



Edited by Fabio Ciardi

**“Nihil linguendum  
inausum”  
An Oblate Breviary**



Missionarii OMI



Studia 11

Oblatio

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inausum”  
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TRANSLATED BY RONALD LAFRAMBOISE

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# Introduction

**N***ihil liquendum inausum.* “Spare no effort to extend the Saviour’s empire”. With these words, written in 1818, Saint Eugene de Mazenod opened up an unlimited field to the Oblate mission, which seeks to bring the Kingdom of God to the ends of the earth, and a vast field for the gift of self, even up to holiness. This book, which offers some texts of meditation to accompany the members of the Oblate Family throughout the year, wants to be a small contribution to keep alive the commitment to “leave no stone unturned” to fully implement our vocation.

It can be an aid to spend a year as a family, reading, day by day, a thought of Saint Eugene de Mazenod, of our Oblate brothers, of other people who have known and loved the Congregation sharing the same charism, and remembering some of the most significant dates in our history.

Others, before me, have responded to this desire by offering texts for daily meditation, beginning with the three volumes of Fr. Prosper Boisramé, *Méditations pour tous les jours de l’année à l’usage de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Tours 1887. In the introduction to this work, the Assistant General, Fr. Louis Soullier, wrote: “This book [...] was born of a great love for the Congregation. It is a family book that responds to a real need and fills an important gap. Absorbed by the multiple demands of an active life which does not allow us to relax, we have not yet been able to provide ourselves with the instruments of instruction and edification necessary for any Institute. For too long we have lived off the good of others. However excellent that may be, it is always affected by its foreign origin. Our holy Rules do not inspire it; our own spirit cannot find in them the special nourishment it needs. The time has come to free ourselves from a dependence which is not without its drawbacks. This is what Father Boisramé wanted to do regarding the holy exercise of meditation.” (Vol I, p. III-IV).

Fr. Boisramé, who for thirty years was master of novices in Ireland, France and Canada, had few Oblate texts at his disposal to write his work. Since then, literature on the life and spirituality of the Congregation has made great strides, making available to everyone many sources, beginning with the publication of the writings of St. Eugene and his first companions. Today, therefore, it is within everyone's reach to meditate on the texts of the Oblate tradition. However, on the occasion of the bicentennial of our foundation, I had thought it useful to offer a small anthology of texts distributed throughout the year, published in three small volumes in Italian. The English translation appeared, day by day, on the website of the Congregation.

I return here to those texts and have added many others. The result is a new book, almost an “Oblate breviary” to accompany us each day.

The criteria for the choice of the texts are the following:

- Events linked to the life of St. Eugene and the foundation of the Congregation.
- Recollection of the *dies natalis* of the Oblate Blessed, Servants of God, martyrs, and missionaries who left a significant mark on the history of the Congregation.
- Aspects of the Oblate charism and spirituality.
- The celebration of the feast days and liturgical seasons, as well of the saints who have a particular link to the life of the Congregation.

The Oblate Martyrs of Spain are remembered on the day of their birth, although there will be mention of them on the day when their common martyrdom is celebrated. The references are taken from David López Moreno, *El sueño de las espigas. Historia de los mártires oblatos de Pozuelo*, (Oblatio Studia, 9), Roma 2020.

There are only 365 days in the year, too few for a complete presentation of the rich patrimony that our brothers have left us from our origins until today. This is only a little sample that might encourage us to look at our vocation and to help us to pursue with ever new freshness the journey begun on January 25, 1816.

Special thanks to Fr. Ronald LaFramboise who translated this book, to Fr. Isidore Garcia who translated the texts regarding the Martyrs of Spain, and to Fr. Frank Santucci who proofread the drafts.

With gratitude above all to those who have gone before us, who intercede for us, and who wait for us at our final destination.

Fabio Ciardi, OMI





## ABBREVIATIONS

DOV = AOSR, *Dictionary of Oblate Values*, A collaborative work of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate under the direction of Fabio Ciardi, O.M.I., Rome 2000.

Jetté, = Fernand Jetté, *OMI Apostolic Man, A Commentary on the 1982 edition of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules*, General House, Rome 1992.

Leflon = Jean Leflon, *Eugene de Mazenod, Bishop of Marseilles, Founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, 1782-1861*, translated by F.D. Flanagan, omi, Fordham University Press, New York, I, 1961; II, 1966; III, 1968; IV, 1970.

“Missions OMI” = “Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée”, 101 volumes, Marseille 1862, Paris 1863-1902, Liège 1903-1908, Roma 1909-1972.

Rambert = Toussaint Rambert, *Vie de Monseigneur Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod, évêque de Marseille, fondateur de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 2 vol., Mame, Tours 1883.

Rey = Achille Rey, *Histoire de Monseigneur Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod, évêque de Marseille, fondateur de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Tome I, Maison générale, Rome 1928; tome II, Imprimerie Marseillaise, Marseille 1928.

Yenveux = Alfred Jean-Baptiste Yenveux, *Les Saintes Règles de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée...* Nine manuscript volumes, composed between 1878 and 1903.

When there are no particular references to the sources, the texts are accessible in the OMI General Archives in Rome.



# January

*January 1<sup>st</sup>, Holy Mary Mother of God*

## SAINT EUGENE'S GREETINGS

I wish you a happy and holy year as well as all the Fathers and Brothers of your community. These wishes are the renewal of those which I made for you all, the first day of this year when at the holy Altar, I made special mention of each of you. (To Fr. Honorat, January 4, 1844, *Oblate Writings*, 1, p. 69)

\* \* \*

## HOLY MARY MOTHER OF GOD

*With the liturgical reform following the Second Vatican Council, January 1 became the feast of the Mother of God. Here is a reflection by Fr. Gaetano Liuzzo, OMI (1911-2003), Founder of the Secular Institute of the Oblate Missionary Cooperators of the Immaculate (COMI):*

The Council of Ephesus solemnly defined that Mary is the *Theotókos*, that is, the Mother of God, a term that did not indicate a novelty, but confirmed a long held doctrine. It was so deeply rooted in the faithful that, upon its proclamation, a large crowd immediately took to the streets and, with songs and lanterns, carried the Council Fathers in triumph (June 22, 431).

*Mother of God*, of Jesus the Incarnate Word, and therefore ours: the mother of the new humanity created by Christ. That is, *mother of the whole Christ*; mother of that marvelous living organism – the Church – of which Christ is *the head* and we are *the members* animated by his

same Spirit, enlivened by his same life, while each retaining one's own personality.

Tradition, the Council, and the Pope never tire of repeating it to us because it is a sweet and demanding truth: “Mary was a mother to us in the order of grace; being the mother who nourished the Redeemer, she became his generous companion in a most singular way, cooperating in the Savior's work by her obedience, faith and burning charity to restore supernatural life in souls. She is truly the mother of Christ and the mother of humankind. She is truly the mother of Christ's members because she cooperated with charity to the birth of the faithful in the Church.” (RM 22-23; LG 61 e 62). (*Canto di amore. L'Ave Maria dell'uomo di oggi*, Roma 1987, p. 73-74)

\* \* \*

*Since 1968, by the decision of St. Paul VI, this day is also celebrated as the World Day of Peace: “Action on behalf of justice, peace and the integrity of creation is an integral part of evangelization.”* (R 9a)

\* \* \*

*On this day, in 1798, St. Eugene, continuing his journey of exile in Italy, arrived in Naples. He recalls that moment:*

We arrived in Naples on the evening of January 1, 1798. We had left Venice on November 11. So, we came to the end of a journey of fifty-one days. Travel is different today. Our entrance by the Capuan Gate was anything but triumphal. We were packed into a miserable carriage that was not designed to attract the attention of onlookers, and we got down at a hotel to match. It was the Hotel of the Red Hat, but it was not a cardinal's hat.

So, we found ourselves in Naples for a stay of barely a year.... My stay in Naples, the account continues, was for me an oppressive year of very gloomy monotony. I did not have any more my good friends the Zinellis, I no longer had a fixed task, relationships suited to my tastes and inclination. I can say I wasted my time there. Was it my fault? I do not think so.... What a sad existence for a young man of sixteen, to have nothing to do, no idea what to fill his time with, know no one, be

unable to see anything, except the church, where I went to serve my uncle's Mass! The explanation lies in the sad situation to which so many years of emigration had brought us. The money my mother's diamonds had furnished us with had to be eked out. Hence, no teacher. I was too young to be left alone in a town like Naples. (Diary of the Exile in Italy, *Oblate Writings*, 16, p. 64-66)

\* \* \*

BLESSED MANUEL GUTIÉRREZ MARTÍN (1913-1936)  
MARTYR OF SPAIN

*He was born on January 1, 1913, in Fresno del Río (Palencia), from a large family of modest farmers. He had finished the 3rd year of theology. He made his perpetual vows in 1934 and was a subdeacon.*

*He stood out for his gifts as a theater actor, because with his beautiful voice, his oratorical qualities and his resources of a good actor, he drew applause and cheers from everyone in his interpretations. The reports of the formators describe him as a man endowed with a certain talent, balanced, with a good memory and with brilliant results in the exams, with a taste for vocal music. In the community he was docile, affable with everyone, a good companion. Aware of his defects and determined to overcome them, he loved his vocation and the Congregation and was a faithful follower of the Rules.*

*He was shot in the early morning of July 24, 1936, in the Casa del Campo in Madrid, together with six other companions and the father of the family, Cándido Castán. He was 23 years old.*

January 2

THE MARSEILLES MISSION

*The Marseilles mission began on January 2, 1820. This mission opened the city gates to the Missionaries of Provence, and it soon became the center of their missionary expansion, the seat of the General House and the episcopal ministry of St. Eugene. It was the most impor-*

*tant of all the missions preached by the Missionaries of Provence. It was preached in collaboration with 20 Missionaries of France. While the latter occupied themselves with the better-standing classes of society and preached in French, the Missionaries of Provence chose the poorer quarters and preached in Provençal. They were responsible for some 33,000 participants out of 120,000. The Calvary with the huge cross still today reminds the people of Marseilles of that memorable mission.*

J. Pielorz, *Premières missions des Missionnaires de Provence (1816-1820)*, “Missions OMI” 82 (1955), p. 549-561, 641-655.

*Here is what a Marseilles historian wrote about this mission:*

A famous mission, under the direction of Fr. Forbin-Janson, evangelized Marseilles in 1820 [...] The priests of Forbin-Janson were joined by the priests of the Provençal mission, which was under the responsibility of the nephew of the de Mazenod, who later became Bishop of Marseilles. They all worked hard, competing in zeal to cultivate the vineyard of the Lord. The mission, which began on January 2, stirred up religious feelings. The Catholic faith was the basis of a variety of external practices and solemn ceremonies. [...] The planting of the Cross is the ordinary culmination of apostolic missions, but here they wanted something more, because nothing could restrain their enthusiasm. Fr. Forbin-Janson spoke of building a Calvary on the site of the old Accoules church. This idea, that seemed full of poetry, inspiration and greatness, was greeted with enthusiasm. [...] The planting of the sign of Christianity on Marseilles' Calvary was set for February 27. The cross had been placed outside the gates of Aix. [...] The procession began: Rue d'Aix, Place Saint-Michel, the Rue des Petits-Pères, de Meilhan and Noailles avenues, the Canebière. Some pontoons tied together formed a wide raft in the middle of the harbor basin. Here a crew of maritime captains had gathered to wait for the cross, which was then entrusted to them. The procession passed along the route to the sound of music and hymns. The bridges, the masts of the boats, the spars, the quays of the port, windows and even roofs of the houses were filled with spectators, who shouted religious and monarchical cheers. The ladies were waving white handkerchiefs in the general enthusiasm. The cross went towards

the Place de la Bourse, right up to the city hall. The landing was quite a scene! Father de Mazenod, the leader of the Missionaries of Provence, wearing a red cope that added to his imposing stature, was waiting there for the cross, which the master porters then took, forming the company of the last station. De Mazenod gave a speech to the sailors and fishermen in Provençal on the benefits of religion and harmony. The cross was planted on the Calvary at five in the evening. (A. Fabre, *Les rues de Marseille*, E. Camoin, Marseille, t. II, 1868, p. 74-78)

*January 3, The Holy Name of Jesus*

#### LAUDETUR JESUS CHRISTUS

*In the nineteen seventies the feast of the Name of Jesus was suppressed. It was restored to January 3 by Pope John Paul II.*

*The first letter to Father Tempier, October 9, 1815, began with the acronym L.J.C. In the letter of March 20, 1826, after the papal approval under the new name of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, St. Eugene added for the first time, “et M.I.” to the header L.J.C. Since then in response: “Laudetur Jesus Christus”, it became habitual to answer “et Maria Immaculata,” thus summarizing the Christological and Marian dimensions of our Congregation.*

*Here is how Fr. Prosper Boismaré (1831-1903) explains the name of Jesus Christ:*

*Jesus means Saviour. This name comes from heaven. It is the only name by which we can be saved. At this name every knee shall bend in heaven, on earth and in hell. How often have you experienced the mercy and infinite love of Jesus! Thank him for having saved you and removed you from the abyss of sin, the traps of Satan, the chains of your passions and countless dangers of the world. Beseech Him to always be Jesus for you, that is to say to the Savior, *Jesu, sis mihi Jesus!**

*Christ means sacred or one who has received a holy anointing. Jesus was anointed by the Divinity, which, by uniting itself to his humanity, has fully consecrated him, since by this anointing, his soul and his body became the soul and the body of a God. He alone is both king, priest and prophet; only he is the king of kings, his kingdom will have*

no end; he is the only priest, for on Calvary and at the holy altar it is he alone who, through his ministers, offers the Holy Sacrifice; only he is truly a prophet, it is he who has spoken through the prophets, and the future is not hidden from him. Give him the homage to which he is entitled by all these titles. Repeat and repeat again: *Laudetur Jesus Christus!* Saint Paul could not get enough of the sweet name of Jesus. He repeats it two hundred and nineteen times in his Epistles, and the name of Christ four hundred and one times. "Jesus, says St. Bernard, is honey in the mouth, melody to the ear, a thrill of joy to the heart." (*Méditations...*, I, p. 79-80)

\* \* \*

*Bishop J. Jeancard recalls the importance of the Oblate greeting during the missions:*

Early in his work, the venerable Founder, without yet foreseeing the name it would have, ended all the public exercises in the Aix churches and during missions by a pious exclamation, repeated by all present. They would sing in Provencal, and with the ample sonority of that language: "Praised be Jesus Christ eternally and praised be Mary ever Immaculate." (J. Jeancard, *Mélanges, historiques*, p. 271).

G. J. Montmigny, *Laudetur Jesus Christus et Maria Immaculata*, DOV, p. 513-515.

*January 4*

#### SPREADING DIVINE MERCY IN OUR TIMES

*In one of the first studies on the Oblate vocation, Fr. Maurice Bédanger, OMI, (1896-1969), points to Christ the Savior and Mary Immaculate as models of the ministry of mercy.*

For the Oblate of the Rule and tradition, there is a double ideal to in a way incarnate, to reflect in everyday life: the *Savior* of mankind and the Virgin in her *Immaculate Conception*. [...]



Dedicated to the poor following the example of the Savior and under the patronage of the Immaculate, the Oblate is “wanted” by God, “chosen” and “sent” by Him *to spread God’s mercy in our time*. That is the clearest expression of his providential mission. [...]

The Oblate, in fact, was born of a merciful thought, there is no doubt about it: born, in time, out of the compassion of a priestly heart deeply moved by the spectacle of a society horribly ravaged by sin; born, from all eternity, from the divine goodness which focuses on misery, and the least inviting of all miseries, as if happy to exercise itself more, to better express itself, to spread itself. Divine mercy: a complete, full blossoming of God’s goodness. It is this mercy which passes into the man who in his turn is focused on the great distress of the most abandoned souls.

To the one who has thus become, by providential choice, God’s emulator, a most eloquent example is needed, divine mercy in human flesh. That is why the Oblate, this reflection of divine mercy in modern times, is placed by authority *in the school of the incarnate Word*, of the Word precisely considered in his function as *Savior*, with his merciful heart and his merciful works. The friend of the poor, of the abandoned, the apostle of the masses, the Redeemer realized this with every fiber of his being, long before the Oblate and in an infinitely superior way. The missionary of the poor has only to follow in his footsteps to realize himself in his turn.

If the Savior, with his ineffable innerself and his simply perfect examples, is the firstborn of the merciful thought of God, the Immaculate Conception is, for her part, *the most delicious fruit of incarnated mercy*. A creature who can be barely called created, because she is so pure, she owes her purity entirely to the merits of the Redeemer, requiring for this unspeakable purity a “summa” diffusion of his merciful goodness, a superior mode of redemption, more accomplished than our own. That is why she too, although in her own way, stands before us as the *master-piece* of divine mercy and remains the accomplished *model* of all that calls forth in herself the infinite merciful goodness of God in order to repeat it without ever exhausting it. (*Vocation Oblate*, “Études oblates” 3 [1994], p. 94-96)

January 5

SCOLASTICA ANDRICH (1921-2003)  
HONORARY OBLATE

*Scolastica Andrich died on January 6, 2003. She was born March 17, 1921 in Vallada Agordina (BL, Italy) where from an early age she was involved in the Catholic Action movement and the parish. In the shadow of Albino Luciani, then chaplain and later Pope John Paul I, she learned the meaning of humility as a fundamental requirement for those dedicated to the apostolate. Her vocation was "to offer her life for the sanctification of priests." She met the Missionary Oblates in 1968. She noticed that these priests "were living in a different way" and that they "treated her like a sister." From 1974 to 1981, she worked closely with the Oblates in Rome, in their formation houses. On May 18, 1997, the Superior General, Fr. Marcello Zago, awarded her the title of Honorary Oblate. On that occasion she gave the following testimony:*

When the young seminarians of the Oblates arrived at my house in the Dolomites, I trembled because I saw my peace of mind being compromised, but I tried to hide my feelings because of my great reverence for the priesthood. I did not have to do anything for them, but after a few days, I saw them at the fountain struggling with their trousers, because not being accustomed to the mountains they had walked more on their bottoms than with their legs! I tried to help them, and since then... I have washed many trousers!

