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PROMOTING HUMAN LIFE IN SRI LANKA

ARTICLE

Our Sri-Lanka Mission

Ever since the Congregation came to Sri Lanka, principally after 1991, Claretians have made their presence and ministry felt, and continue to leave an impact on the local church and the society in general. In the style peculiar to our beloved founder, Claretians have maintained a generous openness to taking up variety of missions and apostolates depending on what is discerned to be most urgent, effective and opportune. The words of the Archbishop of Colombo on the occasion of the local bicentenary celebrations of the birth of the Founder testify amply to the above assertion: *"The Congregation of the Claretian Fathers initiated their apostolate in Sri Lanka only in the recent past. But within this short time they have showed their dedication to the ministry of the Lord in no uncertain terms."*

Though shortage of personnel has been a serious setback over the years, this has not in any severe way hampered the mission engagement of our members. As of January 2009, the statistics of the professed Claretians living and working in Sri Lanka stand as follows: 13 native priests, 5 priests from India, 1 deacon and 14 professed students. We also have 3 novices and quite a large number of seminarians in elementary formation. Though, most of the priests have to take on the formation of our young people as their primary responsibility, they too, together with others who are engaged in full-time mission work, contribute in many ways to collaborate in the over-all apostolic work of the Congregation.

Parish apostolate:

At present there are two parishes in the care of the Claretian Missionaries. **Madulsima** parish in the hilly diocese of Badulla which was entrusted to the Claretians in 1994 has various programs going on in view of the spiritual and social welfare of the poor Tea Plantation workers, who are under the clutches of oppressive structures for centuries. The parish is modeled on the Small Christian Communities which is becoming increasingly the new way of being church in Asia. The parish provides the scope for greater collaboration with Hindus who live side by side with the Catholics. Running of preschools, St. Claret School Bus Service, and supplementary education programs are undertaken on behalf of the underprivileged children. In order to give a forum for them to bring out their artistic talents and to grow in it, we have St. Claret School for Performing Arts. Women groups are active in organizing health and hygiene programs. Furthermore, opportunities are given to master in the art of self-employment through activities like sewing.

The other Claretian parish is situated at the heart of the metropolitan **Colombo**. Though, geographically the parish is urban, the dwellers of this area are largely poor. Our missionaries have been committed to the wellbeing of these urban poor since 2000. One of the two churches in the parish is a shrine of Our Lady and it attracts hundreds of devotees of all faiths everyday. There are many associations in the parish in order to cater to people of all age-groups of the parish. In addition to computer, language, sewing, cookery, and house making classes, the women's association runs a monthly free medical clinic. Lay empowerment is given a central place in the life of the parish.

At the service of unjust war victims:

Our community in the war-torn Jaffna peninsula is at the forefront in serving the unlucky children and grown-ups of the area. Recently they initiated a program called "Clasika" which is aimed at

helping children who have been severely wounded emotionally as the result of war and disasters like tsunami. A separate area with buildings and equipment is maintained within the community premises for this purpose. The community also offers in-house psycho-social development programs for children.

Publication and preaching:

In the bicentenary souvenir, Archbishop Oswald Gomis wrote the following: *"The perennial complaint of our lay faithful…was that they did not have enough Catholic literature especially in local languages. Among others, the Claretian community has played a leading role in providing books and other publications that provide us access to the treasures of our Christian doctrine. This apostolate of theirs deserves our strong commendation and praise*." Our publication is well-known for the distribution of the Bible Diaries in all three languages spoken in Sri Lanka. We import books from India and the Philippines for sale. Local authors too are given encouragement to publish their works in local languages. As recently as last year, the publication initiated a peace education program targeting all sections of people. We too offer Bible correspondence course in Tamil and Sinhala.

War in Sri Lanka

A civil war fought between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Government of Sri Lanka "officially" began in early 1980s and has claimed over 65,000 lives and wrecked havoc in the country in terms of democracy and economy. LTTE is fighting for the rights of the minority Tamil community. Though different peace truces had been in operation from time to time all of these have brought no sustainable peace in this country so far.

