pronounced is always

¹⁷³ Ibid.164.

¹⁷⁴ Aut. 766.

¹⁷⁵ San A. M. Claret. *El Colegial o Seminarista instruido*, 164.

accompanied by the awareness of the recitation and the connectivity¹⁷⁶. The important practice is how the person stays connected with the prayer. He suggests that it is better to keep it for half an hour and dwell on each word of the prayer, like “Our Father,” “Hail Mary,” etc.

The recitation of the traditional prayer can help the person to meditate on the mystery of the Lord, especially during the rosary etc. If the person cannot succeed it is advised to do meditation or read a book on meditation, it is like a hen taking a drink dipping her head in the water and raising and doing it till it quenches her thirst¹⁷⁷. The use of the hen symbol is very practical and shows how he simplified the example without complicating it with complex theories and practices. This example expresses the connectedness with everyday life. Using a simple example from the environment automatically recognizes the gift of God.

All these processes are done with time and space full of awareness. This must be continued in faith and humility until he or she masters the vocal prayer. The method of dwelling on each word of prayer he learned from the *Ignatian Spiritual Exercises*. This is found in the second method of praying which consists of contemplating each word of prayer that the person is praying¹⁷⁸. The following numbers explain the method of praying and the physical posture:

“*The Second Method of Prayer* is practised as follows. One may sit or kneel accordingly as one feels better disposed or finds greater devotion, but should keep the eyes closed or intent on one place, and not allow them to wander. Then the person should say the word “Father,” and continue to consider the word as long as meanings, comparisons, relish, and consolations, are connected with each word of the Our Father, or of any other prayer which one wishes to use in this manner”¹⁷⁹.

These are some of the ideas found in Claret's writings when he explains the different methods that can help a person improve the habit of prayer. Claret's personal experience practising different methods of prayer convinced him to propose them to others and encourage them to benefit from them.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. 164.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. 164.

¹⁷⁸ St. Ignatius of Loyola. *The Spiritual Exercises*, Translated and Commentary by George E. Ganss, S.J. Bilbao: Mensajero, 2021, no. 249.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. No. 252.

2.2.2 The second Talent: Mental Prayer or Meditation

In the book *El Colegial o Seminarista instruido*, Claret explains the second talent of prayer: Mental prayer or Meditation. Knowing the benefits of such a practice of prayer, he proposed this method and made his explanation simple so that all could understand it easily. Meditation occupies an essential place in Claret's spiritual life. He gives enough time for his daily meditation and mental prayer. In the *Autobiography*, he says that the crucial trait of missionary life is love, and meditation is one of the treasures that help to acquire love:

“Thoroughly convinced that to be a good missionary it is both useful and essential to have love, I have searched for this hidden treasure and would sell everything to find it. I studied the means to acquire it and discovered the following: (1) keeping the commandments of God's law, (2) practising the evangelical counsels, (3) responding faithfully with divine inspirations, (4) making one's meditation well”¹⁸⁰.

Knowing the grace and its benefits, he writes these to help people understand and practice it. In the book *Mystic and Man of Action*, a section on prayer records, “According to the saint, the ordinary theme of the ordinary is the life of Christ, the reading should be either from the Gospels themselves or from some commentary on them”¹⁸¹. He has always drawn inspiration from St. Ignatius of Loyola and made it to accompany his meditation the method of St. Ignatius used in the spiritual exercises¹⁸². The writings show that meditation is always accompanied by two feet, they are *Thought and Affection*; they help the person to walk closer to God and give the fire of love¹⁸³.

In the book, he describes the process of meditation and tells us that it has three parts: beginning, middle, and end¹⁸⁴. In the first part, inward reverence should be made and God's greatness and presence should be recognised in faith. In the *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius presents the third method of the *Additional Directives for Making the Exercises Better*, contemplation or meditation, where he

¹⁸⁰ Aut. 442.

¹⁸¹ J. M. Lozano, CMF, *Mystic and Man of Action*, 174.

¹⁸² Cf. Ibid. 174.

¹⁸³ Cf. Ibid. 175.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. San A. M. Claret. *El Colegial o Seminarista instruido*, 88.

says that he will raise the mind and think about how God is looking at him¹⁸⁵. The process of making a prayer includes good preparation.

In the Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius recommends the preparatory prayer. Claret learned Spiritual Exercises well and was convinced of the benefits and included in his writings: “The Preparatory Prayer is to ask God our Lord for the grace that all my intentions, actions, and operations may be ordered purely to the service and praise of the Divine Majesty”¹⁸⁶. In his book, he instructs that the total surrender must be made to His infinitive Majesty and begin with the preparatory prayer. Then, fixing on the theme and praying for grace is made in the process and requesting the illumination for a true understanding of the will of God¹⁸⁷.

Claret was very determined that meditation or mental prayer is undoubtedly necessary for the spiritual journey, and he says it is a royal way or highway to heaven¹⁸⁸. According to Claret, this practice is done by the power of the soul, memory, understanding, will, and imagination; indeed, it is accompanied by the grace of God. It is a practice that connects all the senses, seeing, hearing, smelling, touching and testing, what a person meditates on¹⁸⁹. He processes that the subject of the meditation should be Jesus. The life, passion, death and resurrection:

«La materia de las meditaciones deben ser los Novísimos y, singularmente, la vida, pasión, y muerte de Jesucristo, nuestro divino Redentor. Puesto cada uno en la meditación, ha de recordar aquellas palabras que Dios dijo a Moisés: *Mira y haz según el ejemplar que en el monte se te ha mostrado*»¹⁹⁰.

2.2.3 The Third Talent: Prayer of acts of virtue

Claret presents the third talent as a prayer union with virtues. The Virtues occupies a special place in Claret's life. The spiritual notes in the *Autobiography* say that prayer and meditation on the life and the passion of Jesus lead us to learn

¹⁸⁵ Cf. St. Ignatius of Loyola, no. 75.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. no.46.

¹⁸⁷ San A. M. Claret. *El Colegial o Seminarista instruido*, 88.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Ibid. 165.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Ibid. 166.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. 166.

three virtues that Jesus Himself practised¹⁹¹. Knowing the necessity of virtue in the life of Christians and especially to the missionary, he says that to bear good fruit in the life and mission, one must cultivate virtues, “Thus far, I have been speaking of the ordinary means I made use of to produce fruit”.

I want to say something about the virtues necessary for any missionary to bear fruit.”¹⁹². One should ask in prayer to obtain the grace to grow in the virtues: “Humility, obedience, meekness, and love are the virtues that shine especially through the Cross and the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. O my Jesus, help me imitate you!”¹⁹³.

He says that virtue is the gift of prayer. It is talent and at the end of meditation a person receives the virtues. He always insisted that virtues are essential for life and they give direction for the good life. He writes that Christians must take good care in learning and growing in virtues; “We must be more intent on acquiring virtues than on acquiring furnishings for the worship of God”¹⁹⁴. In the Meditation, if the person is gifted with the virtues let him dwell on it because it is God who places him in the grace-filled moment. This grace-filled moment will place the person with talents of virtues of faith, hope, charity, humility and resignation to the will of God:

«En el tiempo de la oración deténgase, pues, en las virtudes, ya que Dios así lo quiere; haga actos de fe, esperanza, caridad, humildad, y resignación con la voluntad de Dios; ejercítense bien en aquellas virtudes que conoce le han de servir más durante el día;»¹⁹⁵

The writings say that prayer for the act of virtues is essential; one must consciously pray for those virtues; they are given by God, and without the help of God, they are hard to obtain. He says virtues are like weapons; soldiers, Christians, and especially seminarians must learn to handle virtues well. Those who learn to handle it well use it in times of war against evil:

«Haga como los soldados, que se ejercitan en el manejo de las armas, y cuando han de atacar al enemigo lo hacen bien y, además, bien ejercitados, hacen con garbo las

¹⁹¹ Cf. Aut. Spiritual Notes, 881. (Kindly note: Spiritual denotes the addition in the book in *Autobiography*, and the number denotes the page number).

¹⁹² Aut. 340.

¹⁹³ Ibid. 428.

¹⁹⁴ Aut. Autobiographical documents, XVI, 666.

¹⁹⁵ San A. M. Claret. *El Colegial o Seminarista instruido*, 166.

evoluciones militares. Hágalo también así el seminarista, que es soldado de la iglesia militante»¹⁹⁶

The invitation to practice prayer for virtues is essential. The call is to be militant for the church; to fight against all evils, Christians need weapons of virtues. Virtues are attained through the proper practice of meditation and prayer. God is the giver of virtues, and it is His gift that is attained in prayerful meditation.

2.2.4 Fourth Talent: Contemplation

The contemplation of Claret is Christocentric and it is purely becoming aware of His goodness, beauty, justice, mercy, wisdom and omnipotence:

«El don de contemplación es como cuatro talentos, y tiene ese don aquella alma que sabe contemplar los atributos de Dios, su bondad, sus hermosuras, su sabiduría, su omnipotencia, su justicia, su misericordia»¹⁹⁷.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks of contemplative prayer as a gift and grace, which leads to making a covenant with God and the heart. The contemplative prayer leads to communion with the Holy Trinity:

“Contemplative prayer is the prayer of the child of God, of the forgiven sinner who agrees to welcome the love by which he is loved and who wants to respond to it by loving even more. But he knows that the love he is returning is poured out by the Spirit in his heart, for everything is grace from God. Contemplative prayer is poor and humble surrender to the loving will of the Father in ever deeper union with his beloved Son”¹⁹⁸.

The gift of contemplation is the higher form of meditation that helps him to contemplate the mystery of Jesus. Claret contemplation is not just a prayer, it is an affection. It is the process of getting pregnant with the love of God. It is like a fire that could engulf a person. He could not describe such a fervent spirit in him. It is fire and sweet and fully captivated by the thoughts of God and the words of prophets and saints. Claret sees this as a process to bring the thought of Christ into whole life and thus become a man of action and contemplation:

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. 167.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. 167.

¹⁹⁸ CCC, no. 2712.

“In the course of meditating on the lives and works of these saints, I used to feel such a burning within me that I couldn’t sit still. I had to get up and run from one place to another, preaching continually. I can’t describe what I felt inside me. Nothing tired me; I wasn’t terrified at the awful calumnies being levelled against me or afraid of the greatest persecutions. Everything was sweet to me, as long as I could win souls for Jesus Christ and heaven and save them from hell”¹⁹⁹.

The experiences and his conviction in contemplative prayer prove that Claret was a man of contemplation. The interesting factor is that Claret never lost the desire for other methods of prayer, yet through contemplative prayer, he found God in everything. This is an essential approach towards prayer and contemplation. Marianne Schlosser, in his book *Teología de la Oración* explains beautifully:

«Ser “contemplativo”, significa, por último, cultivar de forma duradera una determinada actitud: la persona contemplativa no pierde la dimensión de la oración cuando se ocupa de otras cosas; le es propio un cierto “modo de mirar todas las cosas”, conformado por la *unión con Dios*»²⁰⁰.

Contemplative prayer is very effective and leads to union with God. Grace is given to those who seek this method of prayer. Claret proposes that all advance in this way of prayer.

2.2.5 Fifth talent: Mixed prayer

Mixed prayer is the one that speaks of the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ, the existence of God in his creatures, rational, irrational, and in all things that have to be²⁰¹. This prayer helps the person see God's presence in everything and His participation in the universe and create everything with utmost respect and reverence. These gifts and awareness are received through this contemplation of the active presence and participation of the divine person in and around us. The practice of prayer leads to an awareness of human nothingness and the greatness of God:

¹⁹⁹ Aut. 227.

²⁰⁰ Marianne Schlosser. *Teología de la Oración. Levantemos el Corazón*. Salamanca: Sígueme, 2018, 144.

²⁰¹ Cf. San A. M. Claret. *El Colegial o Seminarista instruido*, 168.

«También es oración mixta el contemplar a Dios en todas las cosas por esencia, por presencia y por potencia, reconociendo que toda la hermosura, belleza, santidad y perfección que en ellas vemos es una participación de Dios»²⁰².

In this prayer, the soul receives lots of consolation because God dwells in the soul, which is attracted by the goodness of the soul. He says in this prayer, the soul melts in the greatness of God, and as they sing, the tenderness breaks out into tears. The other possibility is that the soul meditates on the greatness of God, recognises its wrongdoings, sins against the kindness of God, breaks into tears as a sign of sorrow for its sins²⁰³.

Claret continues to explain the effect of this prayer, saying that the righteous soul receives a fire in the soul, and it burns and illuminates the soul. The comparison that he makes with fire is fascinating. The fire has the energy to burn, illuminate and purify. It is like Jesus came to set the world on fire. The soul receives the same fire and is illuminated, purified, and produced energy. The just man going through this process comes to know the goodness and the greatness of God:

«Dios, en el alma del justo, hace lo que el fuego, que ilumina, calienta y convierte en fuego el combustible, derrite los minerales, calcina las piedras; pues estos mismos efectos causa el fuego que Jesús vino a traer sobre la tierra»²⁰⁴.

This prayer leads the person to contemplate God's beauty and goodness and become aware of human nothingness and suffering. Desiring God leads to getting rid of desire for oneself, and like the burnt incense, the soul becomes a fragrant offering to God²⁰⁵. Claret presents his writing logically to the students and the people. His explanation of this prayer shows his intention of presenting an explanation that can help the seminarians and the people practice this prayer and enjoy its spiritual benefits.

²⁰² San Antonio María Claret. *Escritos espirituales*, 110.

²⁰³ Cf. San A. M. Claret. *El Colegial o Seminarista instruido*, 169.

²⁰⁴ San Antonio María Claret. *Escritos espirituales*, 111.

²⁰⁵ Cf. *Ibid.* 111.

2.2.6 Sixth Talent: Union

Claret writes that the sixth talent of prayer is union. It is one of the greatest gifts of prayer that God Himself presents to the person who practices it. The gift of union occurs when the soul obeys God's commands. Quoting the evangelist John: «Respondió Jesús le dijo: El que me ama guardará mi palabra, y mi Padre lo amará y vendremos a él y haremos morada en él»²⁰⁶. The prayer leads to the grace to obey the precepts of the Lord, creating the passage to union with the Lord. According to Claret, it is a union that transforms the person into a temple of God, and it is like the expression of St. Paul, “It is no longer I who live but the Christ who lives in me”:

«El don de oración de unión es como seis talentos; éste es el don más rico, pues posee al mismo Dios de un modo muy especial, como dice Jesucristo: “Cualquiera que me ame observará mi doctrina, y mi Padre le amará; y vendremos a él y haremos mansión dentro de él”; y como el alma del justo ama a Dios, está en Dios, y de tal manera están los dos, que dice ella con San Pablo: «Vivo yo, mas no yo, sino que vive en mí Cristo»²⁰⁷.