When these young men left together with the Fathers, we looked forward to their return because we realized that they lived a Christianity that was a little different: they knew how to love everyone and how to love each other. They returned for summer camps and for a few days in the winter. In 1974 I was invited to go to the Oblate community of Marino in Rome. It was hard for me to get used to Rome, accustomed as I was to my hometown where only two or three cars a day went by. Meanwhile I got to know the Oblates better, reading about their works, the life of the founder, and also the life of their missionaries at the North Pole and in Africa. Knowing them, I loved them.

Since that 1968 how many young people have I met and known. I remember them camping in Vallada: they sang, played, worked, but especially prayed, there in the Andrich church, or on the mountain paths. And how many heard the call to give themselves totally to Jesus there.

I pray every day for the entire Congregation, for all the Fathers and Brothers I have known, the ones I have followed with love and who are now in Senegal, Cameroon, Uruguay, Paraguay, Korea, Thailand, Lourdes, Canada... or here in Italy. I have good memories of all of them and it's always a joy when they come to visit us in Marino.

I feel obliged to thank Fr. Zago, the Superior General, for this Oblation which he has given me, for the crucifix he has given me on behalf of the entire Congregation. I'm thinking that perhaps this is a bit His answer, because as a young person I was troubled that I could not be a priest, and He has consoled me and told me that my calling was to help the priests. Now I understand who those priests were to whom the Lord wanted me to dedicate my life. They were, they are, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

*January 6, Feast of the Epiphany*

MARY, STAR OF YOUR MISSIONARY LIFE

*Fr. Fernand Jetté, speaking to the missionaries in Labrador, draws an analogy between the star that guided the Magi and the star that guides the Oblates:*

January 6 is traditionally the feast of the Epiphany, the feast of the manifestation of Christ to the world. It is the feast par excellence of missionaries, the feast of all those men and women who, out of love, dedicate themselves "to proclaiming Christ and his Kingdom to the most abandoned." (C. 5)

This feast remains your feast. You have given yourselves to the Church of Labrador, working for its growth, sharing its joys and sorrows, being close to its people helping them attain "the full consciousness of their dignity as human beings and as sons and daughters of God." (C. 8)

As you proclaim the Gospel to them, you are yourselves being evangelized by them in a certain way. These men and women among whom you are working, by their patience, their spirit of sharing and their faith in God, are helping you to understand in a new way the Gospel that you are preaching. (R. 8)

When we think of the Epiphany, we spontaneously recall the star of the Magi, that mysterious star which led them to Jesus. You, too, have such a star – and a star that is even more rare, more radiant and closer to you than was the star of the Magi. This star is the Blessed Virgin Mary. Mary is truly the star of your missionary life. [...]

As Oblates, as missionaries of the Gospel, the Blessed Virgin is at the very heart of our life. We want to do and achieve all that she did: to welcome Christ fully in the confidence born of faith; to follow him faithfully during our entire lives with perseverance and love; and to give him to people so that he may be their food and thus become for them the source of salvation and resurrection. [...]

Mary's collaboration in redeeming the world was always discreet and yet most intense. She has never sought the first place; she has always been the road that leads to Christ. “Do everything that he tells you!” That was her attitude at the Cana wedding; and, still more profoundly, at the Annunciation: “Be it done to me according to your word!”

In God's hands, Mary was the most perfect instrument for the evangelization of mankind, for she was a model of total availability from the beginning to the very end of her life.

To save our world, God needs our activity; he needs our works, our dedication, and our word; above all, however, He needs our love and our holiness. “We must be truly saints ourselves!” the Founder wrote. “This sums up everything that we could say.”

It is the simplicity of our existence, its transparent clarity and truth which most strongly influences people, and which, in the final analysis, communicates God to people. To participate fully in the mission of Christ the Saviour as Mary did, we must belong totally to the Christ who saves, and, again like Mary, we must love the world he came to save. [...]

Often call to mind the last word of Paul VI to the Oblates on April 19, 1978: “Christ the Saviour always works with those who are his true

disciples and loving sons of his Most Holy Mother.” (*To the Missionaries of Labrador, meeting at Cap de la Madeleine*, January 6, 1982, “OMI Documentation,” June 1982)

\* \* \*

## THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

*The Sunday after the Epiphany the liturgy celebrates the Baptism of Jesus. At his baptism, the Spirit descended upon Jesus; it is the beginning of his prophetic mission: “He sent me to evangelize the poor.” The Directory of Novices, written between the years 1831 and 1835, that the Founder certainly approved and encouraged, presented the devotion to the Holy Spirit this way:*

Among the adorable Persons of the Trinity, they will have a special devotion to the Holy Spirit. It is in fact one of the devotions dearest to interior souls. How could you walk in the way of the Lord, or understand something of the secrets of the spiritual life without the Spirit’s help? It is his prerogative to sanctify souls, for he is not only the source of all graces, but is the grace itself. It is his lights that illuminate the human spirit in what concerns the faith. It is the pure flame of his love that extinguishes the ardor of concupiscence. But it is especially when we want to enter into the interior life, our only life, that we need a special assistance of the Holy Spirit. Only He can guide us on the path that establishes the kingdom of God in the soul. Purity of heart, the spirit of prayer, fidelity to grace are but different forms of the Holy Spirit who takes possession of the soul. The novices will have therefore a special devotion to this adorable Person of the Holy Trinity; they will have a burning desire that He may dwell in their hearts; they will call upon him with frequent sighs and try to faithfully listen to his inspirations, reproaching themselves severely for every negligence. They will be happy to let themselves be charmed by him leaving aside all the delights and repugnance of nature to make way for the promptings of grace.

With regards to external practices in his honor, they will try to pray with great devotion the “Veni Sante Spiritus”, at the beginning of each activity.

It would be good for them to memorize the moving and beautiful hymn of Pentecost “Veni Sancte Spiritus et emitte coelitus”. They could repeat certain verses in the form of an ejaculation during the day. Depending on the circumstances, like when one is sad, for example, they could say “consolator optime”, or in moments of darkness and doubt they could pray for light: “O most blessed light” and so on....

The novices will celebrate with special devotion the Solemnity of Pentecost. To prepare for the feast and observe the octave, they will have a special service in the chapel to honor the Holy Spirit with fervent prayers, asking for a particular grace as necessary.

*January 7*

ERNEST GAUTHIER (1908-1983)  
DOORMAN AT THE OTTAWA SEMINARY

*On January 7, 1983, Brother Gauthier died in Ottawa. A native of North Dakota, he had a difficult childhood and youth because of polio as a child. Because of this disease he had been refused twice by the Oblates, but was finally accepted into the novitiate at Richelieu in Quebec. From the day the college seminary of Saint-Paul in Ottawa opened in 1937 Bro. Ernest, who had just made his vows, was asked to be doorman and receptionist there, a task to which he remained faithful, 24/7, for 46 years. He looked after the many services requested by a large community of young people. Several have said that they turned to him when they had problems and that his influence was more effective than that of the teachers and formators assigned there.*

- Since I cannot do anything else, I was put at the door and left there. There are perhaps some who would like a more modern and intelligent doorman; I have to accept what the good Lord gave me (1965).

- I'm always in the same place; my health allows me to watch the door day and night, doing small services for the future priests. May I be able to do it to the end of my days.

- The duty of the present moment shows me the will of God.

- The saints are not born such; they became one through heroic fidelity to their duty of state.

- I feel responsible for priestly vocations by my prayer and example.

- Lord, knock on my door every day without tiring; let me open it without refusing you anything. May the Blessed Virgin help us to love the divine pleasure more, to seek, to fulfill it faithfully and joyfully.

- I thank God for my vocation as a brother. I know I could not have become a priest, but my duties allow me to serve God and the Church by helping to prepare priests.

- I hope I can serve with blind obedience to the end. Those with whom I share this tell me it is out of fashion. In this matter may I always be original, always patient, courageous, and helpful. I never requested anything nor refused anything. (1981)

A. Nadeau, *Ernest Gauthier, Oblat de Marie Immaculée*, éditions Paulines, Montréal, 1990; A. Nadeau, “*Brother Church*”. *Brother Ernest Gauthier, o.m.i., 1908 -1983*, Oblate General Postulation, Rome 1992.

January 8

#### THE MISSIONARY ASPIRATIONS OF THE YOUNG DE MAZENOD

*This period of the year is devoted particularly to the beginnings of the Aix community (January 25, 1816) and to its life together.*

*On Easter Sunday, March 31, 1839, looking back over his life in his diary, Eugene de Mazenod recalls the proposals of the Bishop of Amiens who had ordained him and then adds:*

I refused to give in... so as not to be turned away from the vocation that called me to devote myself to the service and to the happiness of my neighbor whom I loved with the love of Jesus Christ for all people. It was this same sentiment that determined my choice when, on returning to Aix the Bishop of Metz, who was the administrator of the diocese at the time, asked me what I wanted to do. There was not a hair on my head that wished to take advantage of my social position to give in to the pretensions that everyone at the time would have found reasonable. *Elegi abjectus esse in domo Dei mei* (I preferred

to be put aside in the house of my God.) was my motto.... I thus responded to the Bishop of Metz that my whole ambition was to consecrate myself to the service of the poor and the youth. I thus started out in the prisons, and my first apprenticeship consisted of gathering around me young boys whom I instructed. I formed a large number in virtue. I saw up to 280 grouped around me... (*Oblate Writings*, 20, 85-86 [French edition])

*Later, on August 31, 1847, he notes in his diary:*

I then returned to the diocese of Aix where I requested that I not be given any position, wishing to consecrate myself to the service of the poor, of prisoners and of young children. The path of wealth or of glory still did not lie there. In regard to wealth, I did not have any need of it, in regard to glory, I did not want it. (*Oblate Writings*, 21, 278 [French edition])

*January 9*

THERE IS NEED OF YOU, OF YOUR MISSIONARY COURAGE

*Addressing the participants of the General Chapter of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, October 7, 2016, Pope Francis recalled the beginnings of the Congregation, urging them to be faithful to their origins and to continue their missionary proclamation.*

At the beginning of its history, your Congregation endeavoured to rekindle the faith that the French revolution was extinguishing in the hearts of the poor of the countryside of Provence and overwhelming many ministers of the Church. Over the course of a few decades, it spread into the five continents, continuing the journey that was started by the Founder, a man who loved Jesus passionately and the Church unconditionally.

[...] the Oblates of Mary Immaculate were born from an experience of mercy which the young Eugène had experienced on a Good Friday before Jesus crucified. May Mercy always be the heart of your mission, of your commitment to evangelize the world today. On the day of his canonization, St John Paul II called Fr de Mazenod a “man of Advent”,



docile to the Holy Spirit in reading the signs of the times and in assisting the work of God in the history of the Church. These characteristics are present in you, his sons. May you also be “men of Advent”, able to recognize the signs of the new times and to guide our brothers along the way that God opens up in the Church and in the world.

The Church, along with the entire world, is experiencing an age of great transformation, in the most diverse of fields. It needs men who carry in their hearts the same love for Jesus Christ that lived in the heart of the young Eugène de Mazenod, and the same unconditional love for the Church, which strives to be an ever more open house. It is important to work for a Church that is for everyone, a Church that is ready to welcome and to accompany! The work to be done in order to achieve all of this is vast; and all of you also have your own specific contribution to offer.

Your missionary history is the story of many consecrated people, who have offered and sacrificed their lives for the mission, for the poor, in order to reach distant lands where there were still “sheep without a shepherd”. Today, every land is “mission territory”, every human dimension is mission territory, awaiting the proclamation of the Gospel. Pope Pius XI called you “specialists of difficult missions”. The current field of mission seems to expand every day, embracing the poor again and again, the men and women bearing the face of Christ who ask for help, consolation, hope, in the most desperate situations in life.

Therefore there is need of you, of your missionary courage, your availability to bring to everyone the Good News that frees and consoles. May the joy of the Gospel shine forth firstly on your face, making you joyful witnesses. Following the example of the Founder, may charity among you be your first rule of life, the premise of every apostolic action; and may zeal for the salvation of souls be a natural consequence of this fraternal charity. [...]

It is necessary to seek adequate evangelical and courageous responses to the questions of the men and women of our time. For this you must look to the past with gratitude, live out the present with passion and embrace the future with hope, without allowing yourselves to be discouraged by the difficulties you encounter in the mission, but instead to be strong in faithfulness to your religious and missionary vocation.

As your religious family enters its third century of life, may the Lord allow you to write new pages that are as evangelically fruitful as those of your brothers who, over the past 200 years, have borne witness, sometimes even with blood, to that great love for Christ and for the Church. You are Oblates of Mary Immaculate. May this name, which was defined by Eugène as “a passport to Heaven”, be for you a constant commitment to the mission. May Our Lady sustain your steps, especially in moments of trial. I ask you, please, to pray to her for me too. May my blessing, which I wholeheartedly impart to you and to your entire Congregation, accompany you always on your journey.

*January 10*

JOSEPH THÉODORE MARTIAL CAPMAS (1791-1831)  
MARTYR OF CHARITY

*January 10, 1831, Fr. Capmas died in Marseilles. A priest of the diocese of Montpellier, he entered the Missionary Oblates in 1828. He was a great mission preacher. When cholera broke out in Marseilles he placed himself entirely at the service of the city's “Lazaret”, visiting the sick who were in quarantine, aware of the risk he was running of becoming a victim of the epidemic. January 17, writing to Father Tempier, Father Guibert called him “a true martyr of charity.” When he received news of his death from Father Tempier, St. Eugene replied:*

My dear Tempier, I was only too expectant of the sad news you convey in your letter of the 11th. I have been doing my best to prepare for it from the day you informed me of the danger. I foresaw its outcome and was left without the consolation of even a single ray of hope. So now we are left without one of our best members, a man capable of every form of ministry, while remaining simple and obedient, ever ready to do his duty and to do it well, and having no more pretensions than a child. Praise the Lord! It will be our refrain in times of adversity and of the worst afflictions as in times of prosperity and consolations. My grief is redoubled in that our dear friend died without receiving holy viaticum. I ask God every day, in the Holy Sacrifice, not to let me be deprived of that blessing at my death. The doctors ought to have foreseen

the danger sooner; they do not have to wait for a man to be in a state of delirium before giving warning of the danger; this will be a lesson to us to be a little more on our guard another time. However, the communion you gave him during the night of New Year's Day will have made up for the lack of holy viaticum, and our poor patient (I place my hopes in God's goodness) will have received all the supernatural and extraordinary graces he needed in that final moment. The Lord will have looked kindly on the charity that spurred him to ask for the favour of enclosing himself in the isolation hospital to lavish the graces of his ministry on the many soldiers stricken with the epidemic from Africa. Finally, he died in the bosom of the Society, and this is a sign of predestination. It only remains for us to apply in his favour the suffrages he has a right to and by whose means his soul will enter all the sooner into the full possession of that God who is so good, so faithful to his promises, who was the lot chosen for him and who must be his reward. (*Oblate Writings*, 8, p. 6-7)

## January 11

LÉO DESCHÂTELETS (1899-1974)  
EIGHTH SUPERIOR GENERAL (1947-1972)

*Fr. Deschâtelet died in Ottawa on January 11, 1974, two years after his resignation as Superior General, a position he had held for 25 years. He was born in Montreal, Canada, March 8, 1899. He entered the novitiate in 1917 and was ordained a priest in 1925. He remained at the Saint Joseph scholasticate as a formator and later as superior. He promoted research on the Founder and studies on the Congregation, also offering a valuable contribution as a collaborator of the "Études oblates". As Provincial, he participated in the General Chapter of 1947. On May 2, he was elected Superior General on the second ballot. He carried out a great work of renewal in the Congregation: he appointed within the General Council a Director General of Studies and a few months after his election, he called a meeting of all scholasticate superiors to study the formation process in order to offer a line of united action. He founded the "Studium Generale Superius" in 1950 and the "Retraite De Mazenod", and built the new residence of the In-*

*ternational Scholasticate. He initiated the revision of the Constitutions and Rules and carried out a global and dynamic animation by his Circular Letters. He also gave a new impetus to the study of the Founder and to his cause of beatification. As a participant at Vatican Council II he opened the Congregation to ecclesial renewal. During the General Chapter of 1972 he submitted his resignation from the post of Superior General, the last one to be elected for life.*

*Léo Deschâtelets, to the novices of Marino, March 15, 1973:*

In the Church, the Oblate must be distinguished by his love for the poor. With the grace of God, the Oblate is able at any time to grasp the cry of the poor, the oppressed, and the most abandoned. The Oblate must be extremely sensitive to this. He fears, like sin, to be reproached with: “You call yourself a missionary of the poor, but you are not really.” The Oblate must strive to be a witness of Christ and the Church for the poor, he must know how to dare everything to evangelize the poor. The Oblate of Mgr. De Mazenod should fear as a misfortune that his title of missionary of the poor be taken from him. That would mean that he is no longer so in reality.

His title of missionary of the poor, of those who make up the majority of mankind, enables him to truly be a servant that is useful, especially in the Church of the Poor. This enables him to be everything to everyone. He must be available for all the needs of humanity and his brothers. Because he loves the poor and sees Our Lord in them, the Oblate is able to embrace all people in his love. He feels himself to be a brother to all. He creates peace, harmony, understanding, forgiveness, as once the young priest de Mazenod did: “There is only love in my heart.” [...]