If we scan briefly the current situation, one might say that the county is going from bad to worse. With the military onslaught in the north of the country being intensified, the exodus of people towards

secure places has seen a sudden increase over the last few months. This has resulted in the number of internally displaced persons going up by leaps and bounds. Aerial bombardments, shelling and so on have seen an increase in which even civilians fall victims. There is a kind of mutual suspicion by Tamils on Sinhalese and vice versa. Registration procedures, being subjected to search operations, body checks and so on have become a routine. This is the background in which we, Claretians and all others carry out the missionary mandate of the Lord. It is no easy task, to say the least.

JPIC work

The whole Sri Lankan Mission is contributing to the peace-building endeavor. Together with the Claretian regional JPIC desk, the Publications at Ragama, Colombo has embarked on a peace-education campaign targeting school children, youth and all others alike. It has attracted quite a good response. Pamphlets, peace-stickers, quotation books on peace are some of the items printed and circulated. Also we collaborate actively with the Religious for Peace and Justice (JPIC desk of the Conference of the Major Religious Superiors of Sri Lanka) and Christian Solidarity Movement (an all-inclusive body of all Christian denominations) in promoting peace and justice in the country. In few instances we helped with Immediate Relief for the Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in North and East due to war.

Community Celebration for the "CLARETIAN MISSION DAY – 2009"

INTRODUCTION

Dear friends in Jesus Christ,

It is obvious that we the Claretian Missionaries following our founder St. Anthony Mary Claret need to be convinced of our mission for the suffering persons in the world. We are fade up and became normal without any reaction to any situation and news about brutality of human life. Because the human life has become very cheep and even cheeper today in the world. The commodities, money, prestige, war and violence get more respect and honor than the human beings . We do not feel very much the suffering of others when a tragic situation comes to us. We are awake and we become persons full of feelings but when it happens to others we are least bothered. Being solidarity with the people means being felt with the people. Let us remember all those who are suffering for mere daily survival without a place to lay their heads, without a meal for a day, without any wealth, privilege without any strength and power but only pain, suffering and poverty. It is not easy to work for the marginalized, outcast and oppressed.

OPENING HYMN…

A missionary son of the immaculate heart of Mary…

OPENING PRAYER

Abba Father, you are the source of life in the universe.
You created your children in your image and likeness.
You image and likeness are being destroyed and

lost in our world today.
The beautiful and the precious life you have given
us is always under threat, violence and suffering.
People have become dump,
blind and deaf to voice for justice,
rights and discrimination of innocent people.
Abba Father, you have called us in a unique way as missionary
in the path of our beloved Father St. Anthony Mary Claret.
Give us the same spirit and discernment that you have gave
to your beloved Son and to our Founder
so that we may become the agents of justice,
promoter of human rights and comforter to the suffering
even by sacrificing our life to give life…
we ask this through Christ our Lord Amen.

MEDITATION

(Play an appropriate music while the points for the meditation are being read).

a. People do not understand curses. Because people do not understand the poor.

b. The helpless man who has no where to turn to, who suffers without remittance at the whim of the rich and the powerful, who knows in his bones that he is the victim of injustice and yet finds no redress in the bitterness of his days and the agony of his life. What is he to do?

c. Fighting and war, killing and murder, abduction and exploitation, corruption and injustice, increasing cost of living and mass suffering, crave for power, money and prestige are dominant and common today in the present world.

d. The hired hand who is not the shepherd … sees the wolf coming, leaves the sheep and runs away…. The hired hand runs away

because the hired hand does not care for the sheep…. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep…. Where are we?

e. If the world hates you be aware the it hated me before it hated you….. the servants are no greater than their master, if they persecuted me, they will persecute you too…

f. The world you will face persecutions. But be courageous…. I have conquered the world.

g. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice for they shall be satisfied.

READING (Col 3 : 1-4,12-15)

Or from the Autobiography of Fr. Claret No 223-224 (Suffering for Christ).

The new life in Christ

"So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of the god. Set you minds on things that are above not on things that are on earth, for you have died and you life hidden with Christ in god. When Christ who is you life is revealed with him in glory. As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, cloth yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another forgive each other; just as the lord has forgiven you so you also must forgive. Above all, Cloth yourself with love which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

Psalm :109 3-5, 21-26

Response: - *"Help me O Lord my God, and save me for the sake of your love."*

They assail me words of hatred; they attack for no valid cause.

