



Journeying with Claudine- a woman of faith, pardon, communion...

6th October 2017

*God calls Abram "Leave your country...
and go to the land I will show you." **Gen 12:1-3***

'Mary hurried to the hill country ...and greeted Elizabeth' Lk1:39

Welcome address:

On behalf of the General Govt, I wish to welcome each one of you, from far and near to the Opening of the historic celebrations of the Bicentenary of our beloved Congregation. Let this be an occasion to: i) concelebrate with Claudine her **YES** of the 6th October 1818, ii) rededicate ourselves to the charism entrusted to her, and iii) avail of this, as an opportunity to grow as one apostolic body responding prophetically to the needs of today.

At the outset, I take this opportunity to thank each one of you from all the provinces, for your presence here. It means so very much to us. A special thanks to our dear Sr. Irene Rodrigues RJM- General Councillor for Asia, the 3 provincial govts. of India, the communities of Agra and all the sisters for the tireless and meticulous preparation for this event. Everything from the tiniest to the biggest detail has been prepared with much love, enthusiasm and joy...Thank you.

We have among us Fr. Olivier Velu, a descendent of the family of St. Claudine – the great, great, grand nephew of our Foundress...His presence enhances our bonds without dear Claudine! He belongs to the Diocese of Lyon and it was the idea of the Cardinal of Lyon, Msgr. Philippe Barbarin, to send his representative.

An excellent choice. Welcome Fr. Olivier.

We also have the joy of having our dear Brothers of the Sacred Heart, Br. Paul Montero and Br. Marcel Real Riopel. Special thanks to the Superior General, Br. Jose Ignacio who made this possible. Welcome to our dear Brothers – Paul and Marcel.

Our Congregations share a common director, no other than Fr. Coindre. There is no doubt that Fr. Coindre played an important role in the life of St. Claudine, he guided her but, he trusted her and gave her the freedom, to let the Congregation evolve in the way the Spirit led her, which was very wise and benevolent of him.

Present among us is an important personage, a dear friend and benefactor of the JM's, Ms Monique Bollaerts and her son Thomas.

Without her unflinching support we would not have been able to carry on many of the apostolic works in India. Thanks you Ms Monique we are delighted that you and Thomas are with us. Welcome.

From among our JM family we are fortunate to have: 2 of our former Superior Generals- Sr. M. Lourdes Rossell RJM and Sr. M. Angeles Alino RJM both women of vast experience and wisdom. We miss the presence of Sr. M. Aurora Trallero RJM.

Srs Janice Farnham RJM and Junkal Guevera RJM will present papers during this conference.

We also have our Indian missionaries – past and present, with the exception of dear Sr. Vianney George.

We are delighted to have you all with us – a warm welcome.

I believe Claudine and our First Mothers are present here with us in spirit, at this memorable celebration occasion.

Thank you one and all, for your presence, here in Agra.

Why is Agra important to the RJM's?

Sr. Gabriela Maria wrote, *'The Congregation owes its preservation to the Indian Mission and to the intervention of the Foundress who continued her work as Superior in heaven.*

First: we are from the beginning a missionary congregation – missionary in the sense sent to work within the country and also ad gentes – going out of one's country.

Wednesday, the 14th July, 1841, is a red letter day in our history, M. Rossat, Vicar General of Gap, came to propose to our Reverend Mother Saint Andrew, that we should accept a mission in the East Indies. On behalf of Msgr. Borghi, Bishop of Agra, he put forward a very tempting and pressing proposal to her: Christian education, values, and a professional training, exactly as was the vision, mission statement of the sisters. Many nuns volunteered to go to this distant and unknown land. Only six were chosen – the number specified by Msgr. Borghi – and they set sail from Marseille on 27th January, 1842. For the Congregation, this marked the beginning of a momentous era, those valiant followers of Claudine, who were imbued with her spirit and were ready to share it far and near.

Hence, in our constitution we have in article C 6: *'the missionary spirit has characterized it from the very beginning'*.

Secondly: that our Constitutions obtained its approbation, without the customary Laudatory Brief. The decree of approbation, signed by Cardinal Orioli, dated 21st December 1847, announcing the good news to the Superior General, Msgr. Isoard, Auditor of the Rota, wrote:

"Reverend Mother: It gives me great pleasure to inform you that, contrary to the usual custom of the Holy See, your request has been granted in extensor; as a general rule the

Holy See grants only a Laudatory Brief in response to a first petition for approbation. In departing from its usual procedure, the Sacred Congregation wished to express its recognition of the remarkable growth of your Institution, the good works it has already done and those it is called upon to do in the Master's vineyard.

