

JMJ - Talk 1

August 13th, 2011 - Saint Eugene - Malaga

The Founder of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate was a priest from France named Eugene de Mazenod. He was born in 1782 and died one hundred and fifty years ago this year. All of us here in Málaga preparing for World Youth Day have two things in common: we are Catholics and all of us have been touched by this holy man: Saint Eugene de Mazenod.

It's amazing when you think of it! All of us here have come together because we are connected to the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Somehow in a mysterious way, a French man who died 150 years ago is the reason we are here together in Málaga. And there are thousands and thousands of young people around the world who couldn't come here to Malaga, but whose lives also have been touched by this saint whose life was marked by passionate love for Jesus Christ, for the Church and for the poor.

If Saint Eugene were here today, what would he say to you, this vast and beautiful sea of young faces sitting before me in Málaga right now? He'd have a lot to say, but I'll mention three things.

First of all, he would tell you are loved by Jesus Christ, so open your heart to that love. The young boy Eugene was a member of a noble family. He had to flee from his home and native land when he was ten years old because of the French Revolution. He ran with his family from city to city, just ahead of the armies that wanted to kill the French nobility. It was a life without stability and friends. He spent most of these years with his father and uncles. His parents ended up divorcing and although he tried to get them back together, he failed. It was a great sadness for him. He was 20 years old when he was able to go back to his own country and went to live with his mother, grandmother and sister. He went to parties and dances and as time passed, he felt that something was missing. He wanted to marry a rich girl so that he would not have money worries, but it didn't work out. Eugene's life was very empty and he was drifting with a sense of meaninglessness.

Then, on Good Friday 1807, the young Eugene went into church, and there before the cross on which the Crucified Savior hung, his heart was deeply touched and he was overwhelmed by God's infinite love for himself. He broke down in a flood of tears, feeling totally unworthy and seeing his sinfulness in a vivid way as he experienced God's infinite, tender and personal love. This changed his life.

Saint Eugene would say to all of you, God's beloved young people gathered here in Málaga and throughout the world, that Jesus knows your hearts and all that is in them: your joys and worries, your hopes and fears, your strengths and wounds, your dreams and nightmares. Jesus looks into your eyes and loves you as you are, here, right now, in all the wonder of your being. Saint Eugene would say that Jesus wants to fill you with a deep sense of being loved by God, of being healed by God's love and of being made free so that you can be his witnesses.

This would be the second thing that Saint Eugene would say to you: "Be witnesses of Jesus." When Saint Eugene had come in touch with the love of Jesus, his life began to follow a new path with meaning and happiness. Instead of being self-centered, wrapped up in himself and in his own interests, he changed and began to be other-centered and to serve people, especially the poor and the young people. He started teaching catechism; he began to visit prisoners and to look for what God wanted of him. Because he had experienced the love of God in the cross of Jesus, he was impelled to share this love, he was driven to witness to God's goodness and tell others about this Good News. His heart went out to the young children, to the less fortunate and to the poor. He felt compelled to tell them that in spite of their hard life and their troubles, they were unconditionally loved by God who bestowed upon them their dignity as sons and daughters of God, no matter how they were treated or mistreated.

Saint Eugene would encourage all of you, my young sisters and brothers, to become witnesses of God's love, to think of others and to serve them, especially the poor.

Finally, there was something very urgent in Saint Eugene's life once he discovered Jesus: he desired with his whole heart to become holy. **If Saint Eugene were here speaking to you today, he would say: "Be holy!" "In the name of God, be saints!"** In the midst of all his work as a priest, founder and bishop, the focus of his life was to become holy, transformed by God's grace. I know that he would stand here, look at you with much love and call you to desire holiness in your lives and to do all you are able to do so that God's grace is active in your lives and makes you saints.

What does it mean to be holy or to be a saint? Is a holy person a self-righteous perfectionist, a "goody two-shoes"? Sometimes we think it means to be exceptionally weird or different, kind of strange or bizarre, perhaps boring and sad. Not at all! To be holy is to be a witness of God's love and goodness. It is someone who thinks of others and respects them. It is someone who is in love with God and who lets God's grace transform his/her life. Each person lives holiness in a different way. Saints follow the commandments of God and live the Beatitudes. They pray, read God's Word and participate in the Eucharist and in community. They humbly confess their sins and listen to God speaking in ordinary ways in life. They then speak to God, telling Jesus what's going on in our lives and asking his help for us.

To be holy is to grow in a living friendship with God, to see where I need God's grace to transform me so that my life is one of goodness and love, of generosity and joy. Should I be more thoughtful of others? Should I be more generous? Do I need to reach out to others? Does my family need me? Can I give some of my time to help someone? What am I doing in my parish or community? Should I take more responsibility in the youth group? Do I hurt or laugh at people who are different than I am? Do I hold grudges? Are there people whom I have not, will not or cannot forgive? Am I responsible, truthful, transparent and honest?

Today I hear Saint Eugene saying to you, each young person: **"God loves you; God sends you as witnesses; God wants you to be saints."** May his Mother, Mary, help you to open your hearts to the Lord in this pilgrimage of World Youth Day!