

Rome, 15 March 2024

Feast of St Clement Maria Hofbauer

Missionaries of Hope in the Footsteps of the Redeemer

A YEAR DEDICATED TO FORMATION FOR MISSION

The Lord who instructs us to revive the gift of God that dwells in us

Const. 77-90, GS. 050-085; Mt 10:5-15, Lk 9:1-6, 2 Tim 1:6

DEAR CONFRERES, FORMANDI AND LAY ASSOCIATES OF OUR MISSION,

1. On this day, when we are celebrating the feast of St Clement Maria Hofbauer, we need to remind ourselves that St Clement is an inspiration for our mission. He was not afraid of the time in which he lived nor of the historical obstacles that he faced but turned them into an opportunity for dialogue with all social classes, from the humblest of the poorest, to the nobility, to the middle classes, to intellectuals, to artists, to workers, to students, to teachers, to men, to women, to prelates. He worked with the laity to educate other laity, exercised the apostolate of the pen, and sought to proclaim the Gospel in ever-new ways, which was reflected in his careful preaching and liturgical zeal. He also invested in the formation of children, young people, and adults so that they could grow not only in their faith but also in their humanity.

2. As Heinzmann says:

Hofbauer sought to realize the ideal of a Redemptorist: he longed to be a missionary in the sense of his vocation and of his mission; he feared only one thing: to be unfaithful to it. He did not throw himself into his pastoral work in an absurd frenzy, but as a missionary and as a Redemptorist he placed himself in a turbulent epoch of world history and had the good sense to seek God's will and plans in concrete events and situations. He had the energy not to waste time but to grasp God's timing. He was free enough to shape his method of apostolate because he knew that he was a humble instrument in the hands of the Saviour [...]. He was not intoxicated by his successes, and in the thousand failures and persecutions he remained calm and available. This apostolic man knew that God is present in history and that in him is the fullness of redemption', as the motto of the Redemptorist Congregation says.¹

3. Under the protection of St Clement, we open ***the year dedicated to formation for mission***. *It is a year to become aware of ourselves and to reinvent ourselves as persons, as religious and as a community, immersed in a process of openness to the world and to the Lord who*

¹ HEINZMANN, José. *Nuevo anuncio del Evangelio: Clemente María Hofbauer*. Bogotá: Editorial Kimpres Ltda, 2008, p. 159. (Proclaim The Gospel Anew: Clement Maria Hofbauer)

calls us, in dialogue about our formation processes, starting with initial formation with the help of the Secretariat for Formation; and also opening spaces for reflection and action in the area of ongoing formation, which is quite scarce in our Congregation. In many (Vice-) Provinces there is still no programme of ongoing formation. There is a preference for participation in diocesan formation events, which are very important, but they do not have as a reference point the themes proper to our Redemptorist charism and life, and this, undoubtedly, gradually erodes our Redemptorist identity.

4. The question that each one of us needs to ask ourselves with great sincerity, without blaming anyone, is this: *Is formation important for my personal, community and missionary life? How do the problems of postmodern society challenge me to be formed? How do I contribute to the initial formation of my (Vice-)Province through my efforts to maintain ongoing formation?* This should be a concern for all of us, both those professed and those in formation, in our different stages of formation. The XXVI General Chapter affirmed that “the promotion of vocations and formation, both initial and ongoing, must be a fundamental priority of the Congregation” (*Final Document*, n. 40).
5. I ask the (vice) provincial, regional, missionary, community superiors and formators to encourage the religious communities and those in formation to promote formative encounters which help us to deepen our approach to the mystery of the Redeemer and at the same time to broaden our horizons of Redemptorist life and mission. *I exhort every confrere, religious community and house of formation to intensify and deepen these experiences throughout the year.* Although this aspect is being given a greater emphasis, it does not mean that the other themes² are being forgotten, for they are all connected with each other. For example, community life is linked to formation, mission, leadership, and spiritual life, as well as to the other themes.
6. This year is an invitation *to draw closer to the Lord in the manner of a disciple, who instructs us to rekindle the gift of God that dwells in us, so that we may joyfully proclaim the fullness of salvation. If we want to be missionaries* (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 273), we must first learn from the Saviour who one day touched our hearts and called us to be with Him. Otherwise, our mission will be a matter of doing things that, in time, will become empty and meaningless. As a starting point, I suggest the following texts: Const. 77-90, EG; 050-085; Mt 10:5-15, Lk 9:1-6, 2 Tim. 1:6, which invite us to take up our formation process as a personal and community mission which at the same time enables us for the mission of the Redeemer.
7. Taking advantage of this Year of Formation, the General Government, in order to give concrete expression to decision n. 30 of the XXV General Chapter and to respond to the demands of the XXVI General Chapter on Formation for Mission (*Final Document*, nos. 40-48; Decisions 1-4; *Directives* 22-36), and at the same time taking into account the urgent needs of the Congregation, invites all of us to make a serious evaluation of all levels of formation, both initial and ongoing, in our Units and

² Themes for each year: community, formation, mission, leadership, spirituality and life review.

