



Clelia
**MISSIONARY
YEAR**
To Love Is Our Mission



GFASC – Missionary Year – Reflection 2

EVANGELIZING WITH TENDERNESS

“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.” (Mt 11: 28-30)



The Congregation of the Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was founded in Viareggio, Italy, in 1894 by Mother Clelia Merloni. The Apostles are spread throughout the world to make the Heart of Jesus known and loved. Today the sisters work in 15 nations: Italy, Brazil, United States, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Albania, Switzerland, the Philippines, Mozambique, Benin, Haiti, Ireland, and Portugal. They serve in

education, health care, and in various forms of pastoral ministry and missionary activity.

Evangelizing with tenderness and goodness was Clelia’s secret. The goodness of her heart was immediately evident in her first experiences in educational ministry. Toward the orphaned girls entrusted to her, she acted with all the tenderness and wisdom of a mother. She acted most tenderly with the weakest; she would deprive herself even of necessities. The depth of her tenderness is expressed very well in her own words: ***“I embrace you with a hundred hearts.”***

“Practice charity with a kind and peaceful countenance, with an affable manner, with gentle and cordial speech” (Spiritual Anthology, pp. 88-89).

Formed by Mother Clelia at the school of the Heart of Jesus and animated by the zeal of the first Apostles, we all are called to witness to the tenderness of Christ’s Heart with our works, words, and actions.

POPE FRANCIS

Tenderness can indicate precisely our way of receiving divine mercy today. Tenderness reveals us, next to the paternal face, the maternal face of God, of a God Who loves mankind, Who loves us with a love infinitely greater than that which a mother has for her own son (cf. *Is* 49: 15). Whatever happens, whatever we do, we are certain that God is near, compassionate, ready to be moved for us. Tenderness is a beneficial word, it is the antidote to fear with regard to God, because “there is no fear in love” (1 *Jn* 4:18), because trust overcomes fear. To feel loved, therefore, means learning to trust in God, to tell Him, as He wishes: “Jesus, I trust in You.”

...The Cross is in fact the seal of divine tenderness, which is drawn from the wounds of the Lord. His visible wounds are the windows that open onto His invisible love. His Passion invites us to transform our heart of stone into a heart of flesh, to become passionate about God. And about man, for the love of God.... When man feels truly loved, he feels inclined to love. Besides, if God is infinite tenderness, then man too, created in His image, is capable of tenderness. Tenderness, then, far from being reduced to sentimentalism, is the first step to overcome the withdrawal into oneself, to leave behind the self-centredness that disfigures human freedom. God’s tenderness leads us to understand that love is the meaning of life. Thus we understand that the root of our freedom is never self-referential. And we feel called to pour into the world the love received from the Lord, to channel it into the Church, in the family, in society, to interpret it in serving and giving ourselves. All this not out of duty, but out of love, out of love for Him, by Whom we are tenderly loved. (*September 13, 2018, Conference on the Theme "The Theology of Tenderness of Pope Francis"*)

Family tenderness is the bond uniting parents to each other and they with their children. Tenderness means to give with joy and stir in the other the joy of feeling loved. Tenderness is expressed in a particular way by exercising loving care in treating the limitations of the other... Tenderness in family relationships is the daily virtue that serves to overcome inner conflicts and disagreements in relations with others. (*October 24, 2015, Final Report of the Synod of Bishops on the Family, 88*).

PRAYER - Psalm 145

I will extol you, my God and king;
I will bless your name forever and ever.
Every day I will bless you;
I will praise your name forever and ever.
Great is the LORD and worthy of much praise,
whose grandeur is beyond understanding.
One generation praises your deeds to the next
and proclaims your mighty works.
They speak of the splendor of your majestic glory,
tell of your wonderful deeds.
They speak of the power of your awesome acts
and recount your great deeds.
They celebrate your abounding goodness
and joyfully sing of your justice.
The LORD is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in mercy.
The LORD is good to all,
compassionate toward all your works.
All your works give you thanks, LORD
and your faithful bless you.
They speak of the glory of your reign
and tell of your mighty works,
Making known to the sons of men your mighty acts,
the majestic glory of your rule.
Your reign is a reign for all ages,
your dominion for all generations.
The LORD is trustworthy in all his words,
and loving in all his works.
The LORD supports all who are falling
and raises up all who are bowed down.
The eyes of all look hopefully to you;
you give them their food in due season.
You open wide your hand
and satisfy the desire of every living thing.
The LORD is just in all his ways,
merciful in all his works.
The LORD is near to all who call upon him,
to all who call upon him in truth.
He fulfills the desire of those who fear him;

he hears their cry and saves them.
The LORD watches over all who love him,
but all the wicked he destroys.
My mouth will speak the praises of the LORD;
all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever.

Pledge: Mother Clelia exhorts us to treat everyone with gentleness, tenderness, and charity. She counsels us to avoid harsh words and actions. She teaches us to bring the tenderness of the Heart of Jesus to all.

- How do I live tenderness in my family, my work, and with others? Am I committed to doing this?
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A Story of a Sheep (BRUNO FERRERO)

As soon as the sheep was created, she discovered that she was the weakest of all animals. Her heart pounded with constant fear of being attacked by other animals, all of them stronger and more aggressive than she. She did not know how to defend herself. She turned to the Creator and told him of her anguish. "Do you want something with which to defend yourself?" the Lord asked her lovingly. "Yes." "What about a pair of sharp teeth?" The sheep shook her head. "How would I graze on the more tender grass? Plus, that would make me seem like a bully." "Would you like strong claws?" "Oh no! I would be tempted to use them wrongly." "You could poison someone with your saliva," the Lord continued patiently. "No way. I would be hated and ostracized like a serpent." "What about two strong horns?" "Ah, no! Who would pet me anymore?" "But to defend yourself you need something that will hurt whoever attacks you..." "Hurt someone? No, I can't do that. I'll stay the way I am." We are in a certain sense like small animals without even fur or sharp teeth to defend ourselves. It is not wickedness that protects us, but humanity: the capacity to love others and to accept the love that others want to give us. It is not our harshness that warms us at night but tenderness, which causes others to want to keep us warm. **Our true strength is our tenderness.**

"Bring to all the tenderness of the Heart of Jesus" (Clelia Merloni)