It is also this love that makes the Oblate perfectly evangelical, perfectly apostolic. The Gospel is the book of life and love for the Oblate. Because we love Christ, we likewise love all that He asks us in the Gospel. The Oblate, like St. Paul, is consecrated to God to preach the Gospel.

Spiritually, the Oblate never works alone. His life is essentially communitarian. This is a very important point of Mazenodian spirituality. The Oblate may live alone and at the same time be very intimately united to his local or provincial community. (One cannot conceive of an

Oblate without this community life. Even if physical or material community life must be sacrificed for the ministry, as in the missions, according to the Mazenodian mystique, the Oblate community is the antechamber of heaven, it is the immediate hearth of the love of God and neighbor who the son of Mgr. de Mazenod loves.)

I. Tourigny, *Le Père Léo Deschâtelets, o.m.i. (1899-1974), Supérieur Général des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée (1947-1972). Esquisse biographique*, Ottawa 1975; G. Scalvini, «*Nova et vetera...*». *La vita religiosa oblata nelle lettere circolari di p. Léo Deschâtelets, omi, superiore generale*, Roma 1995.

January 12

#### TO BRING OTHERS TO LOVE HIM

*The August 1812 retreat of young Father de Mazenod, focuses on “all the obligations my vocation imposes.”*

The more I have been and remain a great sinner, the more must I strive to love God and bring others to love him, since notwithstanding my profound unworthiness God has not ceased to pour out on me some of the greatest graces it was in his power to confer, and I can show my gratitude for so many blessings, such great mercy only by doing all in my power to love him to the limits of my capacity, and in reparation for the glory and honour I have taken from him by my most serious fault, I must use all my strength, every means at my disposal and all my inner resources to bring others to love him. (*Oblate Writings*, 15, 5-7)

*In December 1812, during his retreat at the seminary, he wrote:*

The life of a priest should be a life whose every day is full in the Lord's sight. That is why I must really grasp the sublimity of my ministry and of the holiness it requires of me, and that I be really convinced that it is piety alone, and the most extensive piety that can help me to reach my end.... I will take as model of this worship that I owe God, his adorable Son Jesus Christ our lovable Saviour, for whom I will try to have the tenderest of devotions and the most ardent love.... I will meditate on Jesus my love in his incarnation, his hidden life, his mis-

sion, his passion and death; but especially in his Sacrament and Sacrifice. My chief occupation will be to love him, my chief concern to make him loved. To this I will bend all my efforts, time, strength... (*Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 7-10)

January 13

#### ADVICE FROM A FORMATOR

*Back in Aix, as a young priest Eugene began an intense apostolic activity, ranging from the spiritual accompaniment of the seminarians of the diocese to preaching. A long letter from Mr. Duclaux, his director, dated February 23, 1813, gives us an indication of his activities.*

I am very satisfied with what you have written, that you've been to the seminary for your retreat... I highly approve that you undertook to give some instructions in one of your parishes during Lent. I hope you will succeed well by preparing them with care, that is to say, by making them clear, strong and pious, you will attract a lot of people and you will bear much more fruit than most sermons. Thus, you will convince the priests and the faithful that you have no intention of being idle, but that you propose to work when you can and as best you can. I suggest you apply yourself very specifically to instructing the people....

I am delighted with what you write about your way of life.... I am very happy to hear that you have joined with some holy priests for conferences and conversations on the duties of the priesthood. Take the life of St. Vincent de Paul, read the Saint Lazarus Conferences which were held every Tuesday, the first of which deals with the priestly spirit. If you can make these conferences a regular thing, you will have rendered the greatest of all services to the city of Aix. I say the same for the young people to whom you want to give instructions every Sunday. This too is the choicest of works. Give it all your attention, use all your zeal to form them well. Give them a rule...

In your relations with ecclesiastical superiors, act with honesty in all respects and with all the deference that you can. If they were to offer you a post, say that you are disposed to do what your superiors will

prescribe because you look upon them as the instruments of God's will for you, but that you ask them to give you some time to think before God on what they offer, then you will share your comments, but once you have made your observations you will obey. This conduct will glorify God; maintain the subordination among the priests, infinitely honor your ministry and you will attract the blessings of God and man.... (Rey, I, 131-133)

\* \* \*

*January 13, 1827, St. Eugene was appointed a Royal Knight of the Order of SS. Maurice and Lazarus by King Carlo Felice of Savoy.*

*January 14*

MAXIME AD DOMESTICOS FIDEI

*In June 1814, Charles de Forbin Janson, the great friend of Eugene de Mazenod, went to Rome to consult Pius VII about what he ought to do. The answer was: "In France, we must have especially missions for the people and retreats for the clergy..." For Eugene this is the confirmation of his project, as he writes in his Mémoire justificatif.*

In 1814, one of my classmates and closest friends, Abbé de Forbin-Janson, who died as Bishop of Nancy and Toul, went to Italy to visit the tombs of the holy apostles in Rome. He had entered the seminary with the same aims as I, and the similarity of our vocation had often provided us with the opportunity to discuss the means of putting our plans into effect. We differed, however, on one essential point. His zeal led him to take care of the infidels, and my attention was solely fixed on the deplorable state of our degenerate Christians. Since I was unable to bring him around to my opinion, which I believed to be the right one, we parted at the end of the seminary, very good friends, but determined to pursue different careers.

On his way to Rome he met, in I don't know which Italian city, the Supreme Pontiff Pius VII who was returning to his States. He had the opportunity to explain to him the plan that he proposed to carry out with

some companions who were to follow him to China. The pope did not like his project and answered him with these memorable words: “Your project is good, no doubt, but it is more appropriate to come to the aid of the people who surround us. *Maxime ad domesticos fidei*. Especially in France, we need missions for the people and retreats for the clergy.” These are the holy Pontiff’s own words.

My friend immediately informed me of the Pope’s answer, which was so much in line with my thinking, and which sanctioned all my projects. At the same time, he informed me that the decision of the Head of the Church fixed the course of action he was to follow, and that he was going, without the slightest delay, to form a company of missionaries who would work tirelessly to evangelize the peoples. He invited me in the most urgent manner to join him in order to begin the work I had always been so fond of, and I am sure he did not doubt that I would fly to assist him.

It was different. Since I had left Paris, a year after receiving the priesthood, I had returned to my diocese, where I had taken up various ministries which had been given little attention until then, and on which the Lord was already showering abundant blessings. I had gathered the youth of the city into a congregation; nearly three hundred children were beginning to serve the good Lord well, and this work was mine alone.

With some success, I also took care of the prisoners who at the time were quite abandoned; the chaplains were content to say Mass for them on Sundays and holidays. I took charge of instructing them and confessing them, and something unheard of until then, to the great scandal of the ordinary men, several of them were often seen approaching the Holy Table, from which they had been persuaded that they should be excluded because they were in prison.

I had tried to preach to the people in the Provençal language; I don’t know if it was the interest I inspired in my fellow citizens, who always showed me an extraordinary affection, or if the good Lord wanted to encourage me to evangelize the poor in the language they understood best, and which consequently made the instructions more useful to them. The large church of the Madeleine was always full when I preached in Provençal on the Sundays of Advent and Lent, at six o’clock in the morning.



All these considerations persuaded me that I should not leave our southern provinces, and that my ministry would be more useful there than elsewhere. (Rambert, I, 162-163)

January 15

I WILL LEAVE TOMORROW FOR THE MOON

*Responding to Charles de Forbin Janson's requests to join his Missionary Society, on October 28, 1814 (Oblate Writings, 6, 2), Eugene de Mazenod tells him of a fairly specific project.*

I still do not know what God wants of me, but I am so resolved to do his will that as soon as it is known to me I will leave tomorrow for the moon, if I have to. I keep nothing secret from you. So, I will tell you without ado that I am hesitating between two plans: either to go off and bury myself in some well regulated community of an Order that I have always loved; or do in my diocese exactly what you have done successfully at Paris. My illness has played havoc with me. I was feeling more inclined to the first plan because, to tell the truth, I was quite sick of living solely for others. It has come to pass that I have not had time to go to confession for three whole weeks. You can see for yourself how tied down I am.

The second plan, however, seems to me more useful, given the dreadful plight to which the people have been reduced. Several considerations have held me back until now, the absolute lack of means being not the least drawback in this affair. Those who might be able to join me have nothing at all and I myself have little for, out of my pension of a thousand francs, I have to pay my servant who, for that matter, will soon leave me and return to the Trappist monastery. That's a new inconvenience because I was counting on him for our mission house. The community, which in any event, only exists in my head, would be set up in my house. Mother, as far as I can see, would not be loath to yield to me, for the time being, the house by the city gate in which I live alone at present. There is enough room to lodge eight missionaries. We would subsequently look for a larger place, etc. I also have in mind some rules to propose for I insist that we live in a

completely regular manner. That's as far as I have got. As you see, it has not progressed very far.

\* \* \*

JESUS REYNALDO RODA (1954-2008)  
MARTYR IN SULU, PHILIPPINES

*Jesus Reynaldo A. Roda (1954-2008), was born on February 5, 1954 at Cotabato City, Philippines. He made his perpetual vows in 1979 and was ordained priest on May 10, 1980. After his ordination he served in the Diocese of Kidapawan. He was sent to Thailand in 1992 and became the Rector of the Oblate Juniorate in Bangkok. He came back to the Philippines in 1997 to be in Batu-Batu Mission in Tawi-Tawi. In 1998 Fr. Rey became Director of Notre Dame of Tabawan High School and head of the Oblate Mission Station there under the Apostolic Vicariate of Jolo. The people are more than 99% Muslims. The Christians are less than 1% and not all Catholics. It was about 8:30 in the evening of January 15, 2008, when armed men arrived looking for Fr. Rey, who was praying in the chapel. The men wanted to kidnap Fr. Rey. He refused to go with them. So they "manhandled" him and then brutally killed him. Fr. Rey's body was found just outside the school, left on a road near the shoreline from where the murderers sped away in a motorized boat.*

"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

Christ himself embodies with exactness and even overflowing fullness, this depiction of what a friend is. Christ's death and resurrection are only final expressions of this unstinted giving of himself throughout his life, keeping back nothing. Everything he has is ours to draw upon. "It is yours," the Lord says, "because it is mine. You are my friend."

It is not hard to look at Rey and find in him someone who truly deserves this title 'friend'. He was a real friend to his family, to his fellow Oblates (especially Raul and Pol), to his scholars and students, to the people of Tabawan and his other places of ministry before, and to those with whom he worked in his various capacities. Rey overlooked whatever differences there were among them. Rey opened himself to them;

he let people into his own life--his convictions, his dreams, his faults, his weaknesses. Rey trusted in people in ways that were heroic. Lastly, Rey gave what he could for others and constantly invited others to give to his causes, until all that he could give was his own life.

Rey knew that for friendship to flourish, it needed time “to be with”, and Rey had been patient and persevering in nurturing this condition. His affair with the Tabawan mission of the Oblates has lasted over the last ten years. He was prepared and willing to stay there some more years, if not for the rest of his life. The mission, its people, and his scholars have become his life, to the point of almost being an obsession. I am certain that Rey knew what he was up against. Rey knew the risks. But there was no turning back now on his friends. In losing Rey, everybody has lost a friend of the highest order.

Rey knew too that for friendship to grow, he had to nurture his friendship with God, and again, I am certain, he had the most intimate friendship with God. When he was taken, he was at the mission chapel, having finished prayer or the Eucharist perhaps. If he had just finished celebrating Mass that fateful evening, then the tragedy that followed only served to fulfill in his own life, these words of the Eucharistic Prayer which he would have said only a few moments before: “Before he was given up to death, a death he freely accepted... Take this... this is my body which will be given up for you... Take this... this is the cup of my blood... shed for you and for all...”

And so for Rey, the truth about life and death is perhaps something like this: I live, not where I breathe, but where I love. I die, not because somebody takes my life, but because I offer it freely as a friend. (Ramon Maria Bernabe, Excerpts from the Homily on the penultimate day of the wake for Fr. Rey Roda, January 22, 2008)

*January 16*

#### WE WILL BECOME SAINTS IN OUR CONGREGATION

*In September and October 1815, Eugene wrote to a number of priests inviting them to join him in giving birth to the Missionaries of Provence. The most famous are those addressed to Fr. Tempier, but one of the first letters is addressed to Hilaire Aubert:*

No one is fonder than I of the holy Company of Jesus. Its re-establishment has always been to the fore in my wishes and I attach the greatest importance to its growth. However, I would better like to have you here, just now, than with the Jesuits. The good we intend to do ought to remedy the most pressing ills. Those who deal with them dwindle; there is nothing more urgent. It is a matter of some priests banding together and continually preaching missions in all sectors of this vast diocese and surroundings. We wish to do modestly, but not less effectively, what they are striving to do at Paris on a larger scale. We would want to act without commotion but what blows we would strike at hell! Oh, dear friend, if you would be one of us! We would begin in your part of the country where religion is practically extinct as in so many other places. I almost dare to say you would be necessary. Ah! If we could form a nucleus, there would soon cluster round it the most zealous elements in the diocese. Think a while about that before the good God. You know that we must have, in order to do any good in our regions, people of the country who know the language. Oh! Do not doubt that we will become saints in our Congregation, free but united by bonds of the tenderest charity, by exact submission to the Rule we would adopt, etc. We would live poorly, apostolically, etc. (*Oblate Writings*, 6, p. 5)

January 17

JEAN-MARIE-RODRIGUE VILLENEUVE (1883-1947)  
CARDINAL, ARCHBISHOP OF QUEBEC, CANADA

*Léo Deschâtelets, on the first anniversary of the cardinal's death, gave a conference at the International Scholasticate recalling this figure.*

Cardinal Villeneuve died January 17, 1947. He was born in Montreal on November 2, 1883. He entered the novitiate in 1901 and was ordained a priest in 1907. He was a professor and then later superior of the Saint-Joseph scholasticate. He founded the Thomist Society of the University of Ottawa. On September 11, 1930 he was consecrated the first bishop of Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan. He chose as his motto: “Docere quis sit Christus”. The following year he was promoted Archbish-

op of Quebec and made a cardinal. A deep thinker and prolific writer, he was a popular man of the Church.

Father Villeneuve stands out as a model for everyone by his extraordinary love of his vocation as an Oblate of Mary Immaculate, even after he became bishop and cardinal. The first week after his appointment as Archbishop of Quebec, he informed the press, who had forgotten that there were three inseparable letters to his name: O.M.I., three letters that have always accompanied him and that are now inscribed on his grave, as he wanted. His testament has also shown all the affection he had for the Congregation.

As superior of the scholasticate, he usually gave three spiritual conferences a week on the Congregation. With him, I went through the entire Rule three times as well as the history of the Congregation. He had analyzed the Oblates authors like Fr. Rambert, Fr. Ricard, and Bishop J. Jeancard.

He also taught us the true meaning of the Oblate devotion to Mary. The nights of the Marian conferences, he also taught us the true meaning of the Oblate devotion to Mary. The nights of the Marian conferences, it would not have been surprising if Our Lady would have appeared to us: he spoke of her in such a loving and filial way.

The last image I retain of the Cardinal alive is of him kneeling before an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico in 1945. He was there as the papal legate for the crowning of the statue. He was rapt in contemplation, not feeling the pressure of the crowd that pressed upon us from all sides: no superfluous words, only this: "How beautiful, how moving...."

Cardinal Villeneuve held an incomparable place in the history of my country. He unified the Canadian bishops - which is not always easy! Loved by all, all followed him.

Believe in your vocation, dear scholastics, as I said: believe in the Oblate ideal, believe in it by reading the Rule. [...] I give you as model Fr. Villeneuve, Bishop Villeneuve, and Cardinal Villeneuve. He was great because was fully an Oblate. [...] Dear Brothers, I tell you again: Believe strongly in your Oblate vocation. This is how you will be yourselves and how you will play the role that God has for you. (Léo Deschâtelets, *Le Cardinal Jean-Marie-Rodrigue Villeneuve, o.m.i., Témoignage*, [Conference given at the International Scholasticate in 1948,

on the first anniversary of the cardinal's death], "Vie Oblate Life" 63 [2004], p. 97-101)

*Son Eminence le Cardinal Villeneuve, O.M.I., archevêque de Québec*, "Missions OMI" 74 (1947), p. 211-275 ; D. Levasseur, *La vocation oblate chez le Cardinal Jean-Marie Rodrigue Villeneuve*, "Vie Oblate Life" 46 (1987), p. 261-272.

January 18

#### PROSPECTUS FOR THE MISSIONS

*We still have a kind of leaflet from October 1815 entitled, "Prospectus for the Missions." It presents the project for the foundation of a Society of missionaries that Eugene had been thinking about for some time and appeals for contributions to realize it.*

The deplorable state of religion in our countryside, whose inhabitants seem to have abandoned the faith of their fathers, has deeply touched many clergymen who have been able to fathom the depth of the wound, and are determined to devote themselves entirely to the work of the Missions, to try to bring people back to religious principles. Evil appears to be at its height, but yet it is still growing daily....

In this dire situation, it was thought necessary to have recourse to the only means that experience has proven to be almost always effective, the ministry of Missionaries. The most obstinate wickedness finally yields to the special envoys whose mission the Lord usually blesses by sensational conversions that are close to miraculous....

The Missionaries did not refuse to face the difficulties of such a great undertaking. But invincible as the obstacles to the work of missions might seem, the clerics who devote themselves to them, have not been discouraged. They look forward to gathering even larger numbers, so that some may devote themselves to prayer, study, and meditation of the sacred truths, while others spread out over the region, to preach the word of God and to revive the practice of the evangelical precepts.

