

Reflections of the life of St. Anthony Mary Claret

2222222 - always travelling by foot

We are also told that when Claret was giving his missions, always travelling by foot, ‘the pastor and the people would go out to meet him in procession, with the children in the lead singing – this was the “publicity” he received.’

When he was travelling through the Canary Islands giving his missions, the author talks of people coming out to meet Claret forcing him to stay in their own town and then accompanying him the next morning to the following town. Huge crowds, many travelling great distances attended to hear him preach, often the churches weren’t big enough and he would speak from balconies overlooking squares in the towns. They would queue for hours to go to Confession.

There are accounts telling of crowds going out to meet him in procession, singing and saying the rosary, firing salutes and making arches of palms to welcome him and the words he would bring them. I’d like to share a personal reflection with you.

When I read about Claret’s welcome by the villagers and townsfolk, I immediately had very strong memories of 35 years ago when, in 1976, I was fortunate to be able to visit the Claretian Mission in Guatemala. When we travelled to a village called Benque, about 4 hours walk from the then nearest road, Chris was met immediately by several catechists and other from Benque and as we walked many more people came out to join us on the path. I could hear the firecrackers which were being set off to let everyone know that the priest was on his way, and when we arrived in the village there were, it seemed, hundreds of people waiting to greet Chris and thus the Gospel message that he would be bringing to them. The wooden church doorway was decorated with palm-type leaves and the sense of welcome and celebration was overwhelming. When Mass was celebrated, it had to be outside due to the numerous people that had travelled to be there. Many of them had travelled miles to attend Mass, to receive Communion, to have their children baptised – basically to welcome and celebrate their faith. I remember feeling really humbled by the effort these ordinary men, women and children had gone to.

So, you can probably tell why certain aspects of Claret’s travels struck a chord with me.

Monica Walton