The process of prayer offers a great union that produces peace and inner stillness. In the environment of prayer, the soul receives the capacity to meditate and love like Mary and work like Martha²⁰⁸. Claret presents that the prayer makes true union with the Lord possible. The state of the soul is very solid and happy. Nothing can separate the soul from the love of the beloved. Like Mary, the soul could connect with the beloved, and the union would lead to a deep bond and peace²⁰⁹. He explains that the union is so profound that nothing can separate a person from the beloved. As St. Paul expresses, *who can separate us from the love of Christ?* This encounter is energetic and consumed by the love for the beloved.

One of the gifts that prayer brings is a more profound union and love. This grows into a relationship with the beloved and fills the person with the grace to long for the union with the Lord.

²⁰⁶ Jn14 ,23.

²⁰⁷ San Antonio María Claret. *Escritos espirituales*, 112.

²⁰⁸ Ibid. 112.

²⁰⁹ Cf. Ibid.112.

Claret presented the effects and the six gifts of prayer, making it very simple for all to understand his practical teaching. This is another evidence that Claret is very practical in presenting his doctrine on prayer and doing his mission. These six gifts of prayer are not just teaching but his lived experiences. He convincingly lived and helped others to practice them in their lives.

2.3 Liturgical Prayer

Liturgical prayer is recommended for priests, religious people, seminarians, and the faithful. Claret was very clear in insisting on developing practices to help the Church members connect with God and the Church. In the writing of the prayer, Claret, as a faithful son of the Church very particularly begins the day with the prayer of the Church:

“Every day in winter, I ordinarily rise at 3:00, sometimes earlier, because I always get up when I can’t go to sleep and am never in bed unless sleeping. Then I begin the Divine Office reciting Matins and Lauds, after which I say the Trisagion, read Scripture, prepare for Mass, celebrate Mass, make my thanksgiving, and remain in the confessional until 11:00 when I go to hold an audience for anyone who wishes to speak with me”²¹⁰.

Claret never omitted all these daily practices and invited others to practice such practices that can help the spiritual journey. He never hesitated to join others to celebrate this liturgical prayer in practical life. In writing about his voyage to Cuba²¹¹, he writes about his daily prayer practice: “Afterwards, we were free to rest and study until three, when we gathered to recite Vespers, Compline, Matins, and Lauds”²¹². These are some of the events that show that Claret was well aware of the need and obligation to pray. The understanding of Claret was that prayer is private, individual and common. Each place has its beauty and grace.

²¹⁰ Aut. 637.

²¹¹ Cf. Ibid. 506.

²¹² Ibid. 507.

2.3.1 Divine Office

Divine Office is another aspect of spirituality that priests and religious people are encouraged to pray for without fail. Claret was very faithful and in his retreat resolutions, we find that he never omitted this practice²¹³. In his pastoral letter to the priests of Santiago de Cuba on February 18, 1851, he writes about the need and obligation to pray the divine office and the other liturgical prayers²¹⁴. His practice of prayers brought out his ideas about the benefits of prayers in the above chapter. The Divine Office was a regular practice and it said they encouraged each other in the community to pray « A su debido tiempo, el Oficio Divino, que comenzó también a rezarse en comunidad... »²¹⁵.

Claret always encourages priests and seminarians to participate in church prayer. His cofounders were also very faithful in praying for the divine office practised in the community. As the great testimony, James Clotet, one of the cofounders who accompanied Claret in the last stage of his life, wrote to the superior general Joseph Xifré from Fontfroide, on the year 24 October 1870: “Since midday yesterday I have always been next to him, except the time necessary to pray the Divine Office and visit the Blessed Sacrament, to celebrate Mass, take meals and some two hours of rest”²¹⁶. Claret always wanted the seminarians, priests and his missionaries to practice what the Church recommends for the growth of spiritual life.

In the time of his service as Archbishop of Cuba, he recommended this practice to all the priests and had a plan for the spiritual activities, especially

²¹³ Cf. Jose Maria Viñas y Jesus Bermejo, Sant Antonio Maria Claret, eds. *Escritos Autobiográficos*, 340.

²¹⁴ Cf. San Antonio Maria Claret. *Cartas Selectas*. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1996, 110.

²¹⁵ Cristóbal Fernández. *El Beato P. Antonio María Claret, Historia documentada de su vida y empresas*, I, 298.

²¹⁶ Aut. Appendices, 1034.

praying the divine office as a community activity *Horario de los ejercicios practicados por el P. Claret con sus familiares en Cuba*²¹⁷.

2.3.2 Holy Mass

Holy Mass is the higher form of devotion and is Claret's favourite prayer. The first chapter explicitly explains his devotion to the Holy Eucharist. His love for the Eucharist started in early childhood, « Desde muy pequeño me sentí inclinado a la Piedad y a la Religión. Todos los días de fiesta y de precepto oía la santa Misa»²¹⁸. The higher spiritual intensity and consolations were found in the Eucharist²¹⁹. He writes in his Autobiography that he encourages others to attend mass and receive holy communion; “I would ask them to attend Holy Mass, receive Holy Communion and, both during Mass and after receiving Holy Communion, to offer to the Eternal Father his most holy Son”²²⁰.

In his book *Camino Recto* (1889), he writes to young people to practice the necessary spiritual exercises. In the section on Holy Mass, he writes that it is a holy sacrifice offered on the altar to purify souls. He says it's a sacrifice, a banquet and adored with the presence of Jesus. It is offered for the world's salvation and serves as the main worship we offer to God. Jesus stands as the victim, and the priest celebrates the sacrifice of the new covenant²²¹.

The simple explanation to the young people is very impressive. To understand the writing, one must understand his time and religious piety, which must also be considered. The writing and providing the simple text for the mass was very effective in his time. A new method of communicating the tradition, teaching and faith. Keeping his time, he suggested that to have good participation, one must do

²¹⁷ Cf. Cristóbal Fernández. *El Beato P. Antonio María Claret, Historia documentada de su vida y empresas*, I, 379, 590.

²¹⁸ Jose María Viñas y Jesus Bermejo, Sant Antonio Maria Claret, eds. *Escritos Autobiográficos*, 117.

²¹⁹ Cf. Aut. 45.

²²⁰ Ibid. 265.

²²¹ Cf. San Antonio M, Claret. *Camino Recto*. Segunda edición. Barcelona: Veron, 1989,93.

two acts: First is a eucharistic fast, fasting before receiving the communion, and the second is a good confession before the Holy Mass²²². Participation in the Holy Eucharist is to participate in the body and the blood of Jesus;

«Por tanto, al participar del banquete sacrificial de la Eucaristía, participamos del cuerpo y sangre de Jesús alimento de nuestras almas. Los judíos ofrecían multitud de sacrificios y holocaustos a Dios por sus pecados, nosotros ofrecemos uno solo, el de Jesús que es el Único que perdona los pecados»²²³.

Claret teaches that unless the person eats the body and drinks the blood of the sacrificial victim, Jesus, he remains in a state of sins. The idea of his time insisting on the sanctification of the soul is very much explicit in his writing²²⁴. The recommendation to participate and receive communion is participating in the merits of the sacrificial victim. This is to participate in the invitation of Jesus, that is, *Do in remembrance of me*; it is also the reminder of the active presence of Jesus among His people:

«Jesucristo, diciendo: Hoc facite in meam commemorationem. «Haced esto en memoria de mí». Y como las gentes se irán sucediendo y continuando hasta la consumación de los siglos, así también continuará este sacrificio hasta la consumación de los siglos, según lo prometió el mismo Jesucristo con estas terminantes palabras: He aquí que yo estoy con vosotros todos los días hasta la consumación de los siglos»²²⁵

Claret writes extensively about the Holy Mass and other related practices for seminarians in the book *El Colegial o Seminarista instruido*. He brings his explanation with the question, *Qué es la Santa Misa?*²²⁶ There, he says it is a divine sacrifice, a place where all the spiritual graces are made available to the participants, and he recommends that all must participate in it every day;

«... todos tengan devoción a la Santa Misa y que la oigan todos los días; de esta manera conseguirán muchas gracias, ganarán innumerables indulgencias y se prepararán para cuando sean sacerdotes»²²⁷.

When Claret writes to the priests, he tells them to be aware of the state of holiness and that they represent Christ visibly. According to Claret, the priests not

²²² Cf. Ibid. 93.

²²³ Ibid. 93.

²²⁴ Cf. San Antonio María Claret. *Escritos espirituales*, 135.

²²⁵ Ibid. 135.

²²⁶ Cf. San A. M. Claret. *El Colegial o Seminarista instruido*, 172.

²²⁷ Ibid. 172.

only represent the victim but receive the grace to offer themselves as a proper sacrifice to the glory of God and sanctification for their sins²²⁸.

The Holy Eucharist is at the centre of missionary life, and all his retreat resolutions and programmes tell us of his deep love and admiration for it. From childhood until death, Claret never departed from this love. He made it a clearer task to live, teach, invite, and celebrate the Holy Mass wherever he went and lived.

2.3.3 The Rosary

Devotion to Mother Mary is always a unique and inseparable spiritual practice, and he constantly urged others to have true devotion to Mary. In his writings, he records this as an obligation to all the Catholics to have a devotion to Mother Mary:

«La devoción a María Santísima es otra de nuestras principales obligaciones. Es la Madre de Dios y la Madre de los hombres; sobre estos dos puntos cardinales gira toda la devoción. Como Madre de Dios, lo puede todo; como Madre de los hombres, nos amparará y nos concederá todas las gracias»²²⁹.

Claret wrote an *El Santísimo Rosario explicado* book and presented his ideas and teachings to the people. This book contains simple explanations that ordinary people can comprehend. Claret gave great importance to the vocal prayer, and the rosary helped him contemplate the mystery of Jesus. It has a double effect; it is saved as the vocal and contemplative prayer²³⁰.

In his writing to the seminarians explaining the effect of the rosary, he says that it helps the person to contemplate Jesus and Mary. It is not only pleasing Jesus and Mary but also leads the Christians towards perfection; «Y la razón es porque esta devoción nos obliga a pensar en Jesús y María; nos excita a amarles, reverenciarles e imitarles»²³¹. Devotion to Mary is well rooted in the life of Claret,

²²⁸ Cf. San Antonio María Claret, *Escritos espirituales*, 137. «Es además indispensable el que seamos sacerdotes o sacrificadores no sólo en la misa, juntamente con Jesucristo, sacrificador invisible, y el sacerdote, sacrificador visible, sino también hemos de ofrecernos nosotros mismos como víctimas para gloria de Dios y en satisfacción de nuestras culpas y pecados.»

²²⁹ Ibid. 140.

²³⁰ Cf. Antonio María Claret. *El Santísimo Rosario explicado*. Barcelona: Cocusa, 1865, 20.

²³¹ Ibid.20.

and it is always recommended to pray to Mary, who is everything after Jesus for him. He tells God only knows exactly who Mother Mary is:

«Sólo Dios conoce bien quién es María Santísima, dice san Bernardino. Sin embargo, debes saber que María es una gran Señora, concebida sin mancha de pecado original, llena de gracia y de virtudes, Virgen y Madre de Dios, Reina de cielos y tierra y abogada de pecadores»²³².

With our human understanding, we can grasp a little about her. She is free from sin and favoured by God, and we receive God's favour through her. The devotion of praying the rosary leads the people to Jesus. He writes that the rosary is a valuable and fruitful private vocal prayer. He explains that the rosary is a powerful prayer taught by Mary herself and is like ascending to heaven. He goes further to show his devotion saying it is the most powerful prayer after Holy Mass, «La oración llamada *Rosario* es la devoción más que grata a Dios y a la Santísima Virgen, y a la par la más provechosa a todos los hombres, después de la santa Misa»²³³.

Claret calls the rosary, *The crown of the mystical roses* that adorn the Blessed Mary²³⁴. It is an effective prayer that leads to contemplating the mysteries of God, and for him, it is also to imitate Jesus. According to Claret, the contemplation on the mystery leads the Christians to perfection because this devotion consists of knowing, loving and imitating the incarnate Word, Jesus²³⁵. Following the time, he explained that the rosary is divided into three parts to contemplate and celebrate: mysteries of joy, sorrow and glory. It helps the people to join with the liturgical feasts of the church. He insists that the holy rosary is a compendium of our holy religion²³⁶.

Claret is very convinced of the practice of the holy rosary, and he finds this to be a grace-generating act that surely pleases God and the Blessed Virgin because it is made up of the holy elements that help Christians contemplate the life of Jesus. The holy experience of people tells the consolation they received. The history of the church's devotion to the rosary speaks clearly. Claret never failed to

²³² San Antonio María Claret. *Escritos espirituales*, 454.

²³³ San Antonio María Claret. *Camino Recto y Seguro para llegar al Cielo*. Madrid: Cocusa, 1957, 226.

²³⁴ Cf. Antonio María Claret. *Santísimo Rosario explicado*, 16.

²³⁵ Cf. *Ibid.* 20.

²³⁶ Cf. *Ibid.* 21.

record it in his writings: «... que por medio de la devoción del santísimo Rosario se ha experimentado remedio en las necesidades públicas de guerras, pestes, hambres y otras calamidades ...»²³⁷.

Claret explains why this is very important for Christians: it dispels the errors and ignorance that create moral damage to the soul. The rosary is the garden with the most aromatic and beautiful virtue flowers. When the mysteries are mediated properly, the merits are great. He says this is the reason that many saints and preachers always recommend praying the rosary and meditating on the mystery of Jesus²³⁸.

It is interesting to note that he explains how the praying of the holy Rosary is prayed with three powers: memory, understanding and the will. This process of prayer helps the person remember the mystery and helps him or her concentrate on the contemplation and continue without distraction. Understanding is also important in this process, as it allows us to reflect and contemplate the mystery as we progress in the prayer. Understanding each mystery according to the liturgical order helps the person to become aware of the importance of the liturgical seasons and the feasts.

Finally, the will helps the person to create desire, admiration, affection and compassion. Such holy affection and admiration enable the person to fight against the evil of the world. This contemplation, admiration and affection not only helps the person to avoid vices of the world but also helps the person to acquire virtues and trigger the love for virtues:

«Se ha de emplear ejercitando las tres potencias, memoria, entendimiento y voluntad. Con la memoria se recordará el misterio, poniendo todo cuidado en no distraerse: con el entendimiento discurriendo y reflexionando sobre el mismo misterio; y con la voluntad formando afectos de admiración, de compasión, de aborrecimiento de los vicios y de amor a las virtudes»²³⁹

The writings on this devotion bring out the affection that Claret maintains in his life. He wants these benefits to reach others, proving Mary becomes everything to him after Jesus. In the Rosary, the life, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus are contemplated. Jesus and Mary illuminate the soul. They

²³⁷ Ibid. 22.