We have no doubt that those who carry in their heart a sincere love for religion, will find it a pleasant duty to sow some temporal goods in order to obtain eternal ones. (“Missions OMI” 83 [1956], p. 234-246)

January 19

## THE OBLATES, GOD’S PROJECT

*Bishop J. Jeancard, one of the Oblates of the earliest days, looking at the development of the Congregation after the death of the Founder, recognizes its deepest origin in God. Saint Eugene is also of the same mind.*

The evangelization of the poor is the original idea that, growing over time, gave rise to the Congregation. I could not say, however, if the thought of founding a Congregation had been preordained and clearly defined in the soul of Mgr. de Mazenod when he was ordained a priest. I think rather that like almost all the holy persons whom God has used as instruments of his plans, when the Founder of the Oblates began his work he was far from knowing the whole extent of his mission.

He did not at all put into action a plan formulated in advance in every detail. The plan of which he was the worker came from higher up than a purely human conception. It had been inspired, and somehow revealed gradually to him as circumstances opened up new horizons to his zeal. The Lord who guided him let him see only what he had to do in the present situation and rewarded his ardent love for the Church and his gift of himself for the salvation of souls, revealing to him at the appropriate time where he had to go to make new progress towards the completion of the work that was entrusted to him. He moved ahead, driven and guided by Providence, along an unknown or nearly unknown path, by which he was to attain the goal desired from Above. (J. Jeancard, *Mélanges historiques sur la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Tours 1872, p. 71)

*In his Circular Letter of February 17, 1853, written in Latin for the convocation of the General Chapter, St. Eugene himself recalls the humble beginnings of the foundation:*

When Our Lord compared the beginnings of the early Church to a mustard seed that, though very small, nevertheless becomes a great tree, he also described the development of religious societies that He establishes through the ministry of his chosen ones. At our beginning, everything was thus small and humble, except that we were animated by a great pity for the most abandoned souls and a great zeal to devote ourselves, following the example of Christ, to evangelizing the poor. God’s purposes and the fruitful future that was reserved for us, however, remained completely unknown.

*January 20*

#### THE 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY

*On the 50th anniversary of the foundation, Superior General Fr. Joseph Fabre, in a circular letter, recalls the spirit of unity of the beginnings and invites us to celebrate that day as a family feast, a tradition that continues today.*

On the 25th [1866] we will celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of our beloved family. A day like this should not go unnoticed, and I feel bound to bring such a solemn anniversary to your attention to arouse in you the deepest feelings of gratitude towards God and love for our dear Congregation. Oh brothers! On this memorable day we should have but one and the same thought: to look closely over the years that have passed since our revered Father, in obedience to God’s inspiration, laid the foundation of the Congregation to which we are fortunate to belong. Though separated from each other in the places obedience has assigned us, our hearts will be animated by the same sentiment: to thank God for the blessings that he has poured out from the beginning, begging him to bless us even more in the future. And all united in spirit to the early Fathers we will pledge a more lively and deep affection for the Congregation of which we urge you to revisit the origins and the truly providential development. [...]

On this anniversary full of sweet and precious memories, let us gather in spirit around the cradle of the Congregation: the native air has a high virtue, the origins send out a perfume of heavenly bless-



ings. From this aroma of virtue and holiness that emanates from our first days we draw new ardor. Let us be renewed by the contact with a glorious and holy past. We all have need of it, out of love for the family that gives us so noble a legacy. We are its sons, we have to make it live: let us keep its traditions of strength and fervor and out of respect and honor that are its crown. May we not let the gift of God wither away in our hands; let us not let languish the beautiful life, overflowing with generous dedication, that was handed down to us by our great venerated Father. [...]

Religious life here below is a copy of life in eternity. Only one thing is essential: charity. Charity towards our neighbor, our confreres, and our superiors binds us together with a triple thread that no force can break [...].

Beloved brothers, let us therefore strengthen the bonds that unite us all, superiors and subjects; we form one and the same family that the grace of God wanted. The Lord is with us. We saw him bend down with maternal solicitude on our birthplace. [...] The small flock has increased; it has opened itself up to the field of the universal Church [...]. (J. Fabre, *Circular Letter* No. 15, March 19, 1865, *Circulaires administratives*, 1, p. 131, 144-145)

*January 21*

## THE FIRST CENTENNIAL

*For the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Congregation, Superior General Augustin Dontenwill invites us to look to the early Fathers as an example of missionary dedication, so as to continue in their footsteps.*

The Congregation of which we have the grace, honor and joy of being sons, will begin the second century of its existence next January 25 [1916]. This great event cannot leave our souls insensitive, or even indifferent. For religious societies, as for individuals, longevity is a sign of divine blessing. [...]

Our venerable Founder wished therefore that in his young society of Missionaries religious life would have precedence, preparing and

informing the apostolic life. He himself was, from the beginning, a religious in the most noble and sublime sense of the word. His first companion, Fr. Tempier, followed in his footsteps and united himself to God, together with him, by religious vows. Another worker of the first hour, Father Mie, who in parish ministry had practiced poverty to the point of destitution, charity and zeal to the depletion of his resources and strength, mortification up to reproducing the life of the most austere penitents, happily joined the Founder's project. Regular observances were almost virtually established in the small community. These men of good will who did not yet have written Rules submitted themselves, like docile children, to all the monastic practices used in the most fervent communities. [...]

The founders of religious orders and their first disciples have left examples of virtue proving the extraordinary effectiveness of grace in their souls. The history of our origins gives us a striking demonstration of this. Let us read again; it is full of examples of perfection; it is religious perfection blossoming in human hearts. [...] When I am deeply convinced that my religious life, compared to that of the founder's of my Congregation, is but a pale spark next to a blazing fire, there is only one conclusion: I must do better under penalty of being a degenerate child in the father's house. [...]

Thanks be to God, our Congregation, although one hundred years old, still retains a fresh youth, much strength, and a lot of initiative to undertake and persevere in accomplishing the works of God [...]. The few wrinkles, signs of the wear of time, some spots, caused by failures that occurred, are regrettable no doubt, and we must strive to make them disappear, but it would be an injustice and an exaggeration to regard them as the warning signs of old age.

We shall repeat, however, in conclusion of this familiar conversation, the exhortation that our venerable predecessor, Fr. Fabre, spoke to our forefathers on March 22, 1862: “Let us renew ourselves, my dear Brothers, not only in the works of our holy vocation, but above all in its spirit. For this we must often recall what we should be.” (A. Dontenwill, *Circular Letter* No. 113, December 25, 1915, *Circulaires administratives*, 3, p. 267, 278, 283, 385-386)

THE ACCOUNT OF OUR BEGINNINGS

*December 16, 1819, a month after the installation of the new bishop of Aix, Mgr de Bausset, St. Eugene visited him to tell him about the origins of his work.*

During the course of the year 1815, the Abbés de Janson and Rauzan got together to respond to the Holy Father's views: The Pope wanted missions to be given in France. These gentlemen, counting on my good will, requested me to join them in that holy work. Their insistence was so pressing and the reasons they presented so conclusive that I could not but go along with their idea.

It was with great sorrow, however, that I saw myself almost forced to leave my diocese. From the time that I entered the clerical state, I had in my mind consecrated myself to its service. [...]

I was in that state of perplexity when the Lord inspired me with the plan of establishing a society of missionaries at Aix who, as a priority, would undertake to evangelize the poor country people, even in the smallest Provencal hamlets. I shared my idea with the Vicars General who approved it; and immediately I started to put the plan in motion by setting down the foundation of this little society which has worked incessantly for five years for the conversion of souls with a success that is due to God alone and can be regarded as miraculous.

From that time on I could reply to the gentlemen de Janson and Rauzan that it was impossible for me to accede to their invitation because the needs of my own diocese were claiming my services. With some zealous companions I was going to start immediately that same ministry to which they had wanted to recruit me, ministry among the poor abandoned souls all around us. [...]

I cannot congratulate myself enough on the interest and confidence that I was shown by the Vicars General on the occasion of this establishment. They took this work under their protection, and they continually defended it as enlightened administrators against all the efforts that Satan did not fail to apply and destroy it. I made it a point of principle to submit to these gentlemen that plan that I had conceived in order to

render the service of the missionaries more useful to the diocese. They approved it and it was immediately put into action. (*Oblate Writings*, 13, p. 35-36)

January 23, 1964

PIERRE LAEBENS (1920-1964)  
GÉRARD DEFEVER (1919-1964)  
NICOLAS HARDY (1919-1964)  
OBLATE MARTYRS IN THE CONGO

*The Kilembe mission in the diocese of Idiofa, was entrusted to the Oblates in 1933. Between 1960 and 1963, during the period after the independence of the Congo, the mission experienced instability as did the rest of the country. The violent attack by the Muletista Revolution occurred on the night of January 22, 1964, when Frs. Pierre Laebens, Gérard Defever and Nicolas Hardy were massacred. All three were from Belgium.*

*One of the witnesses recounts the events:*

About 11 p.m., two men approached the mission and threw a Molotov cocktail towards the Superior's room, however it did not catch fire. At the Father's cries, the two bandits fled. About a half hour later, two men came back to the mission. Fr. Defever went out to question them and was attacked by a band of about fifty armed persons. Alarmed by the shouting and tumult, Fathers Hardy and Macrea also went out.

While the Congolese Oblate, after coming under gunfire, managed to flee into the bush, his colleagues were attacked with guns and weapons of all kinds. As for Father Laebens he was probably dragged out of bed, before being slain in turn. After brutalizing the bodies of their three victims, the attackers set fire to the buildings, by spreading straw and gasoline. Then they went on to the administrative offices which they also burned. [...]

While the drama unfolded, the 7 Sisters, who were awakened by the cries and shots, had taken refuge in the school store house where they remained until dawn, fearing the worst. It seems, however, that at no time did the bandits intend to attack the religious. At daybreak, hear-

ing nothing, they ventured out. The priests' residence was only smoldering ruins as were also the workshops immediately adjacent to the buildings. In front of the door of the Superior's room, they discovered with horror large pools of blood and behind the building in ruins, they found the bodies of the three missionaries that had been cut with axes and knives. Around them, the fragments of a broken gun, axes, and arrows were lying in the blood of the victims. Assisted by Father Macrea and some villagers, the Sisters dug a grave in front of the church which was left intact. There they laid the bodies of the three martyrs, after having wrapped them in a blanket. (*La tragedie de Kilembre: le récit d'un témoin*, January 25, 1964)

*A week after the massacre, the Provincial wrote to the parents of the victims:*

Console yourselves by remembering that your son, a messenger of God's love, sent as Christ Jesus was to tell men that they should love each other, remember that your son has done his glorious duty to give his life to save that of thousands of others, and that there is no greater love or beautiful gesture on earth. Console yourselves since your son, a martyr for God's love and "God's little ones" has become your first intercessor before God's Throne. [...]

You followed him from afar, supporting him in many ways throughout his mission. And you see: he put all his soul into it, not for any motive of profit as you well know that missions are not a question of money, not about a place in the limelight nor of temporal personal ambition. It is more simple and beautiful. Mission is a matter of personal renunciation: going to show people out there what is the best of humanity, that man needs more than bread: the total gift of self, total love of humanity especially of the least favored.

Be proud of your son and brother, as we Oblates and their Bishop are proud of them. We are also proud of you, proud to see the parents of our Oblates have so much strength, so much faith and so much spiritual generosity. (Fr. Joannes Nizet, *Solemn Service for Our Oblate Martyrs of Kilembre*, January 29, 1964)

January 24

THE IDEAS THAT GOD WAS INSPIRING IN ME

*In his Mémoires (probably reworked after 1844) on the Beginning of the Society, Eugene de Mazenod tells of his inspiration to found the Congregation:*

It was as the Church came out of her great crisis [under the Empire] and with the return of our legitimate princes, that we could conceive the hope to realize some of the thoughts we had constantly nourished in our heart for the salvation of the French.... The field was vast, and brambles were not lacking....

The Lord raised up a few men whom he filled with zeal for the salvation of souls, and a vehement desire to bring them back into the fold of the head of the household. I tried to follow in their footsteps and the blessings that God has poured out on our ministry, and later the formal approval that the Church has given to our small Congregation, give me the hope that we have responded to our vocation by dedicating ourselves as we have for the greater glory of God, the service of the Church, the sanctification of the most abandoned souls, and the education and the reform of the clergy....

Since my return to France (after the emigration), I was deeply saddened to see the service of the altar disdained, since the Church had no rich stipends to offer the sacrilegious greed of the more or less distinguished families in the world....

All these considerations persuaded me that I should not leave our southern provinces and that my ministry would be more useful here than elsewhere....

It was in 1815 that I laid down the first foundations of our little society. My main purpose was to evangelize the poor, the prisoners and the children. I needed some dedicated companions who could share the ideas that God was inspiring in me. We were to devote ourselves to the apostolic ministry, so we needed selfless men who were willing to walk in the footsteps of the apostles in the practice of the evangelical counsels; I could not imagine it possible to do the good that I proposed under

any other conditions. It was not easy to find men of this calibre, I did not know any. (*Mémoire justificatif*, Rambert, I, p. 161-164)

### *January 25, Conversion of Saint Paul*

#### THE CONVERSION OF SAINT PAUL

*A significant date was chosen for the foundation of the Missionaries of Provence, the conversion of St. Paul, apostle of the Gentiles, the "missionary" par excellence. During his seminary years in Paris, St. Eugene had the opportunity to meditate on Paul's vocation, as can be seen from excerpts of one of his writings from that period.*

Let us adore Jesus Christ descending from heaven for the conversion of St. Paul, that he wanted to do himself directly, instead of entrusting the task to a holy figure, or even to some Angel or other heavenly Spirit.

Then consider three main characteristics of this conversion, a miracle of grace and the omnipotence of God.

The generosity and promptness with which St Paul corresponded to the grace of Jesus Christ. Saul, zealous for the Mosaic law had just recently dipped his hands in the blood of the martyr St. Stephen, whom he had joyfully watched sacrificed to what he believed to be the cause of God. Far from being sated by this first test, he was filled with even more rage for those who professed the same doctrine and longed to see the happy moment when he could multiply these human holocausts for the glory of God that he thought had been outraged.

Unable to carry out his fury against the Christians as he would have liked to in the city of Jerusalem, he asked with insistence and received with joy the commission to persecute the peaceful disciples of Jesus Christ who lived in Damascus and surrounding areas.

He was already calculating in how little time he would manage to destroy this new sect, and turned over in his mind the means he would have to use to destroy this powerful seed that from its outset surely threatened law of the Jews, and more so all the pharisaic superstitions of which Saul was an enthusiastic admirer. Full of these plans of revenge, destruction and carnage, he sets out for Damascus with a haste

that told the Christians of the dangers with which they were threatened. He was already at the border of this land that he wanted to water with the blood of Christ's disciples. I see him press his steed that is too slow for the heat of his impatient fury. He tries to make it go in one stroke through the space that still separates them from the theater where he burns to deploy his zeal. But what? All of a sudden, a bright light descended from heaven, surrounds him, dazzles and pushes him into the dust, where immobilized he hears a voice speak these words to him: Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? = *Saul, Saul, quid me persequeris*. At these words that must have penetrated to the bottom of his heart, he recovers from his surprise, and quick to respond to the advances of the Mercy of his God, he exclaims: Who are you, Lord? *Quis es Domine*? Who are you? You, whom I see resplendent with glory and majesty; make yourself known so that I may give you what belongs to you, so that I may know the powerful adversary I had the misfortune to persecute and should appease. *Quis es, Domine, quis es*? The voice, obedient to the wishes of a submissive heart responds: I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, *Ego sum Jesus*. A powerful name before whom all bow, in heaven, on earth and in the underworld, should we be surprised that you win over a rebellious heart! It is yours from this moment, he is changed forever, Saul is Christian; just show him, Lord, what to do. Saul is yours. *Domine quid me vis facere*?

What a considerate grace that saves Saul from Hell; but also what a response on his part. Far from turning away so as not to hear the voice that calls him, Saul listens attentively, and shows a willingness to obey fully: Who are you, Lord, that is to say, make yourself known and I am yours.... Bless God, my brothers, for this happy accord of the free will of Paul with the powerful grace of Jesus Christ, and let us recall its ever memorable results.... I do not speak of this first conquest, a masterpiece of grace, that made the fiercest persecutor of the Church a chosen one, an intrepid Apostle, one of the main and strongest columns of the mystical edifice that Jesus Christ came to establish on earth and that he sealed with his precious blood.