They return my friendship with slander, and yet I pray for them.
They repay me evil for good and hatred for my love.

But as for me, O God my God for your name sake,
act on my behalf, deliver me in the good ness of your love for I am poor
and needy my heart is stricken within me.

My knees have become weak from fasting my body is wasted of its substance.
I have become the butt for scorn of my foes;
people shake their heads at me in derision.
Help me O Lord my God and save me for sake of your love.

GOSPEL READING 2 (John 10:7-11).

"So Jesus said, truly I say to you I am the gate of the sheep. All who came were the thieves and the robbers and the sheep did not hear them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved; he will in and out freely and find food. The thief comes to steal and kill and destroy, but I have come that they may have life, life in all its fullness. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the thief."

SILENCE

REFLECTION

The declaration of the 23rd general chapter " that they may have life" chapter one no 5,6 beautifully highlight the passion for life in the threaten world. It says, that the life is exuberant and fruitful in nature and in humanity: "And God saw all he had made, and indeed it was very good" (Gen 1:31). The creator, who "lovers life" (Wis 11:26), has entrusted us to defend it and cultivate it. The appreciation, the defence

of and the passion for life is manifested today in many ways, as for example, in those persons and organization that work on behalf of the poor, for human rights, and for peace.

We observe also many signs of violence and death in our world:

The life of the planet is under a terrible threat. The selfish and indiscriminate exploitation of nature and the lack of concern for its integrity will have deadly repercussions for the future of humanity.

The disregard towards human life – from conception to death – has many expressions: abortion, violence against women and children, domestic violence, sexual violence; all kind of totalitarianism, terrorism, different forms of open warfare among nations, peoples and ethnic groups; the death penalty, the elimination – sometimes under the protection of law – of those considered an obstacle to the common welfare: the elderly, the terminally ill, the handicapped.

The neoliberal economic system, through the poverty and the inequities it generates, brings with it a form of structural violence and gives rise to other forms of violence.

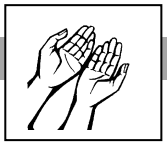
Endemic illnesses, aids, hunger, poverty, unemployment, and addictions hinder proper human development.

We are living in this world. What is our called to be missionaries in such a situation of the world? What can we as Claretians do to protect and to give respect dignity and value to the life. The ministry of Jesus was very different from that of the others. Father Claret also wanted to be like Jesus in his ministry to give life to the lifeless persons. Jesus behaved strangely in order to give respect, dignity and value to the poor of this society who are considered sinners, oppressed and marginalized.

Would we be able to live as missionaries without feelings ourselves deeply affected by this situation? The life that is referred in the gospel is one of the great words of the scripture. This life is energy, the opposite of perish, deliverance from condemnation and death, and life

is found only in God. God is the source and author of life and it is God who has appointed Jesus Christ to bring life to man.

Father Claret is also very much conscious about the life of each soul. He wanted to protect them from every evil of the world and from all the violence. And he fought for justice in order to give life. Therefore he quotes many times during his life time 'I loved Justice and hated iniquity; therefore I die in exile". Where are we as Claretians?



Prayers of the faithful:

Response: *Hear Us, O Lord!*

- Abba Father, we strongly believe that you are the source and author of life, protect all the lives that are under many threats and violence in the world. For this we pray to you O Lord.
- Almighty God, we pray for all the Claretian missionaries in all the part of the world that they may become the agents and promoters of human life and give life to others even by sacrificing their life. For this we pray to you Lord.
- Lord, we also pray for all the poor, suffering and sick that they may feel that their lives are respected, valued and dignified in the society where they live. For this, we pray to you O Lord.

OUR FATHER.

CONCLUDING PRAYER.

God our Father,
thank you for making us aware of the human life today in the world.
We realized that you have called us as Claretians
to do the same mission you have give to your only Son Jesus Christ
and to your faithful servant of the Word St. Anthony Mary Claret.
Help us Lord to defend the life
of the defend less to give hope in life to those who are hopeless
and to be comforters to the suffering
by following the footsteps of Father Claret,
we ask this through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

C.Thevarajan Peries CMF.