²³⁸ Cf. Ibid. 22.

²³⁹ Cf. Ibid. 24.

are the true light of the universe; Jesus is the sun and Mary is the moon²⁴⁰. Claret knows that Mary helps Christians warm their hearts with charity and love for Jesus.

Claret records that Jesus and Mary are the best examples of the Christian virtues. What makes this more remarkable is that one learns from them those virtues. Claret lengthily talks about virtues, yet he says that praying the rosary can help Christians acquire the most needed virtues like humility, obedience, meekness, patience, sobriety and chastity. It is by praying and meditating on the mystery that grace is provided to imitate Jesus and Mary and grow in the most needed virtues²⁴¹. The teaching on the devotion of the holy rosary is well explained in simple terms for students, seminarians and ordinary people. Claret maintains his simplicity and creativity in imparting knowledge on the holy rosary.

2.4 Apostolic Prayer of Claret: A culmination of the experience of his prayer life

The apostolic prayer of Claret is the culmination of the spiritual journey experience. Claret's journey of prayer ended in union with the Lord. All his active practice of prayer reached the apostolic sensation of knowing God and making Him known. Generally, these are key elements in the prayer. The deep affection and orientation towards God the Father are central teachings that draw attention. The apostolic prayer of Claret at the end of This second chapter, which deals with his teachings and instructions on prayer, gives a more colourful conclusion to the chapter. In this section, his prayer becomes the teaching of progressing and reaching the union with the Lord. In the *Autobiography*, he wrote about his intimate union with God and his desire to make Him known and serve Him well. The text of the apostolic prayer is:

“O my God and my Father, may I know you and make you known; love you and make you loved; serve you and make you served; praise you and make all creatures

²⁴⁰ Cf. Ibid. 25.

²⁴¹ Cf. Ibid. 27.

praise you. Grant, my father, that all sinners be converted, all persevere in grace, and all of us attain eternal glory. Amen”²⁴².

It is believed to be Claret's original composition. «Esta plegaria de San Antonio María Claret, denominada convencionalmente y con buen fundamento “oración apostólica”, creemos que es una construcción original del santo, simétrica, armónica, muy completa»²⁴³. Claret expresses his desire to know God more, love, praise, and serve Him better. His apostolic prayer shows his spirit of prayer and connection with his apostolic desire. The intensity of his prayer reveals that it is interconnected with life and mission. The desire he built in his heart to walk always in the presence of God is expressed well in this prayer.

The prayer is rooted in the Word of God. He was a fervent reader of the Word of God, and his loving expression was undoubtedly influenced by his reading and meditation on the Holy Scripture. The apostolic prayer can teach many aspects of prayer. The biblical root of the prayer is very clearly seen. Fr. Severiano Blanco Pacheco, CMF, writes in his article “La « Oración apostólica » de Claret, oración autobiográfica”, about the biblical root of this prayer. The prayer carries the doctrine that the soul must be oriented towards the Creator. The prayer expresses the deeper search for the Creator and his desire to praise Him,

«Como el conjunto de su pensamiento teológico-pastoral, los temas de la oración apostólica de Claret tienen una profunda raíz bíblica: el corazón, la mente, las fuerzas, todo el ser del hombre debe estar orientado hacia su Creador y Padre (cf. Dt 6,5; Mt 22,37)»²⁴⁴.

The prayer expresses that whatever he did, he did it to know God better and serve Him better. He expressed this in several places in the *Autobiography* and his retreat resolutions. The ultimate conviction in participating in the mission in all creative ways is to know, serve and make Him known better. The personal experience and union with the Creator lead him to devote his work and instruct and teach others to engage in prayer and help others also to praise God:

“And because we have been created not only to know, love, and serve God but also to praise Him, I concluded that the clergy, to fulfil all their duties, needed to know

²⁴² Aut. 233.

²⁴³ Severiano Blanco Pacheco CMF. «La Oración apostólica» de Claret, oración autobiográfica, En Misioneros Claretianos, *La Oración Apostólica. Meditaciones*. Madrid, 2016, 18.

²⁴⁴ Ibid. 20.

plainchant. With this in mind, I wrote and published a book containing the shortest, easiest method for singing God's praises"²⁴⁵.

His love for God was fully alive, which triggered him to do everything for the greater glory of God. In his retreat resolution, he writes that he aims for nothing but much work and suffering for the love of God. This he recorded in the *Autobiography* numbers 254 – 256. The intention is clear and presented as the pathway to holiness and union with God. The conscious practice of knowing, loving, serving and making him known is very valuable for the spiritual journey²⁴⁶.

The catechism he wrote for the children is the pure expression of his love for teaching the Christian doctrine to the children. He wants them to learn, know God, and serve Him better. He expresses it in his *Autobiography* about his desire to teach the children and make it available to all:

“Because I love children and want them to be educated in Christian doctrine, I have written four catechisms: one for small children, from the time they begin talking until they reach seven; one for country folk; another, more extensive one; and one fully explained and illustrated”²⁴⁷.

No one should be excluded from learning Christian doctrine and essential prayers, and his creative ideas were put into writings and published²⁴⁸. The desire to know God was prompted from the beginning of his childhood. This kept growing, and he desired to include everyone in praising and adoring the Creator. This act of apostolate brought lots of happiness and fulfilment in his life, and he wanted to do more by distributing the books²⁴⁹. Seeking God's presence is an

²⁴⁵ Auto, 327. The book is titled: *Arte del canto eclesiástico y cantoral para uso de los seminarios* (Madrid 1861).

²⁴⁶ Aut. *Retreat resolution and spiritual notes*, page no. 746 says: “The love of God was the soul of all his Resolutions. As he writes elsewhere: ‘I will live only for the love of God... I will always work out of love... I will die each day out of love. I aim at nothing else in my works and sufferings than the pure love of God’ (Spiritual Notes, “Abp. of Cuba,” 8). These expressions were in perfect accord with his affective and compassionate temperament. But since he was also very active his love, though touched with the sweetness of contemplation and affection, manifested itself largely in doing and suffering. The highest statement of this appears in his Resolutions for 1870: ‘In homage to the Blessed Trinity and to Mary in May: All things that I do, I will do, every one of them, as perfectly as possible. The impelling cause will be the Love of God. The intentional cause will be the greater glory of God. The final cause will be to do the will of God’”.

²⁴⁷ Aut. 285.

²⁴⁸ Cf. P. Claret. *Catecismo de la Doctrina Cristiana*. Tercera edición. Madrid: Corazón de Maria, 1925, 15.

²⁴⁹ Aut. 42: “The realization of how much good I have derived through reading good and pious books has prompted me to distribute them generously, in the hope that they will bring my neighbours, whom I love so much, the same happy results they brought to me. If only all people

important aspect of the spiritual journey, and Claret always kept this habit of seeking help and understanding from God. In his autobiography, 117 – 119, he writes, “The Lord made me to understand or know.”

The desire was kept alive and active. It was burning like a fire in his heart, and he wanted to know His holy will and present a clear idea that knowing God means understanding His holy will. The earnest prayers were made to obtain this grace. He pleads for help to remain steadfast in knowing, loving and serving. Having such a clear conscience of learning, loving and serving, he did everything possible to accomplish this task²⁵⁰. The prayer remains a sacred place where God gave him the knowledge of infinite goodness. The apostolic prayer presents his process of spiritual growth and consistency in the practice of prayer. The prayer is full of actions and teaching. The soul which desires for God cannot remain inactive, but it burns with the love of God and the love of neighbours. Love leads to suffering for the salvation of one's own soul, the salvation of others and the greater glory of God:

“For some time now, God in his infinite goodness has been favouring me with many telling insights when I am at prayer and arousing in me many desires to do and suffer for his greater honour and glory and the good of souls”²⁵¹.

The progress in prayer is very much explained. Initially, he depended on the books, and later, his maturity in spiritual life made him closer to God in prayer and contemplation. Claret had the habit of annually making his retreat and never failed to make his retreat resolution to improve his spiritual life. This is one of the methods he applied to arrange and regulate spiritual practices.

The retreat resolution also presents his growth and understanding of prayer and his teaching of prayers. In 1864, he wrote in his retreat resolution that he would consciously walk in the presence of God. His consciousness of God's presence is a sign of his burning desire for God, and everything was organised

could know how good lovable and loving God is. My God, make all creatures come to know, love, and serve you with full faith and fervour. Give glory to the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endures forever.”

²⁵⁰ Cf. Aut. 136: “After five days at sea, we landed at Civitavecchia and headed for Rome, where we arrived without incident, through God's goodness and mercy. How good you are, my Father. Let me serve you always with fidelity and love. Give me your constant grace to know what pleases you and the willpower to put it into effect. My Lord and Father, I want nothing more than to know your holy will, so that I may do it; nothing more than to love you with all my heart and serve you with all fidelity. My Mother - Mother of Fair Love - help me!”.

²⁵¹ Aut. 761.

around the thought of remaining in God's presence. Claret believed everything came from God and wanted to offer it to Him in return by loving Him more.

His love for God is evident in his attitude; he wants to do everything to love Him and make Him loved. Love naturally demands a lot, and in the same way, Claret recognises that he does this through all means possible, even by suffering. He believed that God wants his fidelity in knowing Him, loving Him and serving Him, "I believe that everything comes from God and that God expects of me the tribute of suffering patiently for his love's sake every injury to my body, soul, and honour"²⁵². Knowing and growing in relationship with God profoundly influenced his thought patterns and belief system.

The most one desires God and invites others to taste God's love and kindness, hold on to God and make Him everything in their life. It is like the experience of St. Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved and gave himself for me"²⁵³.

The total God experience of Claret made him address God with all the personalised wording. It shows that when the person is fully aware of God, he cannot neglect such closeness with God. The person who loves God constantly cultivates such deep and burning desire for Him. When the soul is thirsty for the Divine Master, it never remains inactive but instead becomes active and longs for Him:

"Hungering and thirsting after this love. Just as a man who is physically hungry and thirsty is always thinking of ways to satisfy his craving and asks for food and drink wherever he thinks he can get them; I am resolved to do so by my sighs and burning desires. I turn to the Lord and ask Him with all my heart, "O my Lord, you are my love, my honour, my hope, and my refuge! You are my life, my glory, my goal! O my love, my happiness, my sustainer! O my delight, my reformer, my master, my father! O, my love!"²⁵⁴.

Claret clarifies that the apostolic prayer culminates in his spiritual process. The burning desire for divine union was present in his thoughts, words, and actions. His prayer turns into a pleading for the grace to love Him more than anything and the fidelity to serve Him better.

²⁵² Aut. 423.

²⁵³ Gal.2.20.

²⁵⁴ Aut. 444.

Grace is always with him, and when he was in Rome, he learned many things at the Jesuit Novitiate from the pious and virtuous fathers and brothers, especially preaching, teaching, and conducting spiritual exercises. All these he could include in his vision for the mission. The experience of Claret is an example of those who desire to become missionaries and to have a real God experience in their personal life and mission. He records in his *Autobiography* the anticipated apostolic prayer and expresses the burning desire to convert him into a faithful servant and admirer of the Divine master:

“The Lord did me a great favour in bringing me to Rome and introducing me for however short a time to those virtuous fathers and brothers. I only wish that I had profited more from it. But if I haven’t, my neighbour has. It was there that I learned how to give the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, and methods for preaching, catechizing, hearing confessions usefully and effectively, as well as many other things that have stood me in good stead. Blessed be you, my God, for being so good and merciful to me. Make me love and serve you with all fervour; make all creatures love and serve you. All your creatures, love and serve your God. Taste and see by experience how sweet it is to love and serve God. My God, my only good!”²⁵⁵

The experience of Claret didn’t fail to invite his missionaries to participate in the mission of setting the world on fire with God’s love. He wrote a text traditionally called *The Definition of the Claretian missionary* and sent it to Fr. Xifre (Co-founder and Superior General 1858 - 1870), requesting the missionaries to carry it in their pocket²⁵⁶. In this text, he pours out his burning desire to set the world on the divine fire of love. He wants to do it more and more and invites others to participate in this apostolic action. The letter he wrote to the missionaries on August 20 1861 explains his vision for making God known, loved and praised:

«... que Dios sea más y más conocido y amado...ahora mismo que esto escribí he tenido que dejar la pluma para acudir a mis ojos... Oh Hijos de la Inmaculada Corazón de mi queridísima Madre... quiero escribiros y no puedo por tener los ojos rasados en lágrimas. Predicad y rogad por mí. Adiós querido hermano: aquí va

²⁵⁵ Ibid. 152.

²⁵⁶ Cf. Ibid. 494: “I tell myself: A Son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is a man on fire with love, who spreads its flames wherever he goes. He desires mightily and strives by all means possible to set the world on fire with God’s love. Nothing daunts him; he delights in privations, welcomes work, embraces sacrifices, smiles at slander, and rejoices in suffering. His only concern is how he can best follow Jesus Christ and imitate Him in working, suffering, and striving constantly and single-mindedly for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls.”. (20. 8. 1861)

este papelito que quisiera que cada uno de los misioneros copiará y llevare consigo. Soy tuyo. El A. Claret»²⁵⁷.

The beautiful personal experience with the Divine burned like fire in his heart. It never allowed him to be lazy or mediocre but to explore different creative methods to make God known and praise Him by all creation. Claret wants to set fire to God's love and wants his missionaries to have the same fire. Imitating Jesus, "I have come to bring the fire on the earth," like apostles, the missionaries should have the heart and tongue with the fire of charity²⁵⁸.

Claret's heart is always concerned about serving God. Prayer is the outcome of his desire, and he knows he needs more missionaries to execute the plan of serving God better and making Him known better. Therefore, he urged his missionaries to offer themselves for the mission. He wrote several letters urging them to work for the glory of God and the good of the souls. On the 5th of August, 1848 Claret writes from Gáldar Gran Canaria: «Trabajen, por Dios cuanto puedan por la gloria de Dios y bien de las almas...»²⁵⁹.

As Archbishop of Santiago, Claret continued his project with the priests entrusted to him. He knows that well-formed priests are essential for this mission. They should have sound knowledge and a holy soul to help the people in their spiritual journey. He always cared about the formation of his brother-priests and he wrote to them:

«También ha llamado nuestra atención, que siendo tan vasto vuestro respectivo territorio, el ejercicio de la cura de almas no os dejará tiempo muchos días para abrir un libro de teología moral... Durante este tiempo, recogidos en el seminario de San Basilio, os ocupareis de liturgia y de Teología Moral...Concluimos exhortándoos a desplegar todo zelo por la salud de las almas y para la mayor gloria de Dios»²⁶⁰.