But count if you can the countless nations which were created by his ministry to Jesus Christ: Hebrews, Ephesians, Galatians, Thessalonians, Philippians, Colossians, Corinthians, Parthians, Syrians, Romans, in a word, all the nations were subject to his generous zeal and if he did not



speaking the word of life to each of them, he did carry them all in his heart, and assured the conquest to Jesus Christ by the many followers he formed for the Holy Militia of the Conqueror who conquered the world by dying for it on a cross. (Saint Eugene, *Méditations*, 1809-1811)

\* \* \*

#### BEGINNING OF THE AIX-EN-PROVENCE COMMUNITY

*The request for authorization sent to the Capitular Vicars General of Aix is dated January 25th 1816. It was signed by five Missionaries of Provence: de Mazenod, Tempier, Icard, Mie and Deblieu. (The signature of Icard was later crossed off.)*

*That day de Mazenod, Tempier, and perhaps Icard, took definitive possession of the rooms purchased in the ancient Carmel of Aix. Tempier had probably gone to live there a few days before to follow closely the work of renovation. He had arrived in Aix on December 27, 1815.*

From that day [December 27, 1815] – writes Tempier in his *Memoirs* – until January 25, I went to my parents' home only to rest at night. During the day, I was with the Abbé de Mazenod and we were happily busy with everything we were planning to do for God's glory and the salvation of souls. We said our Office together and made our exercises of piety in common as often as we could, because the Abbé de Mazenod was often in demand by the people of his [youth] congregation. (*Oblate Writings*, II, 2, p. 202)

*In mid-February Mie and Deblieu also arrived at the house. As soon as they were gathered, they elected de Mazenod superior of the house and after ten days of retreat to prepare themselves for apostolic life, they departed for Grans on February 11 for their first mission. The Missionaries of Provence, hardly born, went into action.*

*Concerning that January 25 we have a writing that is especially dear to all Oblates, the letter that St. Eugene wrote on January 24, 1831 to the novice master, Fr. Mille:*

Tomorrow, I celebrate the anniversary of the day, sixteen years ago [an error of one year], I left my mother's house to go and set up house at the Mission. Father Tempier had taken possession of it some days before. Our lodging had none of the splendour of the mansion at Billens, and whatever deprivations you may be subject to, ours were greater still. My camp-bed was placed in the small passageway which leads to the library: it was then a large room used as a bedroom for Father Tempier and for one other whose name we no longer mention amongst us. It was also our community room. One lamp was all our lighting and, when it was time for bed, it was placed in the doorway to give light to all three of us.

The table that adorned our refectory was one plank laid alongside another, on top of two old barrels. We have never enjoyed the blessing of such poverty since the time we took the vow. Without question, it was a foreshadowing of the state of perfection that we now live so imperfectly.... I assure you we lost none of our merriment; on the contrary, as this new way of life was in quite striking contrast with that we had just left, we often found ourselves having a hearty laugh over it. I owed this tribute to the memory of our first day of common life. How happy I would be to live it now with you! (To Father Mille, January 24, 1831, *Oblate Writings*, 8, p. 11)

*It was in 1866, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of foundation that January 25<sup>th</sup> was first celebrated as the date of the beginning of the Congregation. In his Circular Letter No. 15 (March 19, 1865) Father Fabre invited all Oblates to solemnly celebrate the anniversary of the foundation on that day: "That day ought not go unnoticed, and I consider it a duty to call your attention to such a solemn anniversary, so that your hearts may be filled with gratitude to God and affection for our beloved Congregation." The Superior General requested a special indulgence from the Holy See for the occasion. It was granted for all the members of the Congregation including novices and postulants.*

*Ever since then January 25 has become the day when Oblates celebrate the birth of their Congregation. We should call this day more properly: the beginning of community life.*

G. Cosentino, *Notre Congrégation a-t-elle été fondée le 25 janvier 1816?*, «Études oblate» 15 (1956), p. 148-158; J. Pielorz, *Nouvelle recherche sur la fondation de notre Congrégation*, «Missions», 83 (1956) 192-253; 84 (1957), p. 111-166; G. Cosentino, *Quelle est, selon le Fondateur, la date de la fondation?*, «Études oblate» 17 (1958), p. 352-360; J. Pielorz, *La Congrégation OMI était-elle fondée le 25 janvier 1816?*, “Vie Oblate Life” 54 (1995), p. 161-182; E. Lamirande, *Eugène de Mazenod et les Missionnaires de Provence. Étapes de la fondation (1815-1816)*, « Vie Oblate Life » 57 (1998), p. 395-438; M. Courvoisier, *The Origins of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate 1812-1818*, Rome, 2015 (Oblatio Studia, 5).

January 26

FATHER THOMAS, SRI LANKA (1886-1964)  
FOUNDER OF THE ROSARIANS

*The name of this “rishi” (Hindi: sage) was Bastiampillai Anthonipillai. For his deep knowledge of Thomism, his teacher, Fr. Luis Coquil, gave him the new name of Thomas, after St. Thomas Aquinas, the Angelic Doctor.*

*Anthonipillai was born March 7, 1886 in Padiyanthalvu, a village near Jaffna (Sri Lanka). One day, during a Sacred Scripture lesson, he heard these words of Jesus: “If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself, take up his cross and follow me” (Mt 16:24). They were decisive words that brought him to enter the Oblates. Well versed in Hindu literature and the Hindu classics, in keeping with the invitation of Pius XI to develop contemplative communities in mission countries, he was invited by the bishop of Jaffna, Alfred Guyomard, OMI, to found some contemplative monasteries on the island. Thus was born a congregation of native monks, the Rosarians, the first indigenous community of contemplative monks in Asia which was followed later by a female branch. They eventually developed various Christian ashrams on the island and in India.*

*He died on January 26, 1964. The Superior General of the Oblates, Fr. Leo Deschâtelets, after having met him, told the students of the International Scholasticate in Rome: “If you want to see a saint, go to*

*Tholagatty. You will find in that old man all that is usually associated with sanctity. Everything about him responds to our common conception of a man of God.”*

*Fr. Thomas describes his ideal this way:*

First, there is the supreme importance of prayer and penance for every man in the work of his sanctification and salvation. The first and foremost duty of every man born into this world is to render to his Creator the homage of prayer and penance. No man can duly fulfill this duty except in Christ, with Christ and through Christ. But there are millions of people who are unaware of this divine ordinance or ignore it. And of those who are supposed to be aware of it, very few take sufficient pains to fulfill its requirements. As a result, our iniquities accumulate on our head and become a heavy burden. Human society is off the hinges; it will go on from bad to worse until it is crushed by the weight of its iniquities. In these circumstances, it is a high honour and rare privilege for those who love God to be able to offer themselves as victims in union with Christ in order to make vicarious satisfaction for others and thereby ‘fill up those things that are wanting in the sufferings of Christ’. No doubt, there are many souls in the West, who have already for ages consecrated themselves as victims of expiation. But the Church in Sri Lanka and India cannot be said to live her life fully and integrally, until she counts a large number of such souls from among the children of her soil. (*Report sent to Fr. Louis Perrot, OMI, the Vicar of Missions*, 21 March 1932)

M. Zago - J.B. Packianather, *Father B. Thomas, o.m.i., founder of the Rosarians*, “Vie Oblate Life” 40 (1981), p. 11-25; L. Bastiampilai Rayappu, *Le père B. A. Thomas, o.m.i., fondateur des Rosariens*, “Vie Oblate Life” 40 (1981), p. 109-120; P. E. Jesuthasan, *A Saint for Sri Lanka, Biography of Rev. Fr. B.A. Thomas, O.M.I., Oblate Scholasticate*, Ampititiya, Sri Lanka, 2001 (Unpublished); A Rosarian, “*The Mad Monk of Tholagatty*”. *Father B. A. Thomas, o.m.i., 1886-1964*, Oblate General Postulation, Rome 1992; I.S.R. Alphonse, *A fool for Christ. The Biography of Rev. Fr. B.A. Thomas OMI*, Rosarian Publications, Bangalore 200, 312 p.

MISSION AND MERCY

*On the occasion of the 200th anniversary of our Foundation, Christophe Dufour, Archbishop of Aix, presided over the celebrations in his diocese. In his homily, he recalls the story of our origins.*

“The Holy Spirit has sent me to bring good news to the poor”. [...] inspired a young priest of the diocese of Aix, born on the Cours Mirabeau, to choose these words as the motto for the community of Missionaries of Provence which he founded: “The poor have been evangelized.” [...]

Evangelization, new evangelization: Saint Eugene de Mazenod is here as one of our teachers. [...] How did Eugene, this son of the rich, who loved money and luxury – he had promised to marry a woman who had money! – how was he able to choose this fundamental orientation for his life: to go and bring the Gospel to the poor? He would tell us: “Because Christ himself called me.” Christ called him, a bit like the apostle Paul, as he gazed upon the Cross one Good Friday in the church of the Madeleine, in 1808. It was because Saint Eugene, beneath his superior airs, his desire to be pleasing in the eyes of the world, has a sort of poverty, a wound. Because he himself was poor, he was able to accept the Gospel and live a real encounter with Christ. Because he was poor, Christ went to him. [...] Before the Cross, he recognized his own poverty and Christ took hold of him. [...]

And Eugene de Mazenod allowed himself to be led to the poor. First of all, to the prisoners, with the ministry of prisons founded two centuries before him, a ministry still alive today in Aix-en-Provence. Then the jobless youth in front of the Palace of Justice, with whom he would found the Association of Christian Youth in April 1813. He would also start a group for the chimney sweeps and a group for young soldiers.... He had the charism of a founder – that is why Christ called him! He was completely motivated by this passion for the Gospel. [...]

In the letter he wrote to the Capitular Vicars General to ask for permission to establish a community with some priests of the diocese, he wrote that in bringing the Gospel to the poor, Christ gave a proof that

he was the Son of God. Pope Francis adds: in the same way that Jesus proved that he was sent by the Father by bringing the Gospel and the love of God to the poor, so too the disciple, as a missionary, will prove to Christ that he is an authentic disciple.

After *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis announced a Holy Year of Mercy. A year of favor. He shares his conviction that the reception of divine mercy is a necessity, a prerequisite to any missionary renewal. Here too the missionary experience of Saint Eugene de Mazenod should be recalled.

First, the Rule of his community makes a requirement for the missionaries: between each mission, they were to get together for a time of fraternal life, of prayer and sharing, of reconciliation and mutual forgiveness. Then there's confession. The missionaries would bring with them four portable confessionals. Eugene relates in his journal of the mission at Grans: "No one was making the Easter duty... soon one would have to close the church, so little was it used... Everything changed that first week: from 3 in the morning, the penitents crowded around the confessionals... We stayed there for as long as 28 hours without stopping."

Finally, there was the role of reconciliation. The Revolution had produced hatred in the villages. The mission was a sort of jubilee of mercy. Eugene preached reconciliation: "It is not possible to live together in the parish if we are not reconciled." It was proposed to those who hated one another to come forward under the cross, before the altar, and to talk, with the missionary as the sole witness.

There can be no successful mission without reconciliation. Pope Francis tells us that again. After calling us to be missionary-disciples, he calls upon us to reconcile with one another by accepting the gift that is above every gift, pardon, whose source is the divine mercy. [...]

Through the intercession of Saint Eugene de Mazenod, let us ask for the grace to see ourselves as poor, to accept the divine mercy and to be its witnesses, so that the Good News might be proclaimed to the poor. Amen. (Christophe Dufour, Archbishop of Aix, Homily on the occasion of the Jubilee of the Oblates celebrated in the Saint-Sauveur Cathedral in Aix, January 24, 2016)

BLESSED ÁNGEL FRANCISCO BOCOS (1883-1936)  
MARTYR OF SPAIN

*He was born on January 27, 1883, in Ruijas, a very small town in Cantabria. He made his perpetual oblation as a Brother in 1907. On November 28, 1936, he was “taken out” to be executed with twelve other Oblates at Paracuellos del Jarama.*

*His childhood was particularly difficult, as he was the son of a single mother who, moreover, died when he was still a child. He was taken in by his uncle Felipe Hernando, a diocesan priest, who was the parish priest of a nearby village. From his uncle he received a solid Christian education.*

*He was in various communities, always working as a cook, especially in houses of formation, not only in Spain but also in Italy (Novitiate of St. Pierre d'Aosta and St. Giorgio Canavese) and France (Scholasticate of Notre Dame de Lumière), where he had to endure the hardships of the First World War. The fact that he spent his whole life in houses of formation shows the high regard in which he was held by his superiors. He was also a man of practicality and thrift, who had to organize himself to cook in communities with many members in times of scarcity.*

*Félix Erviti, who knew Brother Bocos when he was a junior at Lumière in 1924-1925, tells us of him: “I remember him as a rather short person, chubby, with a beard, who did things very well and who was in charge of the dining room. It was said that he had a special ability for the treatment of wine; in that area near Avignon, we were given a large quantity of liters of wine that Brother Ángel Bocos bottled. In the great festivities they took those moldy bottles to the Superiors, who gave their “consent” to that wine and of course it was something exquisite. I saw him pray in the Chapel, he did it with piety and I can say that he was a very serious, spiritual man and that in his room he had several images that expressed his piety. I also remember that Lumière, where the Community lived, was a sanctuary of the Blessed Virgin and in the crypt we would go to do the exercises of piety in which Brother Ángel Bocos stood out. His character was gentle and peaceful, and as far as I*

know he never had any incident with any member of the Community. [...] He stood out for his humility and his silence”.

January 28, St. Thomas Aquinas

## ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

*The invocation of St. Thomas Aquinas was added to the litany of the patrons of the Congregation in the 1958 Prayer Manual.*

*From 1850 St. Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologica had become the basic manual for the Oblate scholastics' studies; each of them had to have a copy of it. "It was then in the works of the Angelic Doctor, in the Summa, that the young Levites were to draw sure knowledge." (Biographical Notice of P.H. Carbonel [seminarian at Montolivet 1856-1861] Marseilles 1891). Among the many testimonies of the influence of the Summa on the life of the Oblates, we might recall that of Fr. Rey, who had "a real fascination for it. Late in his life, when the conversation would turn to his years as a professor in Marseilles, he delighted in talking about his predilection for the Angelic Doctor, of the study he had made of his works, and the zeal he had in giving his students a taste for them." (E. Baffie, Le premier chapelain de Montmartre. Le bon père Laurent Achille Rey, omi, Paris 1912, p. 44).*

*The Roman Scholasticate had been open for only a few months when the whole community, at the request of the superior, Father Cas-sian Augier, was invited by Leo XIII to attend his Mass in the private chapel in the Vatican. After the celebration there was an audience in the throne room. The conversation was friendly and covered various subjects. Among them was the importance of the study of theology, based especially on Saint Thomas as the Pope had recommended in his recent encyclical Aeterni Patris (1879).*

- Now you are safe, sheltered, but later in the sacred ministry, you will encounter danger, and you will have to defend the Church and the persecuted Church. In order not to fail you need *solid* virtues, *solid* virtues, he repeated with force. You also need *solid* knowledge. I am happy to see so many of you. With numbers there is competition, enthusiasm, *circuli faciunt doctores*. I am also pleased to learn that you follow



the courses at the Gregorian University.... There are distinguished professors there, the most learned among the Jesuits, whom I myself had come from France and America, where they taught. I requested them of the General of the Society so as to strengthen the study of theology and philosophy, and also to teach according to the doctrine and method of St. Thomas.

- Our revered Founder especially recommended the study of St. Liguori and the Angelic Doctor; and our first brothers had no other dogma book than the *Summa* of St. Thomas.

- Hey! exclaimed the Holy Father with visible satisfaction, your founder, your elders, advise you the study of St. Thomas Aquinas, and the Pope commands it. What more do you need?

- *For a few moments longer, he stressed the need for serious study, and to train oneself in the doctrine and method of the Angelic Doctor, and he ended his talk with these often-repeated words: Have solid virtue and solid knowledge. ("Missions OMI" 20 [1882], p. 340-341)*

\* \* \*

AUGUSTE LAVILLARDIÈRE (1844-1908)  
FIFTH SUPERIOR GENERAL (1906-1908)

*September 23, 1906, the General Chapter held in Rome elected Fr. Auguste Lavillardière Superior General, on the first ballot and by a strong majority of votes (44 out of 50). The Congregation welcomed the appointment with satisfaction. Immediately after the Chapter, he briefly visited the Oblates in Italy, France, Belgium, and Holland. But already during this long tour, the illness of which he had felt the first symptoms during the Chapter got worse. He had to stay in Lyons from where he looked after the affairs of the Congregation; he kept in close contact with the members of the General Council in Rome and carried on an extensive correspondence with the Oblates. His disease, cancer, prevented him from returning to the General House in Rome and forced him to appoint a Vicar General for the Congregation on September 23, 1907. He died in Lyons on January 28, 1908.*

[The discussions at the General Chapter were inspired] by a love for the Family; the discussions which were sometimes heated and opinionated, were always polite and filled with fraternal charity, which inevitably ended in that wondrous unity which has been the hallmark of our last assembly!

May this unity always be the characteristic of our beloved Congregation! Unity of minds, unity of interests, unity in our mutual relations, unity in the observance of our Holy Rules, unity in our apostolic traditions! [...] This will allow us to reach the goal of our sublime mission: is not this the source of strength, peace and holiness! (*Circular Letter* No. 92, April 21, 1907, *Circulaires administratives*, 3, p. 141-142)

The good Lord has undoubtedly permitted this long ordeal [illness], so that I can better appreciate the thoughtfulness of the sons he has given me, who compete to offer good wishes and sympathy: I say this to tell you that the sweetest consolations are not lacking. [...] For the rest, may the holy will of God be always done! (*Circular Letter* No. 93, June 21, 1907, *Circulaires administratives*, 3, p. 208-209)

J. Bernard, o.m.i., *Très Révérend Père Lavillardière 1844-1908*, Bar-Le-Duc, 1908, p. 118.

*January 29*

#### APPROVAL OF THE VICARS GENERAL OF AIX

*The Petition addressed to the Capitular Vicars General of Aix requesting permission to form a Society of Missionaries bears the date of approval of January 29, 1816 (Icard, one of the signatories, is not mentioned in the response. On the other hand, we find there the name of Maunier):*

Convinced of the usefulness of the aforesaid group formed by respectable priests dedicated to the salvation of souls, full of confidence that the mercy of God will bless their enterprise, recognizing that this is a sign of the infinite goodness to have inspired the aforementioned priests with the generous resolution to devote themselves to the instruction and edification of their neighbor, living in community for this pur-

pose in the house known as the Carmelites of Aix, under the observance of the above regulation, of which we examined and approve the terms [...]. Guigou, Canon, Vicar General.

