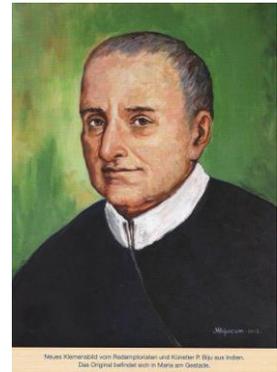CONGREGATIO SS. REDEMPTORIS

Superior Generalis

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Rome, March 15, 2014

Message for the feast of St. Clement Hofbauer, C.Ss.R.
"To preach the Gospel ever anew"

Dear Confreres, Sisters, associates and friends,

During this Year for the Promotion of the Redemptorist Missionary Vocation, the story of St. Clement Hofbauer offers us insights into the remarkable ways in which God calls people to share in the missionary vocation of our Congregation.

Clement Hofbauer was almost 33 years of age when he was accepted into the Redemptorist novitiate, along with his friend Thaddeus Hübl. Although he had a strong sense of vocation to the missionary life and to the priesthood, various obstacles kept disappointing his hopes. Nevertheless, he did not stop searching for a way to respond to what he experienced as the call of God. He studied theology in Vienna, spent time as a hermit and catechist in Tivoli, read spiritual books, developed a deep prayer life, and went on pilgrimage to Rome. It was on this occasion that he met the Redemptorist Missionaries working in the church of San Giuliano and requested admission to the Congregation.

His remarkable story does not end here! In fact, this was just the beginning. Less than a year after their profession as a Redemptorist Missionaries, he and Thaddeus once again crossed the Alps to establish the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer in new regions. Less than two years later, he had established in Warsaw the first house of the Redemptorists outside Italy. His missionary dynamism converted the small church of St. Benno's into a pastoral centre which attracted thousands. Young men joined the Congregation, new foundations were envisioned, social ministry was developed, and new ways of evangelization were fostered. Time and again he repeated: **The gospel must be preached anew, in every age and generation, in a language that ordinary people can understand.**

However, Clement continued to face serious obstacles. His confrere and companion, Thaddeus Hübl, died after a severe beating during a time of persecution. Many of his ministries were shut down by the civil authorities. He experienced lack of support and jealousy from other priests and church officials. Eventually, he and his brother Redemptorists were expelled from Warsaw. For the next twelve years, he attempted to make numerous other foundations. Every one of these initiatives failed. He attracted many young men who desired to enter the Congregation and to give their lives for plentiful redemption in this missionary vocation. He could not establish a novitiate, and they were

unable to live in community. When he died on March 15, 1820, it seemed to some that all his efforts had come to nothing. But God had other plans.

One month after his death, on April 19, 1820, the Emperor allowed the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer to establish foundations in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Soon, those young men who had waited so long to embrace their missionary vocation were admitted to the novitiate. Before long, the Congregation spread from Vienna across Northern Europe, to North America, and then beyond. St. Clement Hofbauer was canonized in 1909, and he was declared the co-patron of Vienna 100 years ago in 1914.

The life and vocation of St. Clement Hofbauer is an important witness to the power of God to transform our failures into opportunities, and to raise up missionary vocations in the most unlikely places. As we celebrate his feast day, we remember his single-minded perseverance and fidelity, along with his great vision and creativity. May God continue to renew our Congregation and our missionary vocation in the spirit of St. Clement. Through the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, may the Redeemer continue to call men and women to share this missionary vocation today. May Mary, our Perpetual Help, always accompany us in the mission.

I wish you a blessed and joyful feast day of St. Clement.

Your brother in the Redeemer,

Michael Brehl, CSsR

Michael Brehl, C.Ss.R.
Superior General