Conferences throughout the Congregation. The purpose of this evaluation is to examine the quality of our Redemptorist formation: *Is our formation truly Redemptorist in its essence, nature, scope and purpose? Is it formation for mission?*

8. Some things cause concern, for example, the constant changes of formators which make it difficult to accompany those in formation; the lack of continuity in the formation programmes from one stage to another according to the *Ratio Formationis*, a vocation promotion which does not speak of the vocation of the Brothers, the lack of a formation programme in many houses of formation, leaving it solely in the hands of the institutes or faculties of theology. It is not the primary duty of the institute or faculty of theology to offer formation on consecrated life and the charism of the Congregation; *this is the duty of the house of formation!*
9. Many confreres confuse ongoing formation with specialization. Ongoing formation goes beyond this. It is for life. *Ongoing formation is the process that begins when we enter a house of formation and develops throughout our lives from a personal, fraternal and (vice-)provincial point of view. It is a dynamic of personal conversion, of understanding and deepening our consecration as a disciple responding to the Lord who calls, and of commitment to his mission for the people of God. Therefore, it goes beyond intellectual and academic formation. It touches every area of our lives. If this is so, then the quality of our initial formation depends on the quality of our ongoing formation. For us, ongoing formation is not a mere appendix; it is intimately linked to our very being and to our mission.*
10. Formation is not only at the intellectual level. It is about nourishing the spirit to strengthen our missionary zeal and our joy in being Redemptorists (cf. Const. 2, 20, 33, 80). It is therefore important to take advantage of this time to deepen our rich Redemptorist spirituality. *How can we create a strong and creative identity that is not a repetition of the past, but a renewal of our mission, if we do not take as our point of study Sacred Scripture, the writings of our saints, our Constitutions and the many writings of so many confreres who have delved deeply into Redemptorist themes? In Redemptorist life there is no mission without community, experience of God and ongoing formation.*
11. It is good to ask ourselves: *have our communities been places of formation? Do our houses of formation make our young people aware that they need to be formed, not only for the religious profession or the priestly ministry, but to be free and faithful in Christ (cf. Gal 5:1) and bearers of a charism which, without losing its originality, can be experienced, interpreted and shared with the men and women of our time?* For us, therefore, formation is not only something that qualifies us from a ministerial point of view, but it nourishes our vocation to be the successors of the Redeemer in today's world, to be incarnated in him and to be at the side of the poorest and most abandoned. Only in this way can we be the light of the world (cf. Mt 5:14).
12. In a context of so many crucial questions in different areas of human life, to take just one example, in the field of morality and bioethics (new family models, sexuality, etc.), *if we are not up to date, we are doing the People of God a disservice. It is a question of personal and collective conscience as formators of conscience.* We will not have magical and universal answers, but if we at least acquire the ability to dialogue and to listen to our interlocutors, this

is already a great step. In this sense, it is important that our (Vice-) Provinces and Regions draw up their annual programme of ongoing formation and that the communities also take up this task at the local level in order to address the challenges they face.

13. Like St Clement, we must contribute to the formation of our Lay Associates and Oblates so that they too can be evangelisers in the reality in which they live. They can contribute to our formation, both through their professional skills and by their way of living the Gospel. *Our charism is an inexhaustible source, it is a gift of the Spirit given to us, and we must share it with the laity as a way of life and mission, so that together with us they may form a missionary body that radiates the Saviour in the world.*
14. Finally, I would like to highlight some of the fruits of ongoing formation as being personal, community and missionary:
 - a) It draws us out of our superiority complex thinking that we already know everything and that we do not have to update ourselves.
 - b) It broadens our vision of the world, so that we do not see reality from only one point of view, but read the signs of the times and dialogue with current cultural contexts.
 - c) It enables us to grow in maturity and helps to renew in us the charism of the founder, so that we can live it and pass it on to new generations as a treasure given to us by the Spirit.
 - d) It helps us to understand and consolidate our Redemptorist identity based on the mystery of Christ the Redeemer who sustains and nourishes our consecration.
 - e) It calls us to pastoral charity towards our interlocutors, who deserve the best of our reflection, with a simplicity of language, but with a spiritual and theological depth that touches and transforms the human heart.
 - f) It provokes us to a rethinking of new methods of mission and of our language, based on our charism and our spirituality.

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May St Clement and our Mother of Perpetual Help, Mother of Wisdom, help us to be true disciples and missionaries of hope in the footsteps of the Redeemer.

Fraternally in Christ the Redeemer,

Fr. Rogério Gomes, C.Ss.R
Superior General

Original: Spanish