*The Petition says:*

The undersigned priests:

- deeply moved by the deplorable situation of the small towns and villages of Provence that have almost completely lost the faith;
- knowing from experience that the callousness or indifference of these people renders the ordinary help supplied by your concern for their salvation insufficient and even useless;
- convinced that missions are the only means by which these people who have gone astray can be brought out of their degradation;
- desirous, at the same time, of responding to the call which summons them to consecrate themselves to this arduous ministry;
- and wishing to accomplish it in a manner as useful to themselves as it is advantageous for the people whom they propose to evangelize;
- have the honour of requesting from you the authorization to come together at Aix in the old house of the Carmelites which one of them has acquired; and to live there in community under a Rule whose main points they now indicate to you.

The end of this Society is not only to work for the salvation of one's neighbor by dedicating itself to the ministry of preaching; its chief aim also includes providing its members with the means necessary to practice the virtues of religion to which they are so strongly attached that the greater number of them would have consecrated themselves for life to their observance in some religious order, did they not nurture the hope of finding in the Missionaries' community more or less the same advantages as in the religious state to which they wanted to pledge themselves.

If they preferred to form a regular community of Missionaries, it is in an effort to be useful to the diocese, while at the same time working at their own sanctification in conformity with their vocation.

Thus, their life will be spent in prayer, in meditating the sacred truths, in practising the virtues of religion, in studying Sacred Scripture, the holy Fathers, dogmatic and moral theology, in preaching and in the direction of youth. (*Oblate Writings*, 13, 2)

BLESSED FRANCISCO POLVORINOS GÓMEZ (1910-1936)  
MARTYR OF SPAIN

*He was born in Calaveras de Arriba, in the province and diocese of León, on January 29, 1910, of peasant and shepherd parents. He entered the seminary at the age of 16, a little too old for his time. He took his first vows on August 15, 1932. Military service delayed his studies and perpetual oblation. He was a pious man, observant of the Rule, frank with his superiors, careful of his vocation and interested in the works of the Congregation. He liked to "do good without making noise". He stood out for his love for the Church, which he expressed expressly during family vacations, with a phrase that became popular in the town: "The Church will always be persecuted but will never be defeated". When he was martyred he had finished his first year of theology and was 26 years old.*

*Alberto Pacho, nephew, testifies:*

"From the time he was arrested until the dawn of July 24 (when he was executed), apart from the humiliations to which the whole community was subjected, I suspect that, the same as the other companions, he would be subjected at least to contempt and ill-treatment. I understand that in the short time that they were detained in the convent of Pozuelo, they led an intensely spiritual life. He received the Eucharist, which, in his case and that of his companions, was like the Viaticum, when they decided to consume the Eucharist to avoid profanations. I know all this from references of the survivors. In the early morning of July 24, 1936, the militiamen read the list of seven names of Oblates, among which they included my uncle. The first news I received of his death, as martyrdom, was the letter sent to his father (my grandfather), at the beginning of May 1937, signed by Father Matías Mediavilla, the original of which I have kept and which I have read many times. This letter was kept in my own family with veneration".

*The most significant fragment of this letter says: "I understand how sad this news is for your parents; but in these times it is an honor to be parents of martyrs. Know how to accept this sacrifice with Christian*

resignation, certain that your blood will be a blessing for all your family and for our Congregation”.

*January 30*

#### THIS WAY OF LIFE

*In his Mémoires Eugene describes the living conditions of the first team of three in the Carmelite convent. He had to accept “the onerous conditions” of the director of the boarding school:*

She had left us narrowly confined to the rooms she had deeded over to us. To reach the top-floor apartment, which now serves as a library, we had to use the small staircase leading from the outside of the house; we had great difficulty squeezing into these quarters. Thus, two of our group slept in the room that has now become the library, while I myself slept in the narrow passageway leading to it. As we had very little furniture in those first days, we set a lamp on the threshold of the connecting door and it served the three of us at bedtime.

The refectory, supposedly temporary, remained poorly furnished for a long time. Our improvised table was merely a plank placed over two barrels which served as legs. The fireplace, where we did our cooking, smoked so badly that it blotted the daylight out of the foxhole where we ate with great relish the meager portions set before us. This suited the dispositions God had put into our hearts far more than the leisurely meals my mother would have been glad to serve us at her home. We had not lost any of our cheerfulness. On the contrary, as this way of life formed a pretty stark contrast with that which we had left, we often had a hearty laugh about it. (Rambert, I, p. 176-177).

*January 31*

#### MARIUS SUZANNE (1799-1829) THE FAVORITE SON OF ST. EUGENE

*In the autumn of 1816, Marius Suzanne, who was to begin his philosophy at the major seminary, extended his vacation time in Fuveau*

in order to be able to take part in the second mission being preached in his parish by the Missionaries of Provence. He was given the task of teaching catechism to the men, visiting those who refused to attend the mission exercises, and responsibility for the singing and the decor for the main ceremonies. He entered the Aix community at the end of the mission. Immediately after ordination he began preaching parish missions. In 1823, Suzanne, who was 24 years old, became the superior at Calvaire. The Founder became immediately attached to this young man brimming with talents and virtue, and endowed with an affectionate nature and a fiery temperament like his own. According to Fr. Rey, he was “the spitting image of Father de Mazenod.” Fr. Alexandre Audo writes: “Young Father Suzanne was to Father de Mazenod what Joseph was to the patriarch Jacob, what Saint John was to Our Lord: the favorite son. Moreover, he saw in him an alter-ego, the man for the future of the Congregation, the one who would step into his shoes to govern the religious family. (*“Missions OMI”* 60 (1926), p. 285-286) Yet the Founder’s love for him was not over-indulgent. When it was necessary he could severely reprimand and correct him. For example, in response to complaints from the community he called him to task publicly and removed him as superior of the Calvaire house.

At the end of 1828, when Fr. Suzanne was 29, his tuberculosis worsened. For several months, the Founder was almost always at his bedside.

November 26, 1828: My body must be of iron to resist such violent and continuous emotions of the soul.... You are on the field of battle (preaching a mission) and I am at the foot of the cross whereon our poor brother is nailed. (*Oblate Writings*, 7, 169)

December 15, 1828: If I showed exteriorly all the anguish I am going through, they would take me for a madman, when in truth I am simply a man who, so I wish to believe, is rendered very imperfect by his love. Yes! Indeed I am so imperfect. (*Oblate Writings*, 7, 171)

January 29, 1829: My hours, my days and my nights are spent beside our blessed patient.... This dear child... communicates to me all

his agony... while repeating to me a thousand times, with the most tender accent, these words: 'My good father' which sooth him and pierce me, for indeed that is what I am, good Father, and that is what kills me, being on the point of losing so good a son, a being whom I have always cherished more than myself. (*Oblate Writings*, 7, 175)

*Bishop J. Jeancard relates the continuous touching dialogue between the ill Father Suzanne and St. Eugene. In his notes (late January 1829), Eugene wrote:*

I die a hundred times each day; my grief is excessive; it is beyond words.... I am in continual agony; I would die if I did not find relief from time to time in an outburst of sobbing and copious tears. I do not think any of my children love me like he does. It could be said he modelled his heart and mind on mine, or, to phrase it better, this happened wholly naturally.... Oh, my God! You are sundering two hearts made to be ever united. (*Oblate Writings*, 15, 176-177)

*Father Suzanne died January 31, 1829, at two o'clock in the afternoon. After the death of St. Eugene, an image of the Madonna was found in his prayer book which he had kept for over thirty years. It was the image he had asked Father Suzanne to kiss moments before his death. He had written on the back of the image:*

My son, your traits like your virtues are graven on my soul in indelible characters! I will love you in your absence as I loved you when you were the apple of my eye. What am I saying, absent! Are you not ever alive in my heart, present in my thoughts?

My beloved son, who will console me over your loss? The memory of what you meant to me? Alas! I have you no longer! The thought of the eternal happiness you are enjoying? Summon me then to your side, for me to share it. (*Oblate Writings*, 15, 177)

M. Suzanne, *Quelques lettres sur la mission d'Aix, Marseilles*, 1820, 44 p. The handwritten notes of his sermons and meditations are preserved in the General Archives. J. Jeancard, *Mélanges historiques sur la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée à l'occasion de la vie et de la mort du R.P. Suzanne*, Tours 1872, 400 p.





# February

**T**his period of the year is devoted particularly to the first community of Aix, to the first mission at Grans (February 1816), and to the pontifical approval of the Congregation and the Constitutions and Rules (February 17, 1826).

*February 1*

## THE FIRST COMMUNITY IN AIX

*Some of the early writings describe the life of the first community in Aix.*

We are six.... Our community is very fervent. There are no better priests throughout the diocese. (Eugene de Mazenod to Forbin-Janson, October 9, 1816, *Oblate Writings*, 6, p. 24)

We live in community under a mild Rule which fixes our duties and gives a very great value to the least of our actions. The spirit of charity and of the most perfect brotherhood reigns amongst us. Our ambition is to gain souls for Jesus Christ. (Eugene de Mazenod to a diocesan priest, Fr. Vignier, January 6, 1819, *Oblate Writings*, 6, p. 55)

[...] We are all striving for perfection, a perfection that we will not fail to achieve by faithfully following our holy rule.... In a word... we have one heart and one soul: *Cor Unum et anima una*.... (Jacques Joseph Marcou, a novice to Hippolyte Guibert, a seminarian, May 11, 1822).

Studia 11 ■ 64 ■ “Nihil linquendum inausum”

Studia 11 ■ 64 ■

## Studia 11

## Studia 11

## Studia 11

## Studia 11

*Throughout his life St. Eugene never ceased to emphasize the essence of the oblation: the entire giving of self, without reserve to God and to His cause, which is that of the Church: the salvation of souls, the poor and the most abandoned. This is how he expresses it in the letter to Brother Baret, dated August 18, 1843:*

Now you are consecrated to God for life and beyond by your oblation; and I must add in all humility but with great consolation, that thereby I have become your father. I do not know you personally; but since the affection that unites me with my children is essentially supernatural, it is enough for me to know that the Saviour Jesus Christ, our common Master, has received your vows, has adopted you and has marked you with the seal that makes us what we are, so that we are united in the most intimate bonds of charity and that I am bound to you forever as you are to me.

Accustom yourself, my dear son, to having confidence in the Lord, without reservation whatsoever. We must become entirely generous toward our Father who is so good and, at the same time, both so great and so powerful. There must be no reservations in the gift of ourselves to him. He knows your needs, he knows the lawful desires of your heart: that's all that is needed. He rightfully wants us to consider ourselves so honored, so happy to be admitted into the secret intimacy of his privileged disciples, that in exchange and in gratitude we give ourselves to him without reserve and without conditions. [...]

You consecrated yourself to God, to his Church, to the Congregation. Refer to Him for everything else. He will know how to inspire in those who are in charge that which is right. (*Oblate Writings*, 10, p. 27)

É. Lamirande, *Esprit d'oblation. Approche historique*, «Études oblates» 15 (1956), p. 323-355. H. Charbonneau, *Oblation*, DOV, p. 671-680.

February 3

ON THE FIRST COMMUNITY IN AIX

*The life of the first community in Aix according to Mgr. J. Jeancard, one of its early members.*

The community of Aix was really a family. Everyone was living the same life, and every heart realized it was driven by the same influence....

All in varying degrees, submitted with happiness to this sweet and easy yoke. The *cor unum et anima una* that the Founder recommends in his rules as one of the characteristics of the Society was really the distinctive trait of this small community.... The members of this small community... presented a touching sight by the bond of affection which, uniting them to their leader, united them all among themselves. It was a bit like the image of the first Christians, such as the Acts of the Apostles presents them to us. No rivalry, no self-seeking to the detriment of another, but rather joy and even pride in a brother's accomplishments. His talents and works were praised with great satisfaction.... I ask forgiveness for my needless repetition, but I cannot stress enough the great family spirit that was the hallmark of the Congregation even before it was formed....

Following the example and the instructions of the venerable Founder, the virtues of the apostolic man were widespread throughout the community at Aix. They were transmitted from one to the other. It was, I like to say, a Cenacle where some of the gifts that came down from heaven on the day of Pentecost were the object of incessant communication. They filled the whole place with the good aroma of Christ. (J. Jeancard, *Mélanges historiques*..., Tours 1872, p. 26, 28-29, 61)

F. Ciardi, *Introduction* to Jacques Jeancard, "*The community of Aix was really a family*", "Oblatio" 3 (2014), p. 111-118.

## ANNIVERSARY: THE EUCHARISTIC MIRACLE

*Every year on this day the Oblates, together with the Sisters of the Holy Family of Bordeaux, recall the Eucharistic miracle that took place in 1822, at the beginning of that religious family.*

*On Sunday 3 February 1822 Fr Noailles was unable to be present, as was his custom, to give Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament at the convent in Mazarin Street, Bordeaux. He asked a local priest, to replace him. Scarcely had the priest placed the Blessed Sacrament in the monstrance when, instead of the host, the head and upper part of the body of a young man of extraordinary beauty, surrounded by a brilliant halo, were distinctly seen. His left hand rested on his heart and his right hand was stretched out in blessing towards the people in the chapel. They included the sisters, the orphans in their care, some parishioners from the locality and the altar boy. Though not everyone saw the apparition all testify to a remarkable experience. For some, it was an overwhelming sense of the Divine presence and all speak of an impression of dazzling brightness and light infusing the chapel.*

*The miraculous apparition lasted for about twenty minutes. This event confirmed Fr Noailles in his resolve to continue the work he had begun in spite of difficulties and obstacles, convinced that it was indeed God's work: "My great desire, as my most constant prayer to the Lord, is to see a continuation of the good which Jesus himself came to bless and encourage in a visible manner, a blessing which, to this day, has borne such abundant fruits."*

*February 4*

BENJAMIN DAVID DE JESUS (1940-1997)  
VICAR APOSTOLIC OF JOLO, PHILIPPINES

*February 4, 1997, Bishop Benjamin de Jesus, Vicar Apostolic of Jolo, was assassinated on the square in front of the cathedral as he was about to get into his car.*

*He was ordained bishop by Pope John Paul II on January 6, 1992 in St. Peter's Basilica. He was the first Filipino Vicar Apostolic of Jolo. When he was appointed, we read in the Province Newsletter:*

Brother Ben is someone who is cheerful and happy to be alive. His smile is contagious. He is a priest who is totally committed to the pastoral care of the people, a man respected and loved by all the people of Jolo, both Muslims and Christians.... He knows well the Vicariate that he has traveled by boat, jeep and on horseback, many times risking his life, given the conditions in the region. All the children in Jolo familiarly call him “Padil Bin” (Father Ben); for Muslims, he is a long-time friend and one who has a very good relationship with them....

*His fellow bishops say:*

He was very peaceful, easy to talk with, willing to listen; loved by the people, even Muslims.

A smiling bishop, always at peace, despite the problems of his region. He was not afraid; his only concern was for peace.

He was a man of God, a man of peace. He lived his vocation with zeal and dedication, giving of himself in a multi-religious environment, with the ardent desire to foster peace and harmony everywhere. He was a tireless promoter of dialogue not only of minds and hearts, but also of life, personally committed to fully understand not only the Catholics but also the Muslims of Sulu and Tawi Tawi.

*Ms. Virginia Villanueva spoke for everyone when she introduced the Funeral Mass:*

He lived his motto: “To love is to serve,” for he loved and served everybody, Muslim or Christian, rich or poor, but he had a special love for children and the aged, the poor and the marginalized, and the least of the least, the Badjaos. “Love is repaid with love.” Everybody loved him, but those whom he loved and cared for so tenderly took him into their heart and reciprocated in full the love he lavished upon them.... His constant admonition was: “Live your life as simply, as joyfully, as faithfully, as if each day were your last”. He taught us the secret of living life to the full.

February 5

ON THE FIRST COMMUNITY IN AIX

*The life of the first community in Aix according to Mgr. J. Jeancard, one of its early members.*

The Society was only in its early stages, but it is interesting to consider for a moment this mustard seed, which was to become a tree whose branches have spread much further than one could have imagined at the time. While following the holy inspiration to seek everywhere for priests willing to sacrifice everything for God, and to gather them in a congregation to work with him for the sanctification of souls in preaching missions, Mr. de Mazenod had wanted also to form around himself like an apostolic school, which would continue the generous enterprise and be the instrument by which it would develop.

The youth [...] were the first students of this holy school. They were specially cared for by Mr. de Mazenod himself, who became the director of their consciences and their novice master. The care he gave to their education was constant: during recreation, on walks (when he had time to accompany them), in his room, in the common room, in the chapel, finally everywhere he tried to animate them with the spirit of God. So we can say that the air of the house was steeped in this spirit; it was breathed constantly and there was no other. They were living in a fully apostolic atmosphere, supported also, it must be said, by all the priests of the community, even those who later were not part of the Society when it was definitively constituted by the Holy See. Zeal and self-sacrifice were, with inevitable differences, the hallmark of these priests, all of whom without exception were men of high quality as regards priestly virtues. (J. Jeancard, *Mélanges historiques*, p. 26-27)

February 6

ON THE FIRST COMMUNITY IN AIX

*Some early writings describe the life of the Aix community.*

What shall I say of poverty? Nothing equals the destitution in which we found ourselves. The house was devoid of everything. It was

like camping in an abandoned shack. This house, where what is called comfortable had always been unknown at all levels, where there was no other furniture than a few old things, broken and discarded from old houses, offered barely a miserable shelter to its inhabitants, and they were more than happy to resemble a bit He who did not have a stone on which to rest his head. (J. Jeancard, *Mélanges historiques*, p. 31)

*Fr. M. de L'Hermite speaks of Thérèse Bonneau, the woman in the ancient Carmel of Aix, who had come from the service of the young girls in the boarding house to the service of the community of missionaries:*

Thérèse Bonneau, a good woman, who is now (1868) ending a long and Christian old age, passed from the service of the boarding house to the service of the missionaries. She likes to tell of the fervor and austerity of the early days. She was given a modest salary of a hundred francs by M. de Mazenod. The lifestyle was not noted for its comfort say the chronicles and often Therese, pitying the poor standard of the community, took from her own meager means to add something to the dinner of the mortified men she served, without ever telling them, she says. (*Le R.P. Courtès, omi, ... sa vie, ses pensées*, Aix, 1868, p. 23).