The love for God never stopped him to be rest in a comfortable place. When he was the confessor of Queen Isabel II, He referred to his stay in the royal palace as the martyrdom for him. Because he wants to run from place to place, preaching

²⁵⁷ R. P. José María Gil, C. M. F. *Epistolario de San Antonio María Claret*. Vol. II, Madrid, 1970, 352.

²⁵⁸ Cf. Aut. 440: "The same Holy Spirit, by appearing in the form of tongues of fire above the Apostles on Pentecost, showed us this truth: an apostolic missionary must have both heart and tongue ablaze with charity."

²⁵⁹ R. P. José María Gil, C. M. F. *Epistolario de San Antonio María Claret*. Vol. I, Madrid: Cocusa, 1970, 275.

²⁶⁰ Ibid. 514.

and making God known, loved, praised, and served, “I have such a deep longing to leave Madrid and go out into the whole world that I can’t tell you how much I suffer at not being allowed to do so; God only knows”²⁶¹. The best way to love God is by praying and doing His mission. When Claret wrote this apostolic prayer, he had spent twenty years living, preaching, writing, and assisting people in their spiritual Journey. This cannot be taken as one of his prayers; it is a holistic experience of spiritual journey that he wants to instruct and hand over to the people as a reference point for their spiritual journey.

The life of Claret tells us that this is not simply a timely attraction but has been a burning desire from childhood. The interior devotion is reflected in his exterior apostolic mission and in his presentation of a doctrine to the people who desire to follow the way of the Lord. In founding the congregation of *The Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*, in the year 1849, July 16th, he kept his burning desire alive and founded the congregation with his companions to whom God had given the same spirit: “I talked with some priests whom the Lord had given the same spirit that motivated me”²⁶².

Claret's apostolic prayer expresses his love for God and souls. This text reveals his contemplation of the Divine and his purpose in the call. Claret's beauty is that he wants to include all who desire and teach those ignorant about the purpose of human creation. In his life, Claret used all the possible means to know, love, and serve God.

* * *

Claret an apostolic missionary, had a thirst for God. The desire for the Divine Master was constantly burning in his heart. God's experience and spiritual growth revealed to him that he was called to be the bearer of God and his goodness and beauty. The best thing he did was use all the possible means creatively to preach, teach and publish the Christian doctrine to the people. This chapter presents some details of his work and initiatives. The study reveals that his prayer life is not a

²⁶¹ Aut. 762.

²⁶² Ibid. 489.

passive reality but is very active, and he wants to make his God experience known to others and invite others to join in this mission.

He presented in his teachings the importance of prayer, pious practices, liturgical celebration, Christian virtues, traditional spiritual practices, reading good books, and the formation of seminarians, religious people, priests, and the faithful. It was not just teaching or writing but a fully lived prayer experience. The joy of living the prayer he communicated through his writings to the people. The next chapter will bring prayer details into the congregation's life. How faithfully the missionaries transmitted the spirit of prayer from the founder and kept this spirit burning in the congregation's formation, life and mission.

CHAPTER 3

Prayer in the Claretian Constitutions and Documents: An Invitation for the Claretian Missionaries to participate in the spiritual charismatic trait of Claret.

The above chapters present the practice of prayer and the teaching of prayer by Claret. The spiritual trait of Claret is handover to his brothers (Claretian Missionaries) to continue in their life and mission. Chapter five of the Fundamental Constitution discusses prayer and its charismatic characteristics for missionary life. The chapter is placed in the first part of the Constitutions and it contains six numbers. Here, the prayer is described as the elements or dimensions of the missionary life of the congregation. The project of missionary life, commentary on the Constitutions, addresses it as follows: “It deals with the praying missionary congregation”²⁶³.

Pope Pius XII described Claret as a man who always preferred to be in the presence of God, «siempre en la presencia de Dios, aun en medio de su prodigiosa actividad exterior; calumniado y admirado, festejado y perseguido»²⁶⁴. It is possible only for those who have a healthy approach to prayer. Claret's prayer was undoubtedly missionary. The above chapters describe how his prayer was evaluated and his awareness of his apostolic vocation from the beginning of his

²⁶³ OPM, 445.

²⁶⁴ Acta Apostolicae Sedis. 42,1950, 480. (<https://www.vatican.va/archive/>) Accessed on 15.08.2024.

life. Claret writes in *Autobiography* no. 8 about the early flame that was kindled in his heart to save unhappy souls²⁶⁵.

The beauty of Claret's prayer is that it is very simple and understood by all, yet it expresses a deep faith in his life's circumstances²⁶⁶. Claret communicated to the congregation a threefold aim, which is to invite the missionaries to participate and cultivate. Jesús Álvarez Gómez, CMF, writes about it saying there is one aim yet the other two are oriented towards the primary aim:

“Our Father's founder gave the congregation a threefold aim: the glory of God, our sanctification and the salvation of souls throughout the world. But in reality, there can only be one aim of the congregation, namely, the glory of God, to which the other two are oriented”²⁶⁷.

3.1 Imitating Jesus Christ, who prays

Claret says that he is impressed by Jesus's missionary action and always fixes his gaze on Jesus²⁶⁸. He never failed to instruct his missionaries to imitate Jesus, who was praying. His conscious awareness of this thought and experience made him included in the definition of Claretian missionaries. The definition emphasises laying a special foundation on the imitation of Christ in prayer and work and seeking the glory of God and the salvation of all.

In the fundamental Constitution, no. 9 speaks of imitating Jesus, who prayed, worked, and strived for God's greater glory and humankind's salvation.

“...His only concern [of a missionary] is how he may follow Christ and imitate him in praying, working, enduring and striving constantly and solely for the greater glory of God and the salvation of humankind”²⁶⁹.

²⁶⁵ Aut. 8. (Kindly see in the first chapter of this thesis, page 6)

²⁶⁶ OPM, 452.

²⁶⁷ Jesús Álvarez Gómez, CMF. *Claretian Missionaries, Transmission and the reception of the Claretian charism*. Vol II. Translated by Joseph C. Daries, CMF. Quezon city: Claretian Publication, 2000, 593.

²⁶⁸ Aut. 221.

²⁶⁹ *Constitutions Of the Congregation of Missionaries*. Claretian Missionaries. Rome,2000, no,9: The Claretian missionaries are called Sons of the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The intention of Claret is very clear, always wants to imitate Jesus and he proposes to his brothers to do the same. Therefore, the Claretian Missionaries need to cultivate a prayer life, as suggested by the founder Claret. The project Claret proposed cannot be achieved without cultivating a healthy prayer life. The holiness of the missionaries is possible when they take this project seriously and put genuine efforts to know God and work for the sanctification.

The fruit of the mission depends on the holiness of the person²⁷⁰. Therefore, cultivating a sound prayer life is an important habit of all the Claretian missionaries. Claret always gazes at Jesus, who prays, works, and suffers for the glory of God and salvation of humankind. During his time in the Jesuit Novitiate, he realized his call and offered himself without reserve. The intention is to fully dedicate to the life of prayer and mission. The preparation for the mission must be accompanied by the prayer. He says that as he was waiting for the time, he engaged in prayer to prepare him fully for the discernment and mission:

“I offered my all to God without reserve. I was continuously thinking and planning what I could do for the good of my neighbour, and since the time had not yet come for me to set out on my work, I busied myself with prayer”²⁷¹.

Claret's above statement shows that his invitation to his brothers is not just an idea but a personal experience. The above two chapters explain Claret's growth in his prayer life and how it becomes an inseparable component of his spiritual life and mission. Claret's first invitation is to imitate Jesus. Jesus is the primary reference for prayer. The foundation of Claretian prayer and indeed of all Christian prayer is Jesus Christ²⁷².

²⁷⁰ Cf. Jesús Álvarez Gómez, CMF, *Claretian Missionaries, Transmission and the reception of the Claretian charism*, Vol II, 593: “Moreover, if a Claretian Missionary is not holy, he will produce no fruit by his preaching and will be, in Paul’s phrase, but sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. This means that both the founder and his missionaries must follow to reach their sanctification lies in an unconditional commitment to announcing the Kingdom of God for the salvation of souls throughout the world.”.

²⁷¹ Aut. 153.

²⁷² OPM, 457.

3.2 Constitutions no 33: A call to cultivate the habit of prayer

The no 33 in the Constitutions clearly states that the one who undertakes the mission of Christ must imitate His habit of prayer: “We who have undertaken Christ's Missionary work should also imitate his constancy in prayer and take to heart his recommendations and teachings on prayer without ceasing”²⁷³. Claret cannot think of a mission without prayer and prayer without imitating Jesus. The idea is that one should lift his heart and soul to the Lord and ask his favour, offering oneself completely to the will of God and happily accepting the suffering to bring glory to God.

The action of Jesus always moved Claret. He was in love with the missionary image of Christ. In the *Autobiography*, he always kept this concept of his missionary idea deeply related to Jesus, who was moving from place to place, preaching and praying to the Father, “I am ever more deeply impressed at the thought of Jesus moving from town to town, preaching everywhere”²⁷⁴. The conscious imitation of Jesus leads to living a consecrated life characterised by poverty, humility, obedience, and always aiming for God's greater glory²⁷⁵. Claret's sentiments were very deep, and he was captivated by all of Jesus' actions.

Claret's loving attention to Jesus' actions, praying, working, and suffering fully captured his, and he undoubtedly fell in love with Him²⁷⁶. Claret explains that the love for Jesus, Mary and the neighbours is necessary for the missionary. Claret spoke of using different means to achieve success in the mission, but he

²⁷³ CCM, no. 33.

²⁷⁴ Aut. 221.

²⁷⁵ Cf. Ibid. 648. “I resolve always to walk in God’s presence, referring all things to Him, never seeking my praise, but only greater grace to imitate Jesus. I will always try to ask myself how Jesus would have acted under similar circumstances”.

²⁷⁶ Cf. Ibid. 356. “I strove to imitate Jesus, who tells all of us, learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. And so, I constantly reflected on Jesus in the crib, in the carpenter’s shop, on Calvary. I meditated on his words, his sermons, his actions; on the way He ate, dressed, and travelled from town to town. I took courage from his example and would ask myself, “How would Jesus act in this case?” Striving to imitate Him filled me with contentment and joy because I was pleased to think that my model was also my Father, my Master, and my Lord. My God, how good you are! You gave me these holy inspirations to help me imitate you and be humble. May you be praised, my God, for if you had given anyone else the grace and help you have given me, how different they would have been from what I am.”.

highlights that prayer is the first means that help the missionaries do their apostolate effectively. He says that he was constantly praying for the grace to keep the love for the prayer alive and active:

“The first means I have always employed and still do is prayer. In my opinion, this is the greatest means that can be used for the conversion of sinners, the perseverance of the just and the relief of the souls in purgatory. Hence in my meditations, Masses, recitation of the breviary (prayers) and other devotions, as well as in my aspirations, I always asked God and the Blessed Virgin Mary for these three intentions”²⁷⁷.

When Claret talks about prayer and the Constitutions reflecting on prayer, both don't centre the ideas on personal acts of prayer, rather inviting others to join this great work, “I not only prayed myself but asked others to pray - nuns, Sisters of Charity, Tertiaries, and all virtuous and zealous folk”²⁷⁸The expression of Claret presents an important mission to create a network of praying for people so that the fire of God will be more intense, burning the hearts of the people and moving them to seek conversion and the glory of God.

Claret during his time of apostolate, without reserving himself imitated Jesus, who preached and prayed to the Father. Claret never slacked off or neglected the prayer; he found it spiritual nourishment and the powerhouse of missionaries. Therefore, the congregation invites the missionaries to imitate Jesus, who was always in unceasing and intense prayer. This imitation must be an indispensable characteristic of a missionary who, like Jesus, has received the mission's mandate from the Father. The commentary on the Constitutions elaborates that the Son does not work without contemplating the Father²⁷⁹. The congregation considers prayer the missionaries' lifeline, and taking Jesus as a model for prayer is essential in the spiritual life. The invitation is obvious: Those who undertake the mission of Christ must imitate Jesus's constancy in prayer.

Claret, a man of prayer, always cared that his missionaries also took his life project very seriously. He has used many creative ways to communicate his ideas and teaching. The letter titled *Carta al Misionero Teofilo* contains pastoral instructions, some of which were personal addresses to the life of prayer to the

²⁷⁷ Ibid. 264.

²⁷⁸ Ibid. 265.

²⁷⁹ OPM, 465.

people and pastoral sermons²⁸⁰. The direct and important notice in this letter to the missionaries is that they must be a great friend of prayer and this must be practised by imitating Jesus who spent the night with the Father. He emphasises that Jesus both commands and teaches us to pray, therefore the missionaries must keep this desire to be a friend prayer:

«Has de ser muy amigo de la oración, a imitación de Jesús que pasó la noche orando a Dios, y encargaba muy mucho la oración a los Apóstoles. Todos los misioneros de nombradía han sido hombres de oración. El que pide, alcanza...»²⁸¹.

For Claret, thoughts of Jesus drive him to live in the presence of Jesus and create the desire to imitate Him by praying and doing the mission. The loving attention of God always animated this action and was illuminated by the Holy Spirit. The profound God experience leads Claret to imitate Jesus and receive the charism and the apostolic trait. The congregation always urges the missionaries to imitate Jesus as Claret did. The missionaries should be friends of prayer, and never lose the thought of imitating Jesus. Claret always admired Jesus's life of prayer and apostolate: "By day He preached and cured the sick, and by night He prayed. *Et erat pernoctans in oratione Dei*"²⁸².

Another important characteristic that missionaries should imitate of Jesus is that filial relationship with God. Jesus addresses God as "Abba" and establishes a filial relationship in prayer. Jesus sums up this filial prayer in Our Father. The missionaries, imitating Him, grow in this filial relationship and work for the glory of God²⁸³. The prayer should not be an occasional event in the life of the missionary, but it should be an integral part of their lives. The filial relationship with the Father is deeply intimate and to express it Claret in his apostolic prayer addresses Him "O God and my Father"²⁸⁴.

The spirit that consecrated Claret enabled him to incorporate the mission of the Son, enkindled in him the missionary fire, and transformed him into an obedient son. Filial love is a characteristic of the Claretian charism, and it was highlighted in the extraordinary chapter of the 1967 Declaration on our charism: "A son's

²⁸⁰ Cf. San Antonio María Claret, *Carta al Misionero Teofilo*. Roma: Secretariado Claretiano, 1979, 5.

²⁸¹ Ibid. 29.

²⁸² Aut. 434.

²⁸³ Cf. OPM, 461.

²⁸⁴ Aut. 233.

spirit and piety towards Father, lived in union with Christ, the Son sent for the salvation of humankind”²⁸⁵.