Be of good heart, then; your zeal is already being rewarded in this life, but a far greater reward awaits you in Heaven."

Third:Msgr. De Bonald abandoned the idea of amalgamationwith another congregation, and from then on, until his death, he witnessed the Congregation's remarkable development, with appreciative admiration and gave it his wholehearted support.

Finally, we learn that numbers is not all that counts. In 1841, there were -76 religious, 6 novices and 6 Postulants in France, but they went out adgentes, not only to India but to Spain, Canada etc in quick succession...what counts is zeal, perseverance, passion for mission and an infinite trust in a Good God.

Yes, because of the above, Agra is sacred ground; **Agra isthe Promised land** as our First Mothers would say; this is where the story of the expansion of our charism unfolds. Hence, for the above reasons Agra holds a special place in our JM History, and your presence here is confirming this statement.

I therefore invite each one of you to make the best of this time...may we enter into this experience profoundly dear sisters and friends. I wish dearly that this is an important milestone not only for the congregation, but for each one of us...may this time be a time of an **After and a Before**,....a conversion experience like that of St. Paul...he was never the same after his encounter with the Lord...so let us enter into this this **Journey with Claudine – a woman of faith, pardon and communion**, with a heart and ear, open to what the Lord wants of us.

May St. Claudine accompany us on this journey undertaken in her name and in her honour.

We invoke the name of Jesus for our Journey in our Indian traditional manner.

Lighting of the Lamp:

Opening Hymn: Bhajan(as the lamp is being lit)

YesuYesuYesu... YesuYesuYesu...

YesuYesuYesu... (2) JesusJesusJesus ... JesusJesusJesus ...JesusJesusJesus ... (2)

- | | | |
|----|---|---|
| 1. | YesumeraJeevan
JeevanmeraYesu
Yesumerajeevan | Jesus is my life
My life is Jesus
Jesus is my life |
| 2. | Yesumerashakti
Shakti meraYesu
Yesumerashakti | Jesus is my power
My power is Jesus
Jesus is my power |
| 3. | Yesumera shanti
Shanti meraYesu
Yesumera shanti | Jesus is my peace
My peace is Jesus
Jesus is my peace |



4. AaoYesuaao
Dil me mere aao
Yesu mere aao

Come Jesus come
Come in my heart
Come my Jesus

Dear friends, life is often compared to a journey from birth to death.

You have each undertaken a long journey to be here...

Yes, in our Christian tradition, journeys have often been the result of a God experience.

In the O.T. we have Abraham...God called him to leave his country and his people to the land that He would show him, and he did just that...he left all and undertook this long journey...

In the N. T. Mary after the powerful experience of the Annunciation, went on foot to the hill country of Judea to be with her cousin Elisabeth... she went out of herself and journeyed...and her son Jesus followed suit, travelling from town and village being the compassion of God...

Today we reflect on the theme “**Journeying with Claudine**”. It is a journey, which began on 6th October 1818, and hopefully, one that will continue for a long time to come.

Claudine undertook many a journey either on foot or by carriage. But, it was a **bullock cart** that brought our first missionaries to this place in Agra.

To undertake a long distant journey, one needs a vehicle; be it a boat, a car, a bus, a scooter, a train, a plane, a carriage or even a bullock cart !!!.

The common thread connecting them all, is the **wheel**.

Today, let us reflect on the symbolism of the **wheel**. It is no coincidence that at the centre of the Indian National Flag, we have the wheel- the Ashoka Chakra.

The wheel is one of the great inventions in history. From ancient times till today, the wheel is an integral part of transportation. The wheel, takes us in all directions: forward, backward, inward and outward.

Claudine journeyed both inward and outward. Some of the outward journeys were:

- During the revolution to meet her brothers in prison,
- Accompanying them on the way to their execution
- Serving those suffering during and after the revolution
- From her home to PierresPlantees on the dark night of 5th October 1818
- From Lyon to Monistrol for her First Profession
- To visit her sister Elisabeth and the list could go on and on...