*Fortuné de Mazenod, who lived in the Aix community, also speaks of her and describes her as “the lone excellent domestic for about 20 people, a model of virtue and work”.*

*February 7, Blessed Pius IX*

#### BLESSED PIUS IX AND DE MAZENOD

Bishop de Mazenod knew and loved Pius IX who received him in audience five times. He wrote more than fifty letters to him and received sixteen. He named him in nearly three hundred letters or entries in his diary. Their relations were intense on some occasions, first during the Roman revolution of 1848 and the exile of the Pope to Gaeta. The French government then invited the Pope to take refuge in France. The Founder wrote in a pastoral letter on November 29: “With what joy we, especially, will have him in our house.” All the French bishops wrote



to the Pope; the first response of the latter is addressed to the Bishop of Marseilles.

On the trip to Rome with Father Tempier in 1851 to request approval of changes to the Rule, the Founder was received in audience three times. It was then that the Pope granted him and his successors the pallium. In Rome, from October 27 to December 31, 1854 for the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, Bishop de Mazenod was invited to stay at the Quirinal palace with some other bishops. He was received in audience twice (October 30 and December 26) and wrote several letters to the Pope asking him not to worry about the doubts and opposition of some prelates to the definition of the dogma.

Bishop Jeancard announced the death of Bishop de Mazenod to Pius IX, who replied, *manu propria*: “We are deeply grieved at the death of this prelate who, distinguished by his unusual love for religion, piety and priestly zeal, honored himself even in the highest degree by his loyalty, his commitment and his respectful obedience to us and this chair of Peter...” From 1861 to 1878, Pius IX received in audience Father Fabre and most of the Oblate bishops. (Y. Beaudoin, *Relations de Mgr de Mazenod et des Oblats avec quelques-uns de leurs contemporains béatifiés et canonisés*, « Vie Oblate Life » 67 (2008), p. 360-362)

We believe that there are few French bishops, during the period under consideration, who have had as many relations, either direct or indirect, with Pius IX than Bishop de Mazenod. The fact is due in part to the geographical position of Marseilles, which we have noted allowed the Pope to call the Blessed “his neighbor” [...] But it seems that it must be attributed also to the apostolic activity of Bishop de Mazenod and his love for the Roman Church [...] It is only as a result of political events that he was not made a cardinal [...] The Supreme Pontiff, despite the contradictory fluctuations of politics, kept his esteem for Bishop de Mazenod. Nothing proves it better than what he wrote *manu propria* in response to the letter in which Mgr Jeancard announced the death of the Bishop of Marseilles: “We are deeply grieved at the death of this prelate who, distinguished by his unusual love for religion, piety and priestly zeal, honored himself even in the highest degree by his loyalty, his commitment and his respectful obedience for us and this chair of Peter...”

(H. Verkin, *Le bx Eugène de Mazenod et Pie IX*, « Vie Oblate Life » 35 [1976], p. 3-20, 121-152)

J.-M. Salgado, *Le Bx [Bienheureux] de Mazenod et Pie IX*, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1976.

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*February 7, 1814, on his journey back to Rome after his imprisonment in Fontainebleau, Pius VII passed through Aix at midday. Eugene approached his carriage with the same enthusiasm as the crowd that was shouting “Long live the Pope.” He clung to the door of the carriage, lost his hat, slipped, hit against the wheel and dislocated his heel. He decided to follow the Pope, got on another vehicle and followed him to Tourves, where he was admitted into the pope’s apartment. He spoke with him and received the apostolic blessing.*

*February 8*

INAUGURATION OF THE CONFRATERNITY OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS IN AIX

*On July 12, 1814, St. Eugene had asked for the faculty to begin a Confraternity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Aix which would be affiliated to the one in Rome. It was erected on February 8, 1816 in the choir of what would later be called the “Mission Church”, which was then still unusable. The church was already dedicated to the Sacred Heart, who was depicted in the stucco that dominated the apse (but was removed in successive restorations). Currently the Sacred Heart is depicted in the stained-glass window in the back of the church.*

O adorable Heart of my divine Redeemer, fruitful source of all graces, King of all hearts, today I consecrate to you my heart with all its feelings and place myself entirely at your service.

Come then, my God, and reign in it; come and act as a true sovereign, eliminate everything in it that may not please you, straighten its inclinations, bring it back when it is lost, purify its intentions, and imprint in it the love of your holy laws. May the gentleness, patience, hu-

mility, contempt, and detachment from earthly goods, with all the virtues that have made up your joy, become also the joys of my heart.

Be its guide on the dangerous paths of the world, its comforter in time of trouble, its refuge in persecutions and its defender before the gates of hell. Above all, I beg you, by the precious blood shed for me, to inflame my heart with the sacred fire that you brought to earth.

I have so much to fear because of my weakness, but I put all my trust in you and I hope to receive all from your goodness.

Consume in me all that displeases you; drive away from me everything that can resist you; imprint deeply your love in my heart, so that I may never offend you, nor forget you, or ever be separated from you.

Let my name be written in your heart, let my heart be similar to yours, and through you may I love eternally the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

(E. de Mazenod, *Exercice à l'honneur du Sacré Cœur de Jésus...*, Aix, Imprimerie de Tavenier, 1822, p. 3-4)

\* \* \*

VENERABLE PIERRE-BIENVENU NOAILLES (1793-1861)  
FOUNDER OF THE SISTERS OF THE HOLY FAMILY OF BORDEAUX

*Right from his time in the seminary Pierre-Bienvenu Noailles conceived a plan for a vast association which would, in the light of the mystery of the Holy Family and the first Christian communities, contribute to the overall renewal of Catholicism and bring together the entire family of the children God. After his ordination in 1820 he founded the Ladies of Loreto for orphans and abandoned youth. In 1829 he founded the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception for the apostolate in the countryside. In 1831, there was the canonical erection of the Association of the Holy Family. In 1836 he founded the Sisters of Hope for the care of the sick. In Madrid in 1856 he founded the Agricultural Sisters, and in 1859 the Contemplative Sisters.*

*He often contemplated the Holy Family whom he referred to as "the sweet image of the Trinity." It was in this intimate dialogue with Jesus, Mary and Joseph that he discovered his spiritual identity. It can*

*be summed up in one phrase that constitutes the core of the founding charism he was to receive: Seek God alone in all things like Jesus, Mary and Joseph.*

*He died on February 8, 1861, after affiliating his foundation with the Oblates, in the person of St. Eugene. He presented the motivation for this to the General Council of the Holy Family on September 15, 1857:*

The Society of the Oblates of Mary and the Holy Family date back to approximately the same time; they were born in similar circumstances; they emerged from the ruins that our revolutions had made; both placed themselves from their birth under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin professing a particular devotion to her Immaculate Conception.... They have spread with the same speed and far from their native soil, which implies that they share the same blessings of God, the same confidence and courage to get rid of all that hinders the progress of emerging works.... One could say that they were created one for the other.... He [the Pope] has entrusted foreign missions to their Society [the Oblates] where they work with success in extending the reign of J.C.... So it is to these dear and venerable Oblates of Mary that the Founder of the Holy Family proposes to confide his pious heritage; he decided this only after much reflection and after recommending the Blessed Virgin to bless a union that could be formed only under her protection: if she united the two Orders that were already devoted to her, this affiliation would certainly be a source of grace and prosperity for each of them.

H. Tassel, *Oblats de Marie Immaculée et Sœurs de la Sainte-Famille de Bordeaux. Une page d'histoire*, "Études oblates" 11 (1952), p. 297-311.

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BLESSED FRANCISCO ESTEBAN LACAL (1888-1936)  
MARTYR OF SPAIN

*He was born on February 8, 1888, in Soria. Six years of scholasticate spent in five different places (Belgium, Madrid, Melilla, Urnieta and Italy), more than half of which he was obliged to do military service*

as a soldier and without a community, did not prevent this young man from forging himself in the values of missionary religious life. Nor did they prevent him from preparing himself with the study of philosophy and theology, often on his own, without classes or professors to accompany him. These experiences did not make him give up his vocation, but they shaped him, as it is said in a report of the formators, “first of all, a man of duty”, rigid with himself, but understanding and patient with others. He was ordained a priest in 1912 and sent to the juniorate of Urnieta as a teacher, where he remained - except for two years in the community of Las Arenas - until 1935.

P. Francisco Esteban began his ministry as Vice-Provincial at the end of 1932. He exercised it for four years until his martyrdom in November 1936. The Theological Commission of the Process of Beatification emphasizes his high “appreciation of religious life” since “in his judgments and observations his reference to religious life is constant”. It also “reveals his appreciation of the Oblate missionary vocation”. In “his manner of speaking and dealing with people, he is enormously delicate and sympathetic to people and their ‘defects’”, especially “when he is obliged to make changes or to entrust responsibilities”.

Another theologian writes: “The human and Christian stature of Father Francis Stephen appears in these letters. He leaves evidence of his love for the Congregation and the priesthood. He shows himself obedient, respectful and compliant with the norms of the Church and the Congregation. He is humble, trusting of his superiors and supportive of those who need help. He is pious, observant and a lover of religious life. He is seen as a responsible man, meticulous in his observance of the established norms. He lives authority with a spirit of service and is a creator of unity, dialoguing and close to his subjects, and in total communion with his Superiors. He is communicative, open, prudent. He has a great spirit of faith, a lover of poverty and good financial administration. He has a spirit of government, knows how to discern, a good counselor, sound judgment, a sense of reality, knowledge of the people in his charge”.

During the time of secrecy of the Oblates in Madrid between July and October 1936, he visited the scholastics who were hiding clandestinely. When he was arrested, he stood in front of the militiamen and said: “I am responsible for all of these. They are Oblates of Mary Im-

*maculate, and they are with me. I am their superior, a Catholic priest. We are here because we have been expelled from our convent". On November 28, he again affirmed: "We know that you kill us because we are Catholics and religious; we are. I and my companions forgive you with all our hearts. Long live Christ the King!"*

February 9

## THE FIRST OBLATE COMMUNITIES

*The fraternal life of the community of Aix continued in the other early Oblate communities:*

*N.D. du Laus:* What a paradise we have at Laus! I am completely happy as one would be in heaven, and am experiencing it already. I love my brothers, all of them, as myself; I admire them and the outstanding example they give me urges me on to practice virtue....

Every day we increase in fervor, unity, and detachment from everything.... You should see how loving, happy and joyful your sons are, and how harmony reigns continually among them; it is charity that makes everything so delightful.... (A. Coulin to E. de Mazenod, November 24, December 8 and 20, 1820, *Oblate Writings*, II, 1, p. 40)

*N.D. du Laus:* We were very comforted by the spirit of truly fraternal charity, of mutual deference and submission to the superior prevailing among this cherished part of our family. It is here, as in other houses of the Congregation, that we can say that we have one heart and one soul. May God keep forever in the Congregation this precious conformity with the first disciples of the Gospel. (Eugene de Mazenod, *Act of Visitation*, May 28, 1834)

*N.D. de Lumières:* I spent five lovely days with you. I found that you really love each other as brothers, and are all of one heart and one soul. There is not even the minimal disagreement among you, everyone is happy in his own way. (Eugene de Mazenod, *Act of Visitation*).

February 10

FROM THE COMMUNITY OF AIX TO THE COMMUNITY EVERYWHERE

*Fraternal life as a characteristic and permanent element of every Oblate community:*

We have but one heart and one soul.... That was always our hallmark, like that of the first Christians... the spirit that I wished to establish in our Congregation. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Durocher, January 17, 1851, *Oblate Writings*, 2, p. 7).

Oh! I have no doubt that you will follow the footsteps of your elder brothers – see the wonders that it has already pleased the Lord to work through their ministry! .... Live always in this intimate union which makes of our house a true paradise on earth and whenever you are enjoying your family life and speaking amongst yourselves of your happiness, the greatest that one can taste here below, think of your father who languishes far from you. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Sumien and the scholastics, March 18, 1823, *Oblate Writings*, 6, p. 104-105).

Charity is the pivot on which our whole existence turns. That which we ought to have for God makes us renounce the world and has vowed us to his glory by all manner of sacrifice, were it even to be our lives.... Charity for our neighbour is again an essential part of our spirit. We practice it first amongst us by loving each other as brothers, by considering our Society only as the most united family which exists on the earth, by rejoicing over the virtues, the talents and other qualities that our brothers possess just as much as if we possessed them ourselves, in bearing with mildness the little faults that some have not yet overcome, covering them over with the mantle of the most sincere charity, etc.; and as for the rest of mankind, in considering ourselves only as the servants of the Father of the family.... (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Guibert, July 29, 1830, *Oblate Writings*, 7, p. 202-203).

THE FIRST MISSION AT GRANS BEGINS

*Septuagesima Sunday, February 11, 1816, fifteen days after the birth of the community, the Missionaries of Provence began their first joint mission in Grans near Salon-de-Provence. Four missionaries took part: Eugene de Mazenod, Icard, Deblieu and Mie. As for Tempier he remained in Aix for the service of the church and the Youth Congregation, which then had more than three hundred young people. The mission will last for five weeks, until the third Sunday of Lent, March 17. Forty years later in his diary, September 5, 1857, Eugene de Mazenod still feels the need to recall "the wonders that were worked at Grans by the grace of God." (Oblate Writings, 22, p. 108).*

It is absolutely impossible for me to write to you, my good brother and friend. We have no time to eat, nor even to sleep.... Religion would be lost in this country without the mission. It is a triumph. Though it be the death of us, I will not complain. Our work is indispensable and only if we are twelve shall it be able to continue. Plead for recruits in your prayers. I shall regret all my life that you have not been here with us, but God will take into account your sacrifice....

P.S. Between us missionaries... we are what we ought to be, that is to say, we have but one heart, one soul, one thought. It is admirable! Our consolations, like our hardships, are unequalled. (Mazenod to Tempier, February 24, 1816, *Oblate Writings*, 6, p. 18).

The good work proceeds; blasphemy has been banished from this place. The inhabitants do not know how this prodigy has happened for there had been no other place where it had been more frequent.

As for us, we never stop hearing confessions. We take in every variety; therein consists our prayers, our preparation, our thanksgiving and everything else, day and night. The other day I could not say Matins until six o'clock in the evening. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Tempier, March 11, 1816, *Oblate Writings*, 6, p. 19).



## OUR LADY OF LOURDES

*On this day we should not forget that an Oblate community has been present officially in Lourdes since September 19, 1985. A sporadic Oblate presence there started as early as 1975.*

*The first account of the apparitions was written by Saint Bernadette Soubirou in an 1861 letter to an Oblate, Fr. Charles Ferdinand Gondrand. (The text can be found in the Office of Readings for this day.)*

B. Dullier, *Les Oblats et Lourdes dans les premières années du pèlerinage*, « Oblatio », XI (2022), p. 27-35.

*February 12*

## THE MIRACLES OF THE GRANS MISSION

*We continue to follow the progress of the mission in Grans as told by St. Eugene to his father.*

I... had the consolation of heading the mission at Grans. I had never seen miracles, which now I cannot say. The people were abandoned and had completely strayed. Faith had died out. They only knew about God to blaspheme his name in the most horrible manner, and that by women and children as well as by men. Needless to say, no one made their Easter duties. The parish priest did not even confess two men; even the women and children had taken the same part, and soon one could have closed the church, so seldom was it used; half the population had not set foot there for 25 years. What more could I tell you? Everything that you could imagine.

Well, the mission changed everything; from the first week, blasphemy was totally eradicated, so much so that the inhabitants informed the people of Salon who passed through Grans and still used blasphemy that they should give up that terrible habit they had or take a different route if they didn't want to be punished for their insolence. The day after our arrival, we set up confessionals for the four missionaries, they

were besieged from three o'clock in the morning, I tell you this because it is a fact, and we stayed there for the following 28 hours. Twenty-eight hours, I must repeat it so that you don't think I made a mistake in writing it. As for the details as to what happened during the mission, it is impossible to attempt to tell them. Excessive cold did not stop the church from being full from three in the morning onward. Three hours of religious exercises did not quench the holy eagerness of these good country people.... (Eugene de Mazenod to his father, May 1, 1816, *Oblate Writings*, 13, p. 5-6).