3.3 Prayer in the Spirit: A high-ranking expression of imitating Jesus

The Constitutions recommend the special attitude the missionaries must maintain in the prayer is “Prayer in the Spirit”²⁸⁶. This is one of the high-ranking expressions of imitating Jesus and cultivating the sonship in God. The human limitation needs the support of the Spirit for assistance in prayer. Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit to pray in the desert, “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness.” (Lk 4:1). The Constitutions recommend it as a way to discern the will of God:

“For this very reason, it is a “Prayer in the Spirit” who drives us to cultivate our sonship in God, to discern the signs of the Father’s will, to listen contemplatively to the word and intercede for the life of the world”²⁸⁷.

In the promise of Jesus is very evident that the Holy Spirit will come to our aid, “But the counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you.” (Jn 16: 26). The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness and helps us to ask from God, what is urgently needed for our spiritual growth. The Holy Spirit was presented in all the awakening of the prayer in the community of believers. The active presence of the Spirit helps the believers to call God as *Abba Father* and makes the believers into a deep relationship with the Father²⁸⁸. The phenomenon of “Praying in the Spirit” appears in various places in the New Testament (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:13ff, Eph 6: 18, Jd 1:20, Rev 22:17).

Through prayer, the grace is granted to live like sons of the Abba. It is a great gift that is given from God the Father. St. Cyprian, bishop and martyr tells as follows:

²⁸⁵ General chapter document XVII. *Declaration on our charism*, Rome: 1967, no 24.

²⁸⁶ OPM, 477.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Cf. Ibid. 478.

“How great is the Lord’s indulgence! How kindly he bends down to us, how he overflows with goodness towards us! For he wishes us to pray in the sight of God in such a way as to call God Father and to call ourselves sons of God, just as Christ is the Son of God. No one would have dared to claim such a name in prayer unless he had permitted us to pray this. And so, beloved brethren, we should know and remember that when we call God our Father, we must behave as children of God, so that whatever pleasure we take in having God for our Father, he may take the same pleasure in us”²⁸⁹.

The sonship creates a mutual relationship and with the help of the Spirit it grows. The explicit prayer that is actively involved in the missionary journey helps the person to cherish the special union with the Father. It is said that prayer through the working of the Holy Spirit assists the person to enter into a wonderful communion with the Father and the Son. It is the Spirit that cries out within the person “Abba”. St. Paul rightly says that it is the Holy Spirit that transforms our body into an authentic shrine of prayer, a temple of God and a consecrated one: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body”²⁹⁰.

The Constitutions tell the missionaries to cultivate the spirit of adoptive sonship. This living the sonship creates the ability to listen, proclaim and become inseparable partners of God’s mission: “For this reason, we should cultivate the spirit of adoptive sonship whereby we cry: ‘Abba, Father!’ Led by the light of faith, we should search for signs of his will in what happens in our lives, thus growing daily more responsive to our mission”²⁹¹.

Sonship brings an awareness to be sent and closely ties the missionary with the mission. The beautiful encounter of this relationship makes the person cry out in spirit, and the Father cries out in the same way: “You are my son, my beloved, my servant; I have begotten you”²⁹².

²⁸⁹ Sermon of St. Cyprian: <https://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/media/articles/hallowed-bethy-name-cyprian/>. Accessed on 17.09.2024.

²⁹⁰ 1 Cor 6: 19. 20

²⁹¹ CCM, no. 34.

²⁹² OPM, 481.

3.4 Prophetic Prayer: A way to discern the will of God

The following approach that is given in the Constitution is Prophetic Prayer. The missionary prayer has the prophetic character to discern the will of God. Claret was always in the conscious presence of God and in the midst of the events God revealed to him the mission. Claret was very clear in his mission, he has never given up to the pressures of the world's external forces but always put his heart and soul into doing the will of God: "During these days, God our Lord made me understand some very special things for his greater glory and the good of souls"²⁹³.

Claret records his experiences of prophetic revelation given by God during the prayer. When he was in Madrid some important prophetic insights were given to him with the symbols of angels and eagles:

"On September 23, at 7:30 in the morning, the Lord told me, *you shall fly throughout the world or walk with great speed and preach of the great punishments that are approaching*. The Lord gave me a deep understanding of those words of the Apocalypse (8:13): *Et vidi et audivi vocem unius aquilae*, flying in mid-heaven cry out in a loud voice, 'Woe, woe, and again woe to the inhabitants of the earth,' because of the three great chastisements that are to come. These chastisements are 1. Protestantism, communism.... 2. The four arch-demons that will make fearful inroads: the love of pleasure, the love of money, independence of the mind, and independence of the will. 3. The great wars and their consequences"²⁹⁴.

The experience of Claret taught the Congregation to be faithful to this type of prayer, which is necessary for the discernment and fulfilment of the mission. The call is very clear that the missionary communities must be praying and prophetic communities. The chapter held in the year 1979 *The Mission of the Claretian Today* found this character very important and urged the missionaries to adopt this character into their prayer and community:

"Ours must be a *praying community* of prophets and apostles, who bring before God the historical situations in which they live and for which they seek an

²⁹³ Aut. 498.

²⁹⁴ Ibid. 685.

interpretation as a community: an open community, in all kinds of prayer, to the Holy Spirit and to the People of God among whom they live”²⁹⁵.

This is an important approach that all the missionaries should learn from Claret, who imitated Jesus to cultivate such an approach towards prayer. The prayer that is mentioned in the Constitutions is filled with life and energy. The missionary prayer must have a prophetic character which helps the missionaries to read the signs of the time and the will of God. Claret urged the missionaries to learn from Jesus, to love prayer and to constantly progress in it. The advice he gives comes from his practice and invites the missionaries to dedicate one-hour mental prayer every day:

«¡Oh Sacerdote!, aprender de Jesús a amar la oración, a hacer oración; y a hacerla como Jesús la hacía, esto es, siempre, con humildad, fervor, constancia y perseverancia. Todos los días tendréis, a lo menos, uno hora de oración mental»²⁹⁶.

3.5 Prayer: To obtain the fire of love

The Constitutions present the two special dimensions of the Claretian prayer, which kindles the apostolic zeal and supplication. The definition of Claretian speaks of a grace that a Claretian missionary obtains through prayer, which transforms him and allows him to spread the fire of love. In the *Autobiography*, Claret writes many supplications to receive the fire of love:

“Asking and begging for love continuously and incessantly, without flagging or growing tired of asking for it, however late it seems in coming. Praying to Jesus and Mary and, above all, asking our Father who is in heaven, through the merits of Jesus and Mary, in the sure hope that good Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who keep asking this”²⁹⁷.

The prayer must contain such a deep desire to obtain the fire of love and the heart of the missionaries must be forged in the burning heart of Mary. The desire to be forged in the heart of Mary is the special characteristic of Claretian prayer. Claret was very fond of this special desire and offered all the missionaries to the

²⁹⁵ GC, XIX, no. 223.

²⁹⁶ San Antonio María Claret. *Escritos espirituales*, 313.

²⁹⁷ Aut. 443.

heart of Mary. He pleads for the love of God and is sure that Mary can grant him immediately this favour because this pleases Her very much:

“Mary, my Mother, Mother of Divine Love, I can ask for nothing more pleasing to you, nor anything that you are more ready to grant than the love of God. Grant me this, my Mother and my love. My mother, I am hungry and thirsty for love; help me, satisfy my need. O Heart of Mary, forge an instrument of love, kindle in me the love of God and neighbours”²⁹⁸.

Claret says that this fire can be obtained by constant meditation. As mentioned earlier, meditation effectively lets Claret set the heart on the fire of divine love.

In his pastoral letter to the people, he reflects on the benefits of meditation and encourages them to get the deep fire of love to operate them into the mission. He says the fire of love generates the power to work more and produce more apostolic fruits. In the year 1853, when he was an Archbishop in Cuba, he wrote these words to them:

«No lo dudéis, hijos, al Padre que con atención se ocupa, como debe, en meditar lo que Jesucristo hizo y sufrió para salvar las almas, y se le enciende en el corazón tal fuego, por medio de esta meditación, que no le permite sosegar ni descansar; y a la manera que el fuego de la pólvora empuja la bomba o bala, y la hace olvidar de su gravedad natural y tendencia al descanso y quietud, así, y aún más, el fuego que se enciende en la meditación de tal manera impele al Prelado, que se olvida de sí mismo y anda por donde le dirige el Espíritu del Señor, pudiendo decir como el Apóstol San Pablo: *Charitas Christi urget nos*»²⁹⁹.

The fire that Claret refers comes through prayer and meditation. When the missionary fails to pray for such apostolic fire, he cannot bear much fruit in his mission. The comparison Claret mentions is very significant because the holy fire enables the person to respond timely and effectively. It can melt the person and transform him into the likeness of Jesus. The Congregation never fails to draw from the charismatic roots of the founder, and taking the example of the experience in the apostolic prayer adopts these qualities in the Claretian prayers.

Prayer is the primary way to obtain such missionary zeal and forms the missionaries to respond to the needs of the time. Claret always felt a burning sensation during prayer and meditation, which forced him to run from place to place to preach and instruct people³⁰⁰. The missionaries must have such lively

²⁹⁸ Ibid. 447.

²⁹⁹ José María Viñas y Jesús Bermejo, eds. *Escritos Pastoral*. Madrid: BAC, 1997, 198.

³⁰⁰ Cf. Aut. 227.

prayer practices that they constantly make their pious practices to keep this flame burning.

Keeping the spirit of the founder, Superior General Fr. Nicolás García (Who was the Superior General 1922 – 1934, in a time of expansion of the Congregation to other parts of the world, Republics of America and especially the foundation in China.), encourages the missionaries to take the prayer life seriously. He found the reason for making this particular request, which is, that prayer is the first means to obtain missionary zeal. He writes, in his circular letter as follows:

«La oración, Quisiéramos recordaros algo sobre el modo de fomentar el celo en nuestros Misioneros, y sea el primer medio la oración. La oración es el gran medio de formar verdaderos Misioneros, en la oración se formaron los profetas, los apóstoles y los grandes misioneros. El Misionero que no frecuenta los altares y que no trata cada día muchas veces con Dios en las visitas y prácticas piadosas, no puede ser que se encienda en celo apostólico, porque no sentirá los motivos de celo, que son la gloria de Dios y el bien de las almas»³⁰¹.

The fire is necessary for the missionary, when he burns with the fire of love for God and people, he automatically understands the power of prayer which guides him and the necessity of imitating Jesus who was constantly connected with the Father through prayer. The missionary fire is needed to continue the mission of Jesus. Jesus Himself defeated the temptation through prayer and contemplation in the desert. The constant and enduring prayer keeps the missionary fire burning. The mission is risky yet prayer makes it possible.

3.6 Intercessory Prayer in the Constitutions: A call to keep the spirit of prayer of Jesus

The congregation keeps the spirit of Claret and never fails to practice the intercessory prayer. The Catechism of the Catholic Church in the numbers 2634 – 2636 speaks of the practice of the Church and celebrating communion through the intercessory prayer. It is a call to imitate Jesus who prayed to the Father for the people:

³⁰¹ Padre Nicolás García, CMF, Superior General. *Circular sobre el Celo. Anales de la Congregación de Misioneros*. 1931, 219.

“..... intercession -asking on behalf of another-has been characteristic of a heart attuned to God’s mercy.... Christian intercession participates in Christ’s, as an expression of the communion of saints”³⁰².

The prayer leads to communion with the saints and helps the person to seek mercy for himself and others: “...intercession-asking on behalf of another has been characteristic of a heart attuned to God's mercy...Christian intercession participates in Christ's, as an expression of the communion of saints”³⁰³.

The intercessory prayer goes beyond boundaries and includes everyone in the prayer. The early Christian communities were urged by St. Paul to pray even to their persecutors: “...The intercession of Christians recognizes no boundaries: "for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions," for persecutors, for the salvation of those who reject the Gospel...”³⁰⁴. This particular Christian Character desires the salvation of all. Claret, in the definition of the Claretian missionaries, reminds us that missionaries should work for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Claret from the beginning of his vocational journey found prayer as one of the wings of missionary life, the other wing is study. It is important to prepare oneself before going on a mission to be rooted in prayer. The intention is very clear that unless one knows the power and necessity of prayer, the missionary can't alert others or teach others the significance of the practice of prayer in the spiritual life. Claret explains this beautifully with an analogy of cock. How the cock defends its brood from attacks and danger the missionary must defend and protect the souls from sins and evil:

“5. The cock defends his brood against the attacks of hawks and other birds of prey; I, too, should defend the souls the Lord has entrusted to my care against the hawks of error, sin, and vice. 6. The cock is very generous; as soon as he sees a bit of food, he fasts himself but calls the hens to eat. I should forego pleasures and conveniences so that I may be generous and charitable toward the poor and needy. 7. Before he crows, the cock first beats his wings; I, before preaching, should move and beat the wings of study and prayer. 8. The cock is most prolific; so must I be spiritually, so that I can say with the Apostle, *Per evangelium ego vos genui*.”³⁰⁵.

³⁰² CCC, no. 2634.

³⁰³ Ibid. no, 2635.

³⁰⁴ Ibid. no, 2636.

³⁰⁵ Aut. 655.

3.7 Called to be nourished by the Bread of the Word, an essential part of missionary life

Claret clearly expressed his love for the Word of God in his *Autobiography*:

“The lives of the saints, which we read daily at the table, and my own spiritual reading all contributed to this. But what moved and stimulated me most was reading the Holy Bible, to which I have always been very strongly attracted”³⁰⁶.

The above expression indicates that Claret always wanted to be a good listener of the Word of God. Keeping the charismatic tradition, the congregation urges the missionaries also to make it a practice that is a prayerful listening and meditation on the Word of God:

“Before we dutifully proclaim the Lord's word, we should first listen to it in attentive meditation and also share it with our brothers so that we may be converted to the Gospel, become conformed to Christ and set afire with his love, the force that should impel us”³⁰⁷.

It is like attentive listening which Mary expressed sitting at the feet of Jesus and He confirmed that one thing that is mostly needed³⁰⁸. The commentary on the Constitutions aptly brought out the importance of the Word of God in the life of the missionaries. It is also reminding that the one who listens and keeps the Word become brother, sister and mother to Jesus³⁰⁹. The fundamental attitude of listening is like soil that receives the seed of the word and bears fruits at due time³¹⁰. The XXI General Chapter of the Congregation (1991) calls the missionaries “Hearers and Servant of the Word”³¹¹ and emphasise that it is a special call to listen in prayer and become doers of the Word. The stress is very clearly made that the missionaries must first all nourished and transformed at the table of the Word to become authentic missionaries:

“Our charism in the Church is an experience of the Spirit (cf. MR 11) conforming us with Jesus Christ the Evangelizer, in the style of Claret. For this reason, «the

³⁰⁶ Aut. 113.