But Claudine also undertook many an inward journey, some of which were in absolute darkness. One of the significant inward journeys culminated in her YES, on that obscure night of the 5th October 1818, where the Congregation began in poverty, simplicity and uncertainty...with one woman, one orphan, and one loom, and she says it was the most dreadful night. Fortunately, she did not give in to that desolation, but trusted in God and continued. That 'Yes' of Claudine reminds us of the 'Yes' of Mary... both brought forth new life.

This 'Yes' was not the only yes Claudine whispered. Many subsequent yeses followed,...till her death bed, when her inward journey culminated in that last and final YES with the words: HOW GOOD GOD IS.

Today we also bring to mind the 'Yes' of the First Group of Religious who expressed their inward 'YES' in an outward journey by leaving their homeland and journeying to India... Over the past 200 years, many daughters of Claudine have undertaken similar inward and outward journeys, responding with a 'YES' to the charism, by journeying to various countries with great missionary zeal.

Today the torch has been passed on to us. We, the daughters of St. Claudine have also undertaken an inward journey that led us to say our YES, which implies many an outward journey as well.

Therefore, all of us consciously or not are on a journey constantly – inward and outward and the wheels keep us going.

Let us reflect a little more on the various parts of the wheel, which are very symbolic for us on this occasion.

The hub, the center is rigid and the strength of the wheel depends on the center, which holds all the spokes and the outer rim together. For us, the center is our God experience and our charism, which holds all of us together. Without the centre there can be no wheel.

The spokes are important, and there are many in a wheel. The spokes can be compared to each province, community and ministry, which are held together by the Charism and Spirituality of our Congregation. Even if one spoke is dysfunctional, weak or fragile, by and by, the entire wheel will eventually give way.

The outer rim touches mother earth. It is in direct contact with a multitude of terrains: sandy deserts, grassy plains, mountain stretches.

The outer rim could represent each individual sister who directly touches the lives of people. They go to the peripheries, are in direct contact with people, mother earth, and all of creation, encountering different cultures, languages, regions and religions.

When healthy all is well, but sometimes, the outer rim of the wheel can be: chipped by egoism, individualism, arrogance...and then the wheel gets stuck in the mire.

The center and the periphery are related, via the spokes. Any disconnection from the center, or from one another, brings any journey to an abrupt end. Thus it is vital to be whole, connected, together, each functioning well, for the journey to reach its final destination.

The wheels of JM history go on, as we continue to ***Journey with Claudine***, in 28 different countries, all rooted and grounded in one and the same Charism.

May this gathering here in Agra, be a time in our history, when each one of us goes back touched, different, a before and an after....

May it be a time for the Congregation, where we carve out a renewed path on this journey, so that we can be prophetic witnesses of the forgiving goodness of God, in the world of today, bringing - healing, reconciliation and pardon; reaching out to the miseries of our time; and working towards a more just and humane society.

I would like to conclude with the words of our Holy Father Pope Francis: *Recounting our history is essential for preserving our identity, strengthening our unity as a family and our common sense of belonging.*

As we listen with much interest to the presentations of each province, prepared with much love, may we draw some lessons for the future. Hindsight is always helpful for a smoother inward and outward journey.

Let us also remember > History is not the past, it is the present, we carry our history within us, WE are our HISTORY. (movie – I am not your Negro-James Baldwin)

With these sentiments, let us listen attentively with our hearts, to our sacred history. Yes, the Provinces will undoubtedly present their outward journey, but may this be an occasion for us to make the inward journey and listen to the Spirit calling.

May we make this journey with Jesus, Mary and Claudine.

Thank you and Happy Listening.

I offer a poem written by our Indian Nobel Laureate **Rabindranath Tagore**, for your reflection later.

JOURNEY HOME by the Indian poet, Rabindranath Tagore

The time that my journey takes is long and the way of it long.

I came out on the chariot of the first gleam of light, and pursued my voyage through the wildernesses of worlds leaving my track on many a star and planet.

It is the most distant course that comes nearest to thyself, and that training is the most intricate which leads to the utter simplicity of a tune.

The traveler has to knock at every alien door to come to his own, and one has to wander through all the outer worlds to reach the innermost shrine at the end.

My eyes strayed far and wide before I shut them and said 'Here art thou!'

The question and the cry 'Oh, where?' melt into tears of a thousand Streams and deluge the world with the flood of the assurance 'I am!'

As the wheel of time turned we have moved ahead.