

23. October 2025
THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS
“Saint Anthony Mary Claret:
a burning torch of love”

What would Spain be without Saint Anthony Mary Claret?

In 1861, a prominent anarchist wrote, *"If it hadn't been for Father Claret, Catalonia would have understood the message of the revolution. With his thousands of extraordinarily popular sermons, this tireless man managed to re-Christianize the whole of Catalonia. After completely transforming Catalonia, he did the same in the Canary Islands and, later, in Cuba, where Catholicism was dying out. But that was not the worst of it. His time in Madrid was a catastrophe for the Spanish revolutionary movement."*

Who was this man who exerted so much influence and had such a profound impact on the political arena despite not being a politician himself?

Antonio María Claret was born in Sallent, near Barcelona, in 1807. Like his brothers, he helped in his parents' textile business and demonstrated such talent in his higher studies that he was entrusted with taking over a large company. However, the Lord had heard his prayers, as from a very young age he had asked for the grace of the priesthood.

He was ordained a priest in 1835. Initially, he went to Rome, where he joined the Society of Jesus. Illness prevented him from continuing there, though, and he had to return to Spain. Upon returning to Catalonia, he devoted himself to popular missions. Having been named an "Apostolic Missionary," he was sent *"like a light cloud, driven only by the Holy Spirit, to bring the blessed rain of God's Word to arid and barren areas,"* as it was said of him.

In fact, he traveled on foot during his missions and never accepted money or gifts, only the food offered to him. His sermons had a profound impact and led to numerous conversions. He spent many hours in the confessional, and people flocked to hear him. Extraordinary gifts were also manifested in his life. For instance, he could tell if someone was living in mortal sin. As he himself stated: *"The Lord has granted me the grace to know the interior of man as if I were reading a book."* Healings took place through his prayers, and God granted him the gift of prophecy.

It wasn't long before persecution came, and terrible smear campaigns were launched against Father Antonio María. During his seven years of ministry in Catalonia, he had become the most widely read religious writer of his time and had founded a religious library and other confraternities and institutes. Because Spain had become too dangerous, his bishop sent him to the Canary Islands. There, too, his work bore abundant fruit. After returning to Spain, he founded the Congregation of the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary together with five priests. This congregation is known today as the "Claretian Missionaries." It was a desire he had carried deep in his heart. Later, he also founded a women's branch.

He was appointed archbishop of Santiago de Cuba, where he did fruitful work, survived an assassination attempt, and was healed by the Virgin Mary. Once again, he was the target of terrible slander.

His ministry constantly developed new facets. Surprisingly, Father Antonio was summoned to the Spanish court by the young Queen Isabella II to oversee her and her young daughter's spiritual direction. The saint accepted the appointment on the condition that he not get involved in politics and be allowed to devote his free time to other activities. He also refused to live in the palace.

His work at the royal court was extraordinarily fruitful. Under his influence, the queen separated from her lover and resumed her married life with her legitimate husband. The customs of the entire court changed so much that Father Claret's presence in Madrid was disastrous for the revolutionaries, as the aforementioned anarchist stated.

There is much to say about the popular missions that the saint carried out, his travels with the royal couple to spread the gospel, and his dedication to bringing people to the faith. In 1868, when the revolution broke out in Spain, he moved with the royal couple to France. After an extremely fruitful life for the Kingdom of God and a serious illness, he died in 1870 in a Cistercian abbey in France.

What was the secret to his fruitful life? Let Fr. Anthony Mary tell us himself:

"What has always moved me most is contemplating Jesus Christ going from one place to another, preaching everywhere—not only in large towns but also in villages—even to a single

woman, as he did with the Samaritan woman. He did this despite being tired from the journey, tormented by thirst, and at an inopportune hour for both him and the woman."

In his book *The "Love of Christ Urges Us"*, St. Anthony Mary Claret writes:

"The fire of love acts in a servant of the Lord like the fire in a railroad locomotive or the engine of a steamship, mobilizing everything with great ease. What good would all the machinery be if there were no fire or steam? It would be useless. So what good is it for a priest to have completed all his academic training, earned a doctorate in theology, and obtained all rights if he does not have the fire of love? Nothing! He is of no use to others because he would be like a locomotive without fire. Instead of helping, he would hinder."

Let us honor the grace of God in this saint and thank Him for his radiant witness to the Lord's love for all people.

Note: In today's "3 Minutes for Abba," I took the favorite prayer of St. Anthony Mary Claret as my starting point:

<https://en.elijamission.net/category/3-minutes-for-god-the-father/>

Meditation on today's reading: <https://en.elijamission.net/2023/10/26/>

Meditation on today's Gospel: <https://en.elijamission.net/2021/10/21/>