³⁰⁷ CCM, no. 34b.

³⁰⁸ Cf. Lk, 10:39.

³⁰⁹ Cf. Lk, 8:21.

³¹⁰ OPM, 484.

³¹¹ GC. XXI. no. 6.

ministry of the Word, whereby we communicate the total mystery of Christ to humanity, is our special calling among the People of God» (CC 46). Imitating Jesus, the Prophet par excellence, whom our Founder followed so radically, we must be transformed into a sign and expression of the Word of God”³¹².

The XXI Chapter document insists that the missionary community is nourished and finds joy by living God's Word and imitating the Evangelizer Christ. The commentary also sees the Word of God as an admirable and mysterious place of God’s presence³¹³. Claret benefited a lot from the prayerful reading of the Holy Scripture. Therefore, it is not just reading for him, this is the place where he found some fundamental aspects of his spirituality, especially the conception of imitation of Christ³¹⁴.

This extraordinary experience in Claret's spiritual life, where he received grace and illumination for his missionary actions, “often reading (the Bible) was also the occasion of the mystical graces and illumination he received³¹⁵. He recorded in his *Autobiography* this illumination experience while meditating on the Holy Scripture, which convinced him to urge all the missionaries to adopt such applicable practices in their lives and the congregation to keep this fire of love for the Word of God alive.

The missionaries followed in the footsteps of founder Claret, making himself flexible and nourished by the Word of God. The Constitutions indicates that before the missionary preaches to the people, he must be nourished by the Word of God. This is what made the missionary work of Claret very effective and fruitful; “It is proper of a Claretian missionary that he be a man impassioned for the Word of God, as was our founder. We must make the Word of God our nourishment”³¹⁶. The commentary on the Constitutions makes it clear that in reading and contemplating the Word of God, one must be open to the wholeness of the message. The missionary must be careful of falling into the temptation of selectiveness³¹⁷.

³¹² Ibid. no 6.

³¹³ Cf. OPM. 486.

³¹⁴ Cf. J. M. Lozano, CMF. *Mystic and Man of Action*, 178.

³¹⁵ Cf. Ibid.178.

³¹⁶ OPM, 486.

³¹⁷ Cf. Ibid. 486.

Active listening and meditation on the Word of God can transform the person to convert to the Gospel and conform to Christ³¹⁸. The Constitutions no 34 presents the effectiveness of such practice. The word of God in the lips of the missionary is the most effective weapon to battle against the prevailing evil in the world, “A sharp sword came from his mouth with which to conquer the nations, and he will shepherd them with an iron sceptre. He will trample out the wine in the winepress of the wrath of God. (Rev 19: 15)”. Claret’s internalization of the Word of God was very much adopted by the congregation and always give enough space and time for the meditation on the Word, “our father founder had internalized these scripture passages and had felt driven to work evangelically without rest”³¹⁹. This clearly shows that the missionary's life must be nourished by the Word of God.

The General Chapter Document *Servant of the Word* (1991) emphasises this aspect very clearly and urges the missionaries to make this project a part of life and mission because it is a charismatic trait that the congregation received from the founder:

“We are a community called together in the Spirit for the missionary proclamation of the Word. In our charism, the Word of God is as essential to the community, as a community is to the Word (CC13). Without the primacy of the Word, the Claretian community would lose its reason for being. When marred by individualistic attitudes, our proclamation loses the community imprint with which Claret stamped us”³²⁰.

Every Claretian missionary is called to nourish himself get enlightened by the Word of God and set his heart with the love of God. The prayer includes listening and setting up a dialogue between God and the person. The Dogmatic Constitution of the Second Vatican Council *Dei Verbum* on Revelation clearly explain this:

“And let them remember that prayer should accompany the reading of the sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for ‘we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read the divine sayings’”³²¹.

³¹⁸ Cf. Ibid. 487.

³¹⁹ *Claretian Missionaries: Transmission and the reception of the Claretian charism*. Vol II, 584.

³²⁰ GC XXI, no. 7.

³²¹ *Dei Verbum*. In *The Documents of Vatican II*. Edited by Walter M. Abbott. New York: Guild Press, 1966, no. 25.

The missionary vocation is nourished and protected by the Word of God, and this is one of the centralities of Claretian spirituality. The congregation insists on welcoming the Word of God as a positive response to the call to discipleship³²². It is a charismatic trait given to the missionaries to follow in the footsteps of founder Claret to become evangelized evangelizers. Therefore, it is a family trait and the missionaries are called to be involved in this practice without failing and with full of joy:

“Our Founder’s practice of the daily and «vocational» reading of the Bible, and our acceptance of it as God’s Word for us today, must be family traits that allow us to give constant proof that we are hearers-servants of the Word”³²³.

The life and mission of Claret set a great example for doing profound practice meditation on the Word of God. The formation of the Claretian missionaries takes this aspect very seriously and urges all the missionaries to imitate Claret in living the Word of God. The Word must nourish the missionary life and encourages everyone to read, study, meditate and live the Word, taking inspiration from the founder:

«Claret, a través del testimonio de su vida y de su modo de actuar, y a través de recomendaciones, nos ofrece orientaciones pedagógicas concretas y precisas para asimilar la palabra de Dios fructuosamente. Él mismo usa, en ocasiones, la palabra método o la deja entrever al referirse a la manera de leer, estudiar, y meditar la Biblia»³²⁴.

The congregation also suggests taking inspiration from the *Autobiography*, which clearly explains the authentic references to the life and mission of the founder. It is a first-hand source for the formation of the missionaries³²⁵. This is the process that helps the missionaries become fitting ministers of the Word³²⁶. The formation in the Word of God must be approached in an environment of faith and reverence. Recalling from the life of Claret the congregation offers the following approach to all the missionaries in the formation: Reading it in the Faith

³²² Cf. *Servants of the Word*, no 13, “Welcoming the Word that makes us disciples (cf. Lk 8:21), announcing it and witnessing to it, is the core of our spirituality, that is, of our way of following Jesus, a Prophet powerful in works and words (Lk 24:19), with the power of the Spirit. The Spirit of the Father and of the Son -and also the Spirit of our Mother (Auto 687) -is the integrating centre for all the dimensions of our life and mission.

³²³ Ibid. no 14.

³²⁴ Misioneros Claretianos. *Iniciación en la Vida Misionera*. Prefectura General de Formación, Roma, 2002, 317.

³²⁵ Cf. Ibid. 318.

³²⁶ Cf. Ibid. 319.

of the Spirit, humility and inner poverty, interior silence, love for God and fidelity to the Word, and with the open spirit and determination³²⁷.

The Congregational documents place a clear emphasis on the importance of the Word of God in the formation, life and mission of the congregation. The missionaries are formed and nourished by the Word of God and they are called to make this practice an essential part of their formation, life and mission:

“Hemos de entrar en contacto con la Biblia *para conocer más a Dios*, sus planes, su pensamiento y su voluntad; para entender el sentido divino de nuestra vida y de nuestra vocación; y para interpretar, a la luz de Dios, la realidad que nos circunda y en la que estamos insertos”³²⁸.

3.8 Nourished at the table of the Holy Eucharist: Daily Rhythm of a missionary life

The Holy Eucharist is the “fount and apex of the whole Christian life”³²⁹, and this is the heart of the mystery of the Church. Along with the Word of God, the Holy Eucharistic celebration takes the place of the fundamental pillar of missionary life. Keeping the faith and tradition, Constitutions no.35 indicates that the missionaries should celebrate the mystery of the Eucharist wholeheartedly to keep themselves closer to God,

“In the first place, every day we should wholeheartedly celebrate the mystery of the Eucharist, keeping close to Christ our Lord as he proclaims the words of life, offers himself for his brothers and sisters, honours his Father and builds up the unity of the Church”³³⁰.

Keeping Claret's charismatic trait, the congregation continues to journey with the same love and devotion for the Holy Eucharist, which made a profound impact on Claret's life.

The deep-rooted devotion to the Holy Eucharist was reflected in all the activities of Claret. He never failed to make it a retreat resolution. In the year

³²⁷ Cf. *Ibid.* 328.

³²⁸ *Ibid.* 328.

³²⁹ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*. In the Documents of Vatican II. Edited by Walter M. Abbott. New York: Guild Press, 1966, no. 11.

³³⁰ CCM, no. 35.

1857, he made it clear again and recorded in his retreat resolutions and expressed his longing for the Eucharist, «Ay Jesús mío! ¡Así como agua se junta al vino en el santo sacrificio de la Misa, así deseo yo juntarme con Vos y ofrecerme en sacrificio a la Santísima! Trinidad»³³¹.

The Holy Eucharist becomes the source of strength for the missionaries to grow in Christian virtues. The congregation makes it clear to the missionaries the importance of the Holy Eucharist in the life and the mission of the members: “Through our celebration of the Eucharist and our praise of God, we will receive the strength we need to grow in Christian life and become more productive in our ministry”³³².

The congregation continued to reflect on this particular devotion and expressed its desire in the 17th general chapter document *Declaration on the Spiritual Heritage of the Congregation* 1967:

“The Eucharist, as the sacrament of the sacrifice and the real presence of Christ, occupied a predominant place in the spiritual and apostolic life of St Anthony Mary Claret. The Eucharistic celebration was the most intense moment of his union with Jesus Christ. As he offered it to the Father for the salvation of men, he felt an ardent desire to sacrifice his life with Christ for the good of the Church and all men. Praying in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament helped him to maintain these sentiments and to develop his activities in the sacrificial spirit profoundly penetrated with the redemptive mystery of Christ and the Church (cf. Auto. no. 265, 694, 756 & 767)”³³³.

The XXII General Chapter (1997), *In Prophetic Mission*, speaks of the Eucharist as the source of unity and apostolic fortitude in the congregation's life and mission, inspired by the founder's tradition and spirit: “In the coming years, we will highlight the eucharistic dimension of our spirituality as a source of unity of life and apostolic fortitude”³³⁴. The deep-rooted desire and love for the Holy Eucharist are very much present in the expression of his prayers, and the Congregation always draws inspiration from the spiritual experiences of the founder:

“My Father, take this poor heart of mine and devour it as I do you, so that I may be changed totally into you. In the words of consecration, the substance of bread

³³¹ San Antonio María Claret. *Escritos Autobiográficos*, 549.

³³² CCM, no. 35.

³³³ GC XVII, no 14.

³³⁴ GC XXII, no 23.1.

and wine is changed into the substance of your body and blood. Almighty Lord, consecrate me; speak over me the words that will change me totally into you”³³⁵.

His desire to be in the presence of God is evident in the retreat resolution in the year 1870 he writes about his desire to be united with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament:

«Tengo de ser como una vela que arde: gasta la cera y luce hasta que muere. Los miembros gustan de unirse a su cabeza, el hierro al imán, y yo a Jesús deseo unirme en el sacramento y en el cielo»³³⁶.

In the founder's spirit, the congregation always urges the members to have a special place to celebrate the Eucharist and Eucharistic devotion. The Constitutions in 1857 records the practice of the visit to the blessed sacrament and the Virgin Mary: «Concluida la refección se hará la visita menor al Santísimo y a María santísima en la Iglesia, ... »³³⁷. Keeping the spiritual tradition of the Congregation, the Constitutions in 1924 recorded the devotion «Procuren visitar al Santísimo Sacramento de la Eucaristía y rezar la tercera parte del Rosario»³³⁸.

The Eucharistic experience of the founder is faithfully transmitted into the life of the congregation. The congregation's documents never fail to remind the missionaries to keep up the spirit of the founder in the life and the mission of the congregation. The congregation recommends a daily celebration and living the mystery of the Eucharist in daily life and mission. This is the source and the strength of the missionaries. The XX General Chapter (1985), *The Claretian in the Process of Congregational Renewal*, also highlighted this:

“The living of the mystery of the Eucharist throughout the day, as our Founder did, will nourish our identification with Christ and with his Spirit and will empower us to confront the presence of Evil in our history”³³⁹.

The Congregation's Constitutions place a significant emphasis on the celebration and devotion to the Holy Eucharist. Inspired by the founder, the practice is important in the congregation's life and mission.

³³⁵ Aut.756.

³³⁶ Sant Antonio María Claret. *Escritos Autobiográficos*, 588.4.

³³⁷ CPM, no 102.

³³⁸ Constituciones Para los Misioneros de la Congregación del Inmaculada Corazón de María, pt, II, no. 33, Roma, 1982.

³³⁹ GC XX, no 55.

3.9 Divine office: An act of Praying with the Church

The Claretian Constitutions say the importance of participating in the prayer of the Church after the Holy Eucharist: “We should cherish conversation with Christ our Lord by visiting and worshipping him in the Holy Eucharist, as well as by faithfully offering daily prayer in the name of the Church”³⁴⁰. Claret was very faithful in praying the Divine Office, and he mentioned in several places, “Then I begin the Divine Office reciting Matins and Lauds...”³⁴¹. He also recommended to others to make it a daily practice, «A su debido tiempo, el Oficio Divino, que él padre Claret comenzó también a rezar en Comunidad»³⁴².

Keeping the teaching of the church Claret always practised the prayer and accompanied those who were with him:

«Después de la comida y de su recreo, también un rato de siesta, a continuación de la cual el Arzobispo, acompañado de Currius, rezaba Vísperas y Completas, Maitines y Laudes. Era tal la afición del P. Claret a acompañarse de otro en el desempeño de esta obligación sagrada, acomodándose en cuanto podía al sentido de la liturgia, que frecuentemente, cuando había en Palacio notable número de familiares rezabase con mayor solemnidad a dos coros»³⁴³.

The commentary on the Constitutions indicates this sacred duty of the missionaries. This is an act of allowing the soul to be let by the spirit of the church's liturgy³⁴⁴. The Holy Mother Church also recommends to duly participate in the prayer of the Church:

“The divine office, because it is the public prayer of the Church, is a source of piety, and nourishment for personal prayer. And therefore, priests and all others who take part in the divine office are earnestly exhorted in the Lord to attune their minds to their voices when praying it. The better to achieve this, let them take steps

³⁴⁰ CCM, no. 35.

³⁴¹ Aut. 637.

³⁴² Cristóbal Fernández. *El Beato P. Antonio María Claret, Historia documentada de su vida y empresas*. II, Madrid: Cocala, 298.

³⁴³ *Ibid.* I, 1000.

³⁴⁴ Cf. OPM, 524.

to improve their understanding of the liturgy and of the bible, especially the psalms.”³⁴⁵.

