

# Fr. General's letter for February 17, 2015

January 25th, 2015 - Rome

L.J.C. et M.I.

Dear Brother Oblates,

I wish all of you a happy Feast Day! On this date in 1826, Pope Leo XII approved our Constitutions and Rules. We are filled with joy and thanksgiving for the grace of our vocation as Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. This year the Church has been convoked to celebrate a special "Year of Consecrated Life" throughout the world. This is another opportunity to appreciate the gift of our vocation as consecrated missionaries and to celebrate our charism as expressed in the Oblate Constitutions and Rules and lived by us today.

I asked everyone at the time of the 2013 Interchapter, and again I request that we all commit ourselves to return regularly to the OMI Constitutions and Rules for reflection and prayer. I invite each Oblate to discover the wealth of meaning contained in the simple and beautiful statements that express our way of life in such a positive way. We will be nourished spiritually and our missionary zeal will be enkindled over and over. In meditating on the various constitutions it is my hope that we will interiorize them and live them more faithfully. This will assist our readiness for the Spirit's work of ongoing formation in our lives, opening us to the grace of a profound personal and community conversion to Jesus Christ as called for by the 35<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of 2010.

Saint Eugene ended the 1825 manuof his Preface to the Constitutions and Rules with these words:

***"But it is not enough for them simply to be convinced of the sublime nature of the ministry to which they have been called. The example of the saints and reason itself make it amply clear that the success of such a holy undertaking as well as the maintenance of discipline in any society make certain rules of life absolutely necessary for unity of thought and action among the members. Such unity is a body's strength, keeping up its fervour and insuring that it lasts.***

***"Wherefore, while pledging themselves to all the works of zeal which priestly charity can inspire - above all, to the work of the missions, which is the main reason for their union - these priests, joined together in a society, resolve to obey the following Constitutions and Rules; by living them they hope to obtain all the benefits they need for their own sanctification and for the salvation of souls."***

Eugene saw this Code of Oblate Life as bringing us together in unity of thought and action for the sake of the mission. This unity was also needed to sustain the fervor of the missionary body so that it would persevere in its availability for the greatest missionary needs of the Church. Holding a common vision of life and mission as expressed in the Constitutions and Rules, and being committed to live this vision, would ensure that the Oblates continue as a robust group of apostles, co-operators with the Savior at the service of preaching the Gospel to the poor. A healthy missionary body, bound together by this Rule of Life, would respond to the signs of the times and would not become stagnant or imprisoned by inertia in merely routine, personal or comfortable ministries. The Founder concluded this Preface to our Constitutions and Rules, resuming that they are a way to holiness for the missionaries themselves and a means for the salvation of God's people. Because of our Rule of Life, Oblates would always be available for the most remote and difficult missions, bringing the joy of salvation to the most abandoned people in the world.

In celebrating the Year of Consecrated Life, the Congregation of Religious has reminded us of the call made by Vatican II to all religious congregations that the Gospel is our first rule of life. The OMI Constitutions and Rules do not replace the Gospel, but specify how Oblates of Mary Immaculate are called to live the Gospel. We could see them as our own family gospel to which we are committed to live with zeal through our oblation. This Oblate Rule of Life expresses for us today the experience of

Eugene de Mazenod and the charism the Spirit inspired him to incarnate in a religious missionary family. We believe that the current Constitutions and Rules are a true and faithful expression of how Oblates live the Gospel through their missionary vocation in today's reality. It is important for our renewal that we seriously study them, reflect on them, talk about them and pray with them.

In fact, our present Constitutions and Rules express this in C#163:

***“The Constitutions and Rules set out a privileged means for each Oblate to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. They are inspired by the charism lived by the Founder and his first companions; also, they have received the approval of the Church. Thus, they allow each Oblate to evaluate the quality of his response to his vocation and to become a saint.”***

We see here an important element, namely that this family gospel is an aid to help us evaluate the quality of our Oblate lives. By meditating on the Constitutions and Rules, we allow them to question us and to call us to change our way of thinking, so that we follow more faithfully in the footsteps of Jesus. Confronting our lives with this Code of Life should inspire us to live more fully and generously our commitment to the poor and most abandoned; to give ourselves more selflessly to our brother Oblates in apostolic community; to dedicate ourselves more deeply to a life of contemplative prayer and all the various aspects of living our faith; and to give ourselves to a more truly prophetic witness of each one of the vows.

C# 163 tells us that our Constitutions and Rules assist us on the way to becoming saints, a desire expressed also by the Founder at the end of the 1825 manuof the Preface. We recognize this holiness and sanctity in brother Oblates who have quietly witnessed a life of generous service to the poor. We know holiness in Oblates who live exemplary charity and patience toward their brothers in apostolic community, even when there might be difficult and challenging people. We have seen real sanctity in Oblates who have lived a beautiful witness to a life of prayer and, by their lives, have called us to pray. We have known the holiness of Oblates who are committed to a life of evangelical poverty with no self-glory. Holiness and sanctity for us are very much incarnated in the ordinariness of everyday life when this is lived with joy, goodness, transparency, self-giving and forgiveness.

My brothers, this is a day for recognizing what a great gift the Spirit has given us through the charism we have received through St. Eugene de Mazenod! The Church has blessed our way of life and we continue as a Congregation to do important missionary work preaching the Gospel of salvation to the poor and most abandoned. We rejoice today and give thanks for the grace of our vocation expressed in our Constitutions and Rules. Let us reflect upon them regularly and discover anew their richness so that we interiorize them more deeply and live them with greater coherence. It is never too late! Our unity in living the Oblate Constitutions and Rules, the faithful expression of the Oblate charism, will give strength to the Congregation and make us more effective missionaries to the poor in today's reality.

I would like to close this letter with C# 168, a wonderful conclusion to our family gospel:

***“Each Oblate through his oblation assumes responsibility for the common heritage of the Congregation, expressed in the Constitutions and Rules and our family tradition. He is exhorted to let himself be guided by these norms in creative fidelity to the legacy bequeathed by St. Eugene de Mazenod.”***

Our future as a life-filled Congregation depends on the decision of each Oblate to live the fullness of our oblation. Let us decide in favour of life for our Congregation by committing ourselves to live united by these Constitutions and Rules. We are sure that if we seek to live this family gospel in our missionary lives, always discerning in apostolic community and with our Superiors, we will live with creative fidelity the charism received from St. Eugene. Please continue to pray that we will be open to the grace of a profound personal and community conversion to Jesus Christ and that the General Chapter of 2016 will be a strong experience of the Holy Spirit.

We are confident that Mary Immaculate is among us as she was in the Cenacle, praying for her Son's disciples, so that we have the inner freedom to be impelled by the Spirit's breath of new life among us.

Happy Feast Day!

*Fr. Louis Lougen, OMI*

*Superior General*

*Rome, Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, January 25, 2015*