This is a recommendation to the members to follow the rhythm of the Church’s daily prayer. This is the Church that shows herself as the follower and imitator of the praying Jesus and the members, by participating in this act of the Church, imitate Jesus³⁴⁶. The Constitutions of Claretian Missionaries indicate that it should not become a burdensome obligation; rather, this should be taken as a gift and practised with eagerness³⁴⁷. The Second Vatican Council reminds the Congregation that prayer is the centre of the mission of the Apostles and they always maintained it as a sacred duty:

“Priests who are engaged in the sacred pastoral ministry will offer the praises of the hours with greater fervour the more vividly they realise that they must heed St. Paul's exhortation: "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:11). For the work in which they labour will affect nothing and bring forth no fruit except by the power of the Lord who said: "Without me, you can do nothing" (John 15: 5). That is why the apostles, instituting deacons, said: "We will devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4)”³⁴⁸.

Claret is a convinced and faithful son of the Church, who never omitted the practice of the Church and insisted his missionaries follow the church's regulations. The missionaries start the day with prayer and end the day with prayer and all these are done in the spirit of the Church³⁴⁹. The community gathers in the name of the Church, draws strength in prayer for its apostolic work, and receives the suitable disposition to walk in the presence of God. The prayer of the Church helps them to be docile to the guidance of the Holy Spirit³⁵⁰.

3.10 Marian Piety: A Filial Reverence

The Constitutions of the Claretian missionaries dedicate specific numbers to explain the filial relationship of the missionaries with the Blessed Mother. This is

³⁴⁵ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. In the Documents of Vatican II. Edited by Walter M. Abbott. New York: Guild Press, 1966, no. 90.

³⁴⁶ Cf. OPM, 525.

³⁴⁷ Cf. *Ibid.* 525.

³⁴⁸ SC, no 86.

³⁴⁹ Cf. OPM, 526.

³⁵⁰ Cf. *Ibid.* 527.

to confirm that the founding of the Missionary Congregation is fully attributed to Mother Mary and invite the members to duly acknowledge it and grow in filial love with the Mother:

“We attribute the founding of our Congregation to the intervention of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whom we honour as our Patroness under the title of her Immaculate Heart. Since we are called and truly are Sons of her Heart, we accompany her in love and trust and commit ourselves to her so that we may be conformed to the mystery of Christ and may cooperate with her in her maternal role in our apostolic mission”³⁵¹.

The number perfectly recognizes the presence of Mary in the congregation and the missionaries have to create a loving bond with Mary. This number speaks of the spiritual maternity of Mary in the congregation. This further explains that the title *Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary* acknowledges her as Mother and the missionary community is a fruit of her spiritual maternity³⁵². The congregation keeps the Spirit of the founder, learning from Mary to pray and collaborate with Jesus. Recall the founder's mindset at the foundation's time makes the topic clearer. When the congregation was founded, Claret offered the newly-born congregation in the care of the Blessed Mother:

“On July 16, 1849, after we had gathered together in the seminary with the approval of the bishop and the rector, we commenced our own Spiritual Exercises, which we followed with all exactness and fervour. Because July 16 is the Feast of the Holy Cross and of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, I based my first sermon on those words of Psalm 22: *Virga tua et baculus tuus ipsa me consolata sunt* (v. 4), alluding to the devotion and confidence we should place in the Holy Cross and the Blessed Virgin Mary and applying it also to the project we were beginning. We left those Exercises full of fervour, bound and determined to persevere, and, thanks be to God and Mary Most Holy, all have persevered”³⁵³.

After the missionary congregation's founding, Claret was confident in Blessed Mother seeking her extraordinary care and pleading to Mother to accept the missionaries as sons of Her heart³⁵⁴. The congregation acknowledges that the filial devotion has penetrated the congregation's life, spirituality and mission. The Chapter documents also mention its importance: “Our Sonship in the Heart of Mary is a proper note of our spirituality and apostolate. It has penetrated the life

³⁵¹ CCM, no. 8.

³⁵² Cf. OPM, 146.

³⁵³ Aut. 490.

³⁵⁴ Cf. Aut. 4983: “Most Blessed Mother, may the courtesy of your Immaculate Heart, in accepting us as your Sons, be praised a thousand times! Mother, make us cooperate with such kindness by becoming daily more humble, fervent, and zealous for the salvation of souls.”

of the Congregation and sustained its energy in the pursuit of the purposes of our Institute”³⁵⁵.

For Claret, the Heart of Mary is a very special place where the missionaries find a way to learn how to listen to Jesus:

“In the depths of Mary's Heart, we discover and learn the way to listen. She received the Word in her Heart (cf. Lk 2:19, 51) -the Word made history in the cry of the poor (cf. Lk 1:48-53). Claret presents Mary's Heart to us as the blazing forge in which we are shaped as heralds of the Word”³⁵⁶.

Mary is Claret's powerhouse, and his total confidence has moved him freely to pray and obtain anything he wants. As an apostolic missionary knowing the need for love, he prayed³⁵⁷ and the congregation, following the founder's tradition, insisted that Marian Spirituality was an important aspect of the missionaries' lives.

The presence of Mary and the filial relationship with Mother Mary are very much present in the formation of the missionaries. The *Plan General de Formación* reflects Mary as the congregation's foundress; she is the formation guide who guides the missionaries. Mary is the model, and Mary forms the missionaries in the forge of her heart³⁵⁸The presence of Mary in the founder's and congregation's lives expresses the profound charismatic experience: «La presencia de María en el Fundador y en la Congregación es una experiencia carismática peculiar»³⁵⁹.

The above records from the formation plan confirm the devotion that the missionary should uphold. The Church also insist on proper devotion to Mary in the liturgy. In the *Marialis Cultus* Pope Paul VI explains the importance of Marian devotion in the liturgical celebration:

“In accordance with some of the guidelines of the Council's teaching on Mary and the Church, we now wish to examine more closely a particular aspect of the relationship between Mary and the liturgy-namely, Mary as a model of the spiritual attitude with which the Church celebrates and lives the divine mysteries”³⁶⁰.

³⁵⁵ GC XVII, no. 17.

³⁵⁶ *Servants of the Word*, no 15.

³⁵⁷ Cf. Aut. 447.

³⁵⁸ Cf. Misioneros Claretianos. *Plan General de Formación*, 90.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 90.

³⁶⁰ Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Marialis Cultus*. Rome 1974, no 16.

The Commentary to the Constitutions says the veneration of the Blessed Mother must be filled with filial love and charity. This reflects the evangelical attitude of the disciple who intimately welcomed her in his inner life and participated in her life of faith. The Constitutions reflect this as a readiness to open the heart to the words of Jesus and take her as the Mother in the life of the missionaries³⁶¹. The Marian spiritual experience for the founder is evangelical and very especially filial³⁶². The evidence for such experiences is recorded in his *Autobiography*, which repeatedly acknowledges the active presence of Mother Mary in life and in the mission. He expressed this particular closeness to Mother Mary in the form of prayer, which he prayed at the beginning of every mission:

“The Prayer I Said at the Beginning of Every Mission. O Virgin Mother of God, mother and advocate of poor and unhappy sinners, you are well aware that I am your son and minister, formed in the forge of your mercy and love. I am like an arrow poised in your mighty hand. Release me, my Mother, with the full force of your arm, against the impious, sacrilegious, and cruel Ahab, wed to the base Jezebel. I mean to say: release me against Satan, the prince of this world, who has allied with the flesh”³⁶³.

From childhood, Claret always showed great flexibility and grew in his devotion to Mother Mary. Keeping the tradition, the congregation always recommends that missionaries include the celebration of the feast of Mary with due preparation and care as a sign of love and reverence. The chapter document *The Claretian in the Process of Congregational Renewal* (1985) speaks of the presence of Mary in the life and the mission of the Congregation:

“It was characteristic of our holy Founder that in his life he powerfully exemplified his relationship as Son of the Heart of Mary. He recognized himself as a Son of the Blessed Virgin, as one formed by her in the furnace of her love (Auto. II, c. 16). Our Founder strengthened himself with devotion to the Heart of Mary as a most effective weapon in his manifold apostolate. Speaking for himself and those called to his Institute he blessed God for having deigned ‘to gather his humble servants as Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Your Mother’ (Auto. II, c.34)”³⁶⁴.

The document explains that it is undoubtedly part of the charism of the Congregation and the filial relationship and devotion are the result of living the

³⁶¹ Cf. OPM, 530.

³⁶² Cf. Ibid.530.

³⁶³ Aut. 270.

³⁶⁴ GC XVII, no 18.

sonship with Mary³⁶⁵. Keeping the founder's spirit, the Congregation never departed from its devotion to Mother Mary. The Constitutions highlight all the Marian devotions as an expression of love and honour to Mother Mary:

“As loving sons, we should honour the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, who is associated with all her heart in the saving work of her Son. Our honour for her should be expressed both in the liturgy and in such traditionally approved forms of Marian devotion as the Rosary”³⁶⁶.

The devotion to Mother Mary gives a chance to participate in the popular piety of the Church and also it is seen as a way to participate in the spirituality of the people³⁶⁷. The life and the mission of the founder give enough evidence of his participation in the simple faith and popular religiosity³⁶⁸.

The Holy Mother Church also invites the faithful to meditate on the mystery of Christ with Mary. Participation in the Marian devotion also means learning how to gaze on Jesus from Mary. The *Marialis Cultus*, (A Church document which is widely used in the commentary on the Constitutions to explain that the Congregation always Intune with the teaching of the Church in practising the devotion to Mother Mary), Pope Paul VI brings into detail the benefits of Marian devotion in the life of individuals:

“By its nature the recitation of the Rosary calls for a quiet rhythm and a lingering pace, helping the individual to meditate on the mysteries of the Lord's life as seen through the eyes of her who was closest to the Lord. In this way, the unfathomable riches of these mysteries are unfolded”³⁶⁹.

The Directory of the congregation also reminds the members to celebrate the special day of Mother Mary with due care and preparation which is already seen as an expression of love:

«Como expresión tradicional de nuestra piedad han de celebrarse en común la novena al Corazón de María y el triduo al Santo Fundador. Con el mismo sentido

³⁶⁵Cf. Ibid., no.18: “It is doubtless part of the charism of our Congregation to be Sons of the Heart of Mary. Filial piety is a consequence of the living and the connatural response to this Sonship. The liturgy itself enumerates devotion to the Heart of Mary among the principal graces which adorned our Founder. It says of him “he was endowed with many heavenly graces of devotion, especially toward the most Blessed Sacrament and the Heart of Mary and her rosary”.

³⁶⁶ CCM, no. 36.

³⁶⁷ Cf. OPM, 536.

³⁶⁸ Cf. Ibid. 536.

³⁶⁹ MC, no 47.

se recomiendan también otras devociones como el mes mariano y el triduo a San José. Háganse de modo sencillo e inspirado en la liturgia»³⁷⁰.

The devotion to Mother Mary is an essential part of the spiritual heritage of the Claretian Missionaries. The specific numbers (8 and 9) in the Constitutions reveal the Marian piety in the congregation. Chapter document XVII reminds the special call to have the Marian devotion: “The devotion to the Heart of Mary should be lived by every Claretian. The Chapter recommends to everyone, especially superiors and educators, that our spirituality and true apostolic zeal be developed in this environment”³⁷¹.

3.11 Personal Prayer (Mental): A Recommended Practice for Claretian Missionaries

Personal prayer played an important part in the founder's life; he writes in his *Autobiography*, “Every day I made a half-hour of mental prayer”³⁷², “Every day before leaving the house I made mental prayer alone”³⁷³, “We got up every day on schedule and together made a half-hour’s mental prayer, which no one ever missed”³⁷⁴, “I will meditate for an hour”³⁷⁵. Many references indicate that Claret was very faithful in practising personal prayer.

The Constitutions of the Claretian Missionaries kept the founder's spirit and gave special attention to the practice of personal prayer, which includes three different forms: meditation, spiritual reading and examen of conscience³⁷⁶. The same spirit and the understanding of personal prayer in different forms are explained in the Apostolic Exhortation *Menti Nostrae*, which speaks that mental and vocal prayers are the way to keep connected with the Divine and that is a source of spiritual strength that is free from the snares of evil. The Commentary

³⁷⁰ Misioneros Claretianos. *Directorio de la Congregación de Misioneros Hijos del Inmaculado Corazón de María*. Roma, 1987, no 88.

³⁷¹ GC XVII, no. 19.

³⁷² Aut. 86.

³⁷³ Ibid. 108.

³⁷⁴ Ibid. 610.

³⁷⁵ Ibid. 645.

³⁷⁶ Cf. OPM, 538.

on the Constitutions, drawing inspiration from this Apostolic Exhortation, explained the necessity of mental and personal prayer:

“From mental prayer cannot be separated vocal prayer and those other forms of private prayer which, according to each one’s peculiar needs, help in uniting the soul with God. Let this be remembered, however: more than a mere multiplicity of prayers, is to be valued piety and the true and ardent spirit of prayer. If ever before, in our days especially is this ardent spirit of prayer necessary, when the so-called “naturalism” has invaded men’s minds and hearts, and when virtue is exposed to every kind of danger, dangers which not infrequently meet one in the very exercise of one’s ministry. Is there anything which can more securely protect you against these snares, anything which can more surely elevate your souls to heavenly things and keep them united with God, than assiduous prayer and supplication for Divine help?”³⁷⁷.

Claret advice to the seminarians reminds them that the practice of daily mental prayer is necessary to have a meaningful ministerial life:

«Debe, pues el seminarista que toda clase de oración que se haga bien es buena; pero la oración mental es la más conveniente para él, pues que, si es diestro en hacerla bien, cuando sea sacerdote rezará bien el Oficio divino, celebrará bien la santa Misa y desempeñará con devoción todas las funciones de su sagrado ministerio...»³⁷⁸.

Personal prayer is given a particular number in the Constitutions to show the significance of the practice in the life of the missionaries. The recommendation to devote time to personal prayer is seen as an exercise of the love of God ³⁷⁹. The no 37 in the Constitutions explains in detail to the missionaries that it is a primary need for both personal and community to make it a daily practice in their lives:

“Our missionaries should spend some time daily in mental prayer, an hour when possible, pondering the Word of God in their hearts. We should also engage in spiritual reading, especially from the Scriptures, and examine our fidelity to the gospel. Daily prayer, faithfully made, is a primary need for both the community and the individual missionary; therefore, it should be given priority in our lives”³⁸⁰.

The missionaries are encouraged to cultivate a sound prayer habit from their initial formation: «Y a los misioneros en formación inicial que cultiven con gran esmero y abran a la acción del Espíritu, su corazón y su inteligencia»³⁸¹. The

³⁷⁷ MN, no. 48.

³⁷⁸ San A. M. Claret. *El Colegial o Seminarista instruido*, 73.

³⁷⁹ Cf. OPM, 543.

³⁸⁰ CCM, no. 37.

³⁸¹ Misioneros Claretianos. *Plan General de Formación, Formación de Misioneros*, no 210.

missionaries are called to imitate Jesus, who took time to pray in solitude. The custom of Jesus praying alone is an inspiration for the missionaries because this animates the daily life of the missionaries:

«Por otro lado, la oración anima su vivir diario y está profundamente arraigada en su ministerio. Jesús busca momentos de soledad y de silencio (cf., Mc 1, 35; 6, 46; Mt 14,23; 26, 36; Lc 5, 16; 6, 12; 9, 18), ora antes de los momentos decisivos de su misión...»³⁸².

The congregation draws inspiration from the founder because he imitated Jesus who worked in the day and prayed at night. The very act of Claret invites his missionaries to spend quality time in personal prayer which has the characteristics of an apostolic prayer: «La oración de Claret se volverá eminentemente apostólica durante sus campañas de misioneros apostólico, cuando se propone imitar a Jesús misionero, que trabajaba de día y oraba de noche»³⁸³. As mentioned in the beginning, the Constitutions take personal prayer into different formats, encouraging the missionaries to cultivate the habit of personal prayer in the format that is more supportive of them.

The Constitutions draws profound inspiration from the Church documents, particularly from *Evangelica Testificatio*, fostering a sense of connection and unity with the broader spiritual community³⁸⁴, expressing to have a daily prayer faithfully and solitude and silence to hear the voice of God:

“Be conscious then of the importance of prayer in your lives and learn to devote yourselves to it generously. Faithfulness to daily prayer always remains for each one of you a basic necessity. It must have a primary place in your constitutions and your lives...The interior man is aware that times of silence are demanded by the love of God. As a rule, he needs a certain solitude so that he may hear God "speaking to his heart."(55) It must be stressed that a silence which is a mere absence of noise and words, in which the soul cannot renew its vigour, would lack any spiritual value”³⁸⁵.

³⁸² Misioneros Claretianos. *Iniciación en la Vida Misionera*, 340.

³⁸³ Ibid. 348.

³⁸⁴ Cf. Ibid. 340: (The "Letter to the Missionary Theophilus" is a short treatise on missionary pastoral care containing important guidelines, and which served as a prologue to a collection of "Sermons for the mission" published by Fr. Claret in Barcelona in 1858. It is addressed to a priest with missionary concerns. It consists of four chapters: 1) Excellence of the mission and merit of the missionary, 2) Important notices to the missionary, 3) What is man, that is, the knowledge that the missionary must have of human nature, 4) Subjects that must be dealt with in the mission, how they must be proposed and what maxims must be frequently inculcated. The full text can be found in: Saint Anthony Mary Claret, *Spiritual Writings*. Madrid: BAC, 1985, pp. 343-367.)

³⁸⁵ Pope Paul VI. Apostolic Exhortation. *Evangelica Testificatio*. Rome 1971, no 45, 46.

In his own life, Claret understood the need for personal prayer and fervently prayed to God not to take this grace from him. The commentary on the Constitutions underscores Claret's desire's intensity, highlighting his commitment to prayer³⁸⁶.

The church documents, from time to time, remind us of the urgent need for daily meditation and its significant contribution to attaining holiness and perfection. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Menti Nostrae*, Pope Pius XII perfectly describes the indispensable role of meditation in the life of the priest and religious:

“We, therefore, consider it Our grave duty to exhort you, especially to the practice of daily meditation, a practice recommended to all the clergy also by Canon Law. For just as the desire for priestly perfection is nourished and strengthened by daily meditation, so its neglect is the source of distaste for spiritual things, through which piety is lessened and grows languid, and the impulse towards personal sanctification is not only weakened or ceases altogether, but the entire priestly ministry suffers great harm. It must therefore be stated without reservation that no other means has the unique efficacy of meditation, and that, as a consequence, its daily practice can in no wise be substituted for”³⁸⁷.

The commentary on the Constitutions refers to spiritual reading as an integral part of personal prayer, emphasising its necessity in the missionaries' lives. It states that Claret experienced its benefits from his childhood and always recommended it to others, underlining its value and impact on the spiritual growth and always recommended it to others³⁸⁸. The constitutions clearly state the effectiveness of spiritual reading helps the missionaries to grow in their contact with the Divine Master³⁸⁹. It is recommended that it helps form missionaries and bring necessary goodness to the spiritual life.

The Constitutions further elaborate on personal prayer, including the Examen as the third form of mental prayer. The Examen, as recorded in the commentary, provides a structured way for the missionaries to confront their lives with the Gospel, examining their fidelity to the Gospel, their virtue practice, and their

³⁸⁶ Cf. OPM, 540.

³⁸⁷ MN, no 47.

³⁸⁸ Cf. OPM, 541.

³⁸⁹ Cf. Ibid. 542.

moral duties³⁹⁰. Claret made the particular examination faithfully from the day he entered the seminary until he died³⁹¹. The congregation makes this a spiritual practice and recommends that the missionaries follow it faithfully, following the founder's recommendation.

The Constitutions clearly recommend one hour of daily personal prayer, spiritual reading, and examination of fidelity to the gospel. This creates space for an interpersonal relationship with the Divine. This is not just fulfilling duty; it comes from love for God. According to the commentary, personal prayer is one of the most privileged moments for expressing love for God³⁹². The missionary community must faithfully treat this as a primary need for individuals and the community.

The Chapter Documents, especially General Chapter XX (1985), *The Claretian in the Process of Congregational Renewal*, in the section *Personal Spirituality of each Claretian* speaks clearly that keeping the spirit of the founder and the spiritual practice of the Claretians are developed:

“We must live a spirituality which, in keeping with the style of Claret, is not marred by gaps between prayer and contemplation, on the one hand, and apostolic activity, on the other. To assure this, we must beg the Spirit for the grace to be contemplatives in mission and must avail ourselves of such means as "spiritual accompaniment," to advance in our missionary life”³⁹³.

The same chapter proved that personal prayer is essential in the Claretian community. This must be included in the community project and reflect that it is also the personal spiritual process and spiritual help for the brother in the community. Personal prayer in the community fosters an environment of communion and fraternal accompaniment. This particular chapter expresses its necessity and draws on the spiritual heritage of the founder:

“To foster a more serious commitment to personal prayer and to aid one another in this commitment, we must create surroundings or moments of silence, make creative use of the most adequate methods, prepare community prayer more carefully and share the Word of God and our own faith experiences with our brothers. In its yearly plan, the community must provide a program for prayer and

³⁹⁰ Cf. Ibid.

³⁹¹ Cf. Aut. 351, 801, 746, 782.

³⁹² Cf. Ibid. 544.

³⁹³ GC XX, no 56.

its periodic evaluation. It must assure each individual an inalienable time for personal prayer and the ability to participate in community prayer”³⁹⁴.

The Constitutions and the Chapter Document clearly explain the necessity of personal prayer in life and the mission of the Claretian missionaries.

* * *

The chapter presented the recommended practice of prayer in the Congregation, keeping the founder's spirit, which is obligatory to the members of this missionary congregation. The commentary on the Constitutions presents this prayer section as *Praying Missionary Congregation*. The founder's spiritual experiences directly refer to the congregation's reflections on prayer. The chapter explained the importance of prayer in the congregation's life and mission. The congregation's Constitutions and Chapter Documents follow the teachings of the Church and present a project for its spiritual life.

The Constitutions dedicate a particular section to prayer and insists on its importance in the Congregation's spirituality. The different forms and methods of prayer help the missionaries to grow towards holiness and union with the Lord. The founder intends for the missionary to imitate Jesus, who always prayed. The charismatic tradition of the Congregation provided ample methods, forms and devotions to participate in the spiritual formation. The chapter tells that the fruits of the missions of the Missionary Congregation come from the sound practice of prayer. This is the founder's lived experience and the recommended prayer practice in the Church.

³⁹⁴ Ibid. 57.

CONCLUSION

Prayer is the lifeline of every person who desires to grow in friendship with God. Every religion offers its members particular teachings, doctrines, and practices to advance their spirituality. Similarly, the Church provides us with rich doctrines and theology on prayer. Many holy men and women put those teachings into practice and shared their prayer experiences to enhance the doctrine and theology of prayer. Similarly, my study of prayer in life, the writing of Claret, the Constitutions, and the Claretian Congregation's documents helped me discover the richness of Claret's prayer experience and the connection with the charismatic roots in the congregation.

The first chapter presents my findings about the different forms and methods of prayer in Claret's life. It is interesting to note that Claret's life was not alienated from the spiritual reality of his time. The socio, religious and cultural background of his time played a vital role in initiating his religious formation. The faith formation that he received from his family, the accompaniments of his father, his admiration for his father's spirituality, the pious practices and spiritual activities of his parish and the contribution of the dedicated catechists all played significant roles in shaping his spirituality at a young age.

The study revealed that sustained progress was actively present in his prayer life. The continuity was maintained from childhood until his death, and the greater awareness of God's presence was expressed by practicing various forms and methods of prayer. The reading habit and the passion for knowing and using the available resources helped him read and learn the basic prayers and the catechism well, which all provoked his inner spiritual journey. The study of the first chapter also revealed the gradual growth in understanding and assimilating the theology

of prayer. It all started with learning from the books and evolved into different levels of personal experience and integration of God's experiences in life and mission. Prayer had been the center of his life and mission. The need for learning and using different forms and methods of prayer has been expressed and explained in this chapter.

Claret is filled with God's providence, and he is able to feel and understand the intensity of prayer and the imitation of Jesus in praying, working, and suffering at every stage of his life. His prayer life offers clarity to help us understand the richness of prayer in the Church. It always provides multiple choices to practice prayer according to a person's interest and maturity in spiritual life. The study also made it clear to me that prayer is fascinating, and when a person falls in love with prayer, he keeps learning new and creative methods that can keep him closer to God. The prayer life of Claret is an example and inspiration; that is, the one who can pray is the one who can love God and others. Therefore, he doesn't stop or quit when he faces challenges. Instead, he generously opens himself in prayer to God's call and makes himself available for God's mission.

The second chapter examines the doctrine of prayer in Claret's writings. First, I must admit that Claret was not a theologian but an apostolic missionary in the 19th century. He used the printing era of his time and wrote and published many books. He encouraged others to contribute to the press apostolate. He encouraged Christian authors to establish religious libraries to strengthen the people's faith and provide good morals to the people. Similarly, he made an effort to provide the people with needed explanations, commentary, and instruction on different methods and forms of prayer and popular devotions.

The study revealed that he had read many books on spirituality and theology, influencing his thoughts and writings. He did not present anything as his doctrine of prayer, yet he preached, wrote and published plenty of his ideas in books and pamphlets. He was very creative in presenting his ideas according to the people's interests, age, and responsibilities in their Christian vocation. His writings, instruction and teaching on prayer disclose his dedication to the formation of the people in all categories. He believed that prayer takes a prominent place in the

Christian life, and healthy faith formation is impossible without proper understanding and practice of prayer.

Claret's conviction comes from his personal experience of prayer. He knew that prayer is the powerhouse of every Christian who desires to live a life formed by gospel values and Christian virtues. This conviction made Claret explain different forms and methods of prayer and promote popular devotions in his time. His writings and instruction were presented as a counter mechanism to protect the faith from all other opposing forces and provide assistance and access for basic Christian formation.

The explanations of various forms and methods of prayer and various popular devotions aimed to fully inform the readers of their benefits and the necessity of promotion and practice for Christians to purify themselves personally and communally. The study and understanding of the theology of prayer are very much needed to immerse into communion with the Lord. He was keen to explain things to the students, seminarians, deacons, religious people, priests and lay faithful about the richness of prayer in the Church's tradition and revealed its impact on the Christian life, according to the particular vocations.

The study of his teachings and writings on prayer reveals that these are simplified teachings that anyone can easily understand and practice. Claret's aim is very clear; his ways of presenting his ideas are simple and practical and can reach all. The reading and the study helped me understand Claret's spirit in forming the people. He never failed to read the signs of time and used the available means to give them to Christ and the teaching of the Church on prayer.

Chapter three studies prayer in the Constitutions and the Congregation's Documents. It is interesting to note that the Congregation always maintains a deep connection with the charismatic spirit of the founder. Studying the Constitutions and the Congregational documents made me understand that the founder's prayer experience remains an inspiration for the spiritual formation of the missionaries in the Congregation. Claret was very clear in reminding the missionaries to imitate Jesus in prayer. He is the first reference for the prayer in the life and the mission of the Congregation. He also reminded the missionaries not to lose sight of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is everything after Jesus; he also provided enough

reference that he was inspired by the life of prophets, apostles and saints to grow in the prayer life. The section on prayer in the Constitutions speaks clearly about the prayer life of the missionaries. It explains the need to adopt the teachings of the Church on prayer and liturgical ceremonies.

The Constitutions and the Documents of the Congregation are inspired by the spirit of the founder and the Church's teaching and present the life project to the missionaries. The methods and forms of prayer proposed to the missionaries assist in personal sanctification and common salvation. Each method and form of prayer has its own benefits and effects on the life and the mission of the Congregation and its members. The prayer serves as the powerhouse of each community; the members are called to imitate Jesus in prayer very closely and learn from Him to be connected to the Father and to discern the will of the Father.

Every method and form generate benefits for the person who practices them. It is clear that it is not meant to practice all the different methods and forms one after another, but according to the person's needs and liturgical celebration, one can engage in them. The main point is to understand the intention and necessity of each form and method of prayer. The congregation knows it is for personal purification, friendship with God, community celebration, and union with the Church: The prayers are celebrated and promoted.

Learning and adopting the Congregation's proposal on prayer is essential. The document also provides ample materials, reflections, and commentaries on prayer and requests that the members be in line with the teaching of the Church, as the founder was faithful to the Church. The study also allowed me to learn about the resources of the Congregation materials and the Church's Documents. It also inspired me to keep my mind open to further study the theme and other Congregational-related subjects.

Therefore, prayer is a lifeline for every person who believes in God. Every faith has its own richness in dealing with prayer. The church is rich in its doctrine, theology, and reflection on prayer. The various forms and methods of prayer teach that there is a method to accompany us in prayer at every stage of our lives. From the simple beginning, prayer leads us to a higher form of union with God. The holy men and women in the Church provided uncountable materials and

reflections on their personal experiences of prayer. These life testaments continue to inspire many. In the same way, each congregation is blessed with the prayer experience, reflection and doctrine of its founder and foundress. The study of prayer in life, the writings of my founder, and the Constitutions and Congregational Documents helped me deepen my understanding of prayer.

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