*February 13*

#### MINISTRY OF THE WORD

*In the Rule Eugene speaks of the centrality of proclaiming the Word during an Oblate mission:*

The missionary – lest his preaching be in vain – will pray and get others to pray to the Divine Master of hearts, to deign to accompany the words of his minister with that powerful grace, which moves and converts souls, and without which all words are but sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. (*The Rule of Saint Eugene de Mazenod*, First Part, Chapter Three, § 1, Art. 24, Woestman ed., p. 35)

The venerable founder of the Oblates, like the men of God who produced the most fruits of salvation in the work of the missions, insisted that we do not limit ourselves to moving speeches, the effect of which would not last for the masses; but he wanted us to imprint on their minds the truths of the faith, so that they would never forget them. This was especially, he said, the preaching of the Apostles who announced the good news to the nations and taught them to know Jesus Christ crucified.... It was necessary, he said, that every missionary... have no other claim than to be able to say with St. Paul: *Non judicavi me scire aliquis inter nos, nisi Jesus Christum et hunc crucificum* (1 Cor, 2,2). (J. Jeancard, *Mélanges historiques*, p. 15)

## THE MISSION IN PUY-STE-RÉPARADE

*Even before founding the Missionaries of Provence, Saint Eugene had begun to preach missions to the people in the neighboring towns. In a letter to Forbin-Janson, dated April 22, 1813, he gives a brief account of the ten-day mission at Puy-Ste-Réparate, a village about fifteen kilometers north of Aix. He describes this mission as “an apostolic journey, walking and clambering over the hills in search of the sick, and preaching, teaching, confessing, baptizing, and carrying out the Holy Week and Easter ceremonies.” On the Friday before Palm Sunday, he lost his voice.*

I asked God in his goodness to give me back the use of my throat for the next day, for I was to leave for Le Puy on that day; something that would never be allowed in the state I was in. The remedy worked and next day I fled more than made a normal departure, promising myself to look after myself properly on my return, in view of what I would be doing during the ten days of my mission. Now I shall hold my tongue, for at Le Puy I spoke or yelled all day and coughed all night. (*Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 48-50; For the complete text see “Missions OMI” 89 [1962], p. 122-126).

*February 14*

## LIFE AT AIX DURING THE GRANS MISSION

[During the Grans mission Father Tempier had remained in Aix] but certainly it was not to stay idle. He had to care for the church, where I had instituted night prayers in common for the faithful. These prayers were always followed or preceded by points for meditation. Every day many young people belonging to my sodality (over three hundred) gathered in the choir chapel, and recreated in the common room of the house. On Sundays, they attended Mass during which they were given an instruction. In the afternoon, before or after Vespers, they were given a catechism class. Along with all this we also preached sermons to the

public. I also had begun the custom of accompanying the young congregants to my Enclos, near the city, so they could play there at their ease. It was also necessary to confess this little flock ... the work was really excessive. (Bishop de Mazenod, Diary, September 5, 1857, *Oblate Writings*, 22, p. 122 [French text])

*In Aix, says Rey (I, p. 194), “Fr. Tempier had worked hard and under his active supervision the completely restored choir could receive the faithful and serve as a public chapel. The Forty Hours had already been solemnly celebrated there for the first time on February 24, but the influx of devout people showed that there was much good to be done once the church would be made available to the public.” That day was not long in coming.*

*The first Constitutions of the Missionaries of Provence (1818) (“Missions OMI” 78 [1951], p. 36-38) help us to understand the situation.*

Preaching, indeed, has no other end than to lead sinners to the pool of salvation.... It is beyond all doubt that the hearing of confessions is to be preferred to preaching, when there is room for choice, because the private direction and admonition given in the tribunal of penance may in a measure supply the place of instruction and preaching.... If grace has touched a soul by the strength of the word of God, ordinarily it is in the tribunal of penance that grace molds and justifies it.

After the home visits inviting people to the mission and the visits to the sick, it is in the sacrament of penance that each person could be touched personally by the gospel.

*February 15*

#### SANTA MARIA IN CAMPITELLI

*Each year the Oblates in Rome go to the church of Santa Maria in Campitelli to celebrate the Eucharist in memory of February 15, 1826 when, in the building across from the church, the home of Cardinal Pacca, the commission of cardinals had gathered to give their views on the Constitutions and Rules of the Oblates, in view of papal approval.*

*Eugene spent the morning in the church, praying for the success of the meeting, which besides Cardinal Pacca, included Cardinals Pedicini and Pallotta. This is what he says in his diary:*

.... I rushed to get to Cardinal Pacca in time to tell him a few things before the other cardinals gathered at his place. I informed his Eminence that I would stay in the church of Campitelli during their meeting so that, if they should need me, they could get a hold of me quickly, since that church is right across from the Cardinal's palace. As I was going out, I requested that they let me know as soon as the meeting was over. That is exactly what they forgot to do, so that I was able to hear nine masses, one after the other, entirely at peace without being disturbed. Well! Can I say it? I have never felt more at home in a church. I had made the decision on entering that I would pray wholeheartedly while the cardinals were discussing our business matters. The time seemed short to me. I left the church at one o'clock since I knew they had forgotten me, because I could not presume that the cardinals would put off their lunch that long on a fast day. (February 15, 1826, *Oblate Writings*, 17, p. 102-103).

Aloysius Kedl, *In the Footsteps of Saint Eugene: the Roman Church of Santa Maria in Campitelli*, "Vie Oblate Life" 66 (2007), p. 79-90.

*February 16*

#### WAITING FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE RULE

*February 16, 1826 St. Eugene tells Tempier what had happened the previous day in Santa Maria in Campitelli.*

Hush, dear Tempier! I speak to you softly yet loud enough for you to hear. Yesterday, the 15th of the month of February of the year of grace 1826, the Congregation of Cardinals, assembled under the presidency of Cardinal Pacca, prefect, has unanimously approved the Rules, except for slight modifications proposed by the Cardinal *ponent*, the judgment of the Congregation being that our Holy Father the Pope grant the brief of approbation in good and due form.

.... Make arrangements so that God may be thanked.... Let us acknowledge that the conduct of divine Providence in this matter has been admirable and that none of us should ever become oblivious of how evident his protection has been.... It is true that I have always put all my confidence in the goodness of God. As I have told you, I offered the Holy Sacrifice every day for this intention; I constantly invoked the holy Virgin and all the saints, but especially the sovereign Mediator, to whose glory all our intentions are directed....

*Then he reports on what he had written previously in his diary:*

Without drawing breath, I hurried on to tell Cardinal Pacca that I would be waiting in the church of Santa Maria in Campitelli, opposite his palace, while the Congregation was in session. Coming out, I asked them to send me word when the meeting ended; they forgot, so I had time to hear nine Masses. However I assure you that, being prepared for a long wait, I did not find the time long at all; on the contrary, I was quite happy in this beautiful church, occupied as one would wish to be occupied always. However, when I realized it was impossible that the Cardinals should still be in session, I left the church. It was one o'clock. In fact, the meeting had ended more than an hour earlier. I waited till evening to get some news of the result from the Archbishop Secretary. As he was not in the first time I called, I returned later, and, with his usual goodwill towards me, he told me everything had gone wonderfully well, and the Congregation had approved, with some modifications which he would put before me. We set to work immediately, and continued to work for more than two hours. He wielded the pen and wrote down our determinations with his own hand. (February 16, 1826, *Oblate Writings*, 7, p. 30, 31, 33).

*February 17*

PAPAL APPROVAL  
OF THE CONGREGATION AND THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

*“Each year on February 17 we will celebrate the anniversary of the confirmation of the Institute and the approval of the Rules and Constitutions by our Father, Pope Leo XII.” (General Chapter 1826).*

*On February 17, 1826, Pope Leo XII approved the Congregation and its Constitutions and Rules. Saint Eugene announced this to Fr. Tempier on February 18, 1826:*

*Te Deum laudamus, te Dominum confitemur. Te per orbem terrarum sancta confitetur ecclesia. Per singulos dies benedicimus te et laudamus nomen tuum in saeculum, et in saeculum seculi.* My dear friend, my dear brothers, on February 17, 1826, yesterday evening, the Sovereign Pontiff Leo XII confirmed the decision of the congregation of Cardinals and specifically approved the Institute, the Rules and Constitutions of the Missionary Oblates of the Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary... this enterprise which now we can call divine.

The conclusion to be drawn from this, my dear friends and good brothers, is: we must work, with renewed ardour and still more total devotedness, to bring to God all the glory that stems from our efforts and, to the needy souls of our neighbours, salvation in all possible ways; we must attach ourselves heart and soul to our Rules and practice [more] exactly what they prescribe to us.... They are Rules approved by the Church after most minute examination. They have been judged holy and eminently suited to lead those who have embraced them to their goal. They have become the property of the Church that has adopted them. The Pope, by approving them, has become their guarantor.... Just now I can say to you quietly what I will say to you out loud when the brief is delivered: know your dignity, take care never to dishonour your Mother who has just been enthroned and recognized as Queen in the household of the Spouse, whose grace will make her fecund enough to engender a great number of children, if we are faithful and do not draw upon her a shameful sterility by our prevarications. In the name of God, let us be saints. (*Oblate Writings*, 7, p. 39-40).

*February 18*

#### IN THE AIX PRISONS

*Along with preaching in Provençal at the Magdalene and the missions in the neighboring countryside during the Lent of 1813, Saint Eugene also ministered in the prisons of Aix, as he writes to his friend Forbin-Janson:*

On Sunday too, I used to go to the prisons to give an instruction to those unfortunates in French, after which I went on to the confessional to hear the confessions until 6:00 p.m. of those of the prisoners who presented themselves. Before and after the instruction, some hymns are sung. I finish up by giving them evening prayer. From there I hurry home, where is gathered together the finest flower of masculine piety in our poor town. After various exercises, I again give a small instruction, quite simple, in conversational vein, which God in his goodness sees to seasoning, and there you have it all....

Let us urge one another on to do good; God knows how long we will be able for it. Life is short. Yesterday again I was called to a poor woman who had dined well and was in her agony just a few hours later. (To Forbin-Janson, April 22, 1813, *Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 49-50; For complete text see “Missions OMI” 89 [1962], p. 122-126).

*Care of the prisoners became one of the ministries of the Missionaries of Provence. After being volunteer chaplains, in the first months of 1821 they took over the pastoral responsibility of the prisons. Fr. Noël François Moreau was the first to carry out this ministry. This is what he wrote to Fr. de Mazenod:*

I am so happy to take care of the poor prisoners. I would be envious of those who would want to take my place. If you want to offer further proof of your attention, you should only confirm this sublime occupation. I go every day to the prison. Today I spent three and a half hours. Many are willing to follow my recommendations for their salvation. I know that I should not let myself be dazzled by these beautiful appearances, but I am moved to tears of joy at seeing the collaboration of most of them.” (August 3, 1821, in Rey, I, p. 277-278)

*February 19*

#### IN THE AIX PRISONS

*More on Saint Eugene’s ministry in the Aix prisons:*

“He willingly became their chaplain. He visited them almost every day, striving to instruct them, to comfort them and encourage them



when they expressed a wish to return to the practice of their Christian duties. He brought about a noticeable change in these degraded souls.” (Rey, I, p 158).

*Rey continues, quoting from the Mémoires of Fr. Martin:* “He even had opportunity to prepare for death an unhappy woman called Germaine who had been sentenced to death. This guilty woman, who had drawn the horror and indignation of the people upon herself because of the enormity of her crimes, was so moved by the Abbé de Mazenod’s exhortations that she made a complete conversion. She was so well disposed that, contrary to what was usually done at that time, the Abbé de Mazenod permitted her to receive communion.”

*Eugene accompanied her to the scaffold. In June 1813, his spiritual director, Fr. Duclaux wrote to Eugene:* “The ministry you do with prisoners is of the utmost importance....” (Rey I, p. 157-159).

*From this experience was born the following page of the Rule of 1826:*

We are never to forget that one of the principal ends of our Institute is to help the most neglected souls. For this reason, the unfortunate inmates of prisons have a rightful claim upon the charity of the Society.

We will, therefore, assist prisoners in so far as circumstances permit, by frequently visiting them, at least on Sundays, and by teaching them their religious duties.

Above all, we will endeavor by the gentlest exhortations to bring them often to confession and also to receive from time to time Holy Communion. (*The Rule of Saint Eugene de Mazenod*, First Part, Chapter Three, § 4, Woestman ed., p. 39)

*February 20*

#### MINISTRY OF THE WORD

*The ministry of proclaiming the Word is at the center of the preaching during the missions. In his notes while in the seminary St. Eugene already reflected on the transmission of the Word of God:*

[...] We must have the same respect for the Word of God that was handed down to us by the Apostles and their successors as if we were hearing it from the lips of Jesus Christ. [...]

It is by the authority of the Church that I will prove to you first of all that the ministers who teach you announce the pure word of God to you; this good Mother who knows how necessary it is for the faithful to be nourished by this heavenly food, expressly charged her ministers to announce it to her children: *Oportet presbyter praedicare Verbum Dei*. This duty is inherent in the divine nature given to them in the name, by the authority, and by the institution of Jesus Christ. [...]

I prove it in the second place by the authority of the Apostle who in his letter to the Corinthians [II, 5:20] to inform them of the source of the Holy Doctrine that he taught them so that they might be docile to his instructions and receive them with the respect they deserve, told them the following: *Pro Christo legatione fungimur*. Speaking in his own name and that of his successors, he said: we are the ambassadors of Jesus Christ; it is the very doctrine we have received from Him that we teach to you, *pro Christi legatione fungimur*. [...]

I prove it finally by the very authority of Our Lord who expressly said in speaking of the Apostles and those who would succeed them, those who listen to you listen to me, those who despise you, despise me, *qui vos audit, me audit, qui vos spernit me spernit*. The Divine Savior identifies himself in some way with those to whom he gives the august commission to announce his word. (*Sujet de méditations et instructions*, 1811-1821, n. 21)

É. Lamirande, *L'annonce de la Parole de Dieu selon Mgr de Mazenod. Le ministère évangélique de la Congrégation*, “Études oblates” 18 (1959), p. 105-126.

BLESSED ELEUTERIO PRADO VILLARROEL (1915-1936)  
MARTYR OF SPAIN

*Born February 20, 1915 in Prioro (León). On April 25, 1935, he made his first vows as a Brother. He was in charge of the cleaning and maintenance of the scholasticate house, tasks that he carried out with humility and generosity. He was very handy at various manual jobs, especially cabinet making.*

*He was expelled from the Pozuelo house on July 24, 1936, and took refuge for some time in the community of Diego de León and later in a boarding house in the center of Madrid. There he was arrested along with several Oblates on October 15 and was taken to the Modelo Prison and later transferred to the San Antón Prison, from where he was “taken out” on November 28, 1936, to be martyred.*

*Eleuterio Prado’s niece recounts what a fellow prisoner told her: “I have always heard that my uncle was a very optimistic man, cheerful, at all times, even when he was in prison. I think this is a sign of trust in God, as one who lives very sure that God never leaves us out of his hand. This trust in God is what made him remain cheerful when the circumstances he was living in were adverse and, in the case of prison, could make him foresee a near death. The encouragement he instilled in his companions in prison and in the process up to martyrdom stands out. [...] As for the behavior of my uncle Eleuterio, Serviliano and the other Oblates, from the above-mentioned references, I can say that it was one of mutual help, where the virtue of charity shone in a singular way, and where they all encouraged one another”.*

*Another nephew, Eleuterio Prado, narrates that, among the prisoners, there was talk that a great “saca” was being prepared, as it happened that same night, and that it was very easy for one of them to win. On November 27, as usual, Fathers Felipe and Vidal, Augustinians, met with Brother Eleuterio. When they said goodbye to each other, as each one had to go to his own room, they said: “If we don’t see each other again, see you in Heaven! The next day the two Augustinians looked for Eleuterio and could not find him.*

February 21

# MINISTRY OF THE WORD

*More on the centrality of proclaiming the Word during an Oblate mission.*

The grace of conversion is eminently attached to the word, it is the strength of God; miracles are operated by it. That is the mysterious net, when it is thrown in *nomine Jesu*. From Saint Peter to our days, and it will be so until the end of the world, it is by the spoken word and not by the written word that numerous conversions are worked. (Eugene de Mazenod, to Fr. Suzanne, August 25, 1827, *Oblate Writings*, 7, p. 138)

[The Word of God] is not a musical poem which sung with sweet and pleasant harmony (*Ezek 33.32.*) leaves only fleeting impressions; it is that bright statement of the teachings of God who gives understanding even to children (*Ps 118.130*). It is the divine teaching that enters and deeply imprints itself in the soul and that has the power to save (*James 1:21*). (Eugène de Mazenod, *Instruction sur les Missions*, Migne, *Orateurs sacrés*, t. 85, c. 1111)

February 22, the Chair of Saint Peter

## OBLATES, THE POPE’S MEN

*Eugene de Mazenod asked us to be men of the Church, the men of the Pope, the bishops’ men. All these expressions should be interpreted correctly, but we can not empty them of their meaning. When, in 1975, Pope Paul VI described Blessed Eugene de Mazenod as a man who was “passionate about Jesus Christ and an unconditional man of the Church,” he wanted to stress something very real (Homily at the beatification ceremony in A.A.G., 1975, p. 284).*

For Bishop de Mazenod, Christ and the Church are all one and the same. (See *Selected Texts* No. 51.) The Church is “that glorious inheritance... of the Savior”, she is “the beloved spouse of God’s only-begotten Son,” whom he “has purchased at the cost of his own blood,” and

who “earnestly appeals to the ministers” to whom she wants to entrust her children.... (*Preface to the Constitutions*). The Church and the Pope were the cause of some suffering for Eugene de Mazenod who also accepted to endure it for this motive, manifesting at the same time an unwavering fidelity to the Church and to the Pope.

Some have understood his attachment to the Church of Rome and to the Pope as a reaction against Gallicanism, as an ultramontane attitude. But it was above all an attitude of faith and he has asked that we have the same attitude: that we be able to welcome the Church’s teaching with a spirit of openness, trust and receptiveness. This does not mean an attitude that is simplistic and never voices any observations and suggestions, but one that is a manly attachment and of a deep, enlightened faith; and, should there be any criticism, that it be truly positive. (Jetté, *OMI Apostolic Man*, p. 67-68)

*The day after an audience with Pope Gregory XVI, Eugene wrote:*

The audience he gave me lasted three quarters of an hour. He was very well disposed towards me and opened his mind to me with kindness and precision.... I count myself fortunate to have followed so faithfully the line of thought of the Church’s head....

I finish.... For us, even before the Head of the Church makes a dogmatic pronouncement in an apostolic constitution *ex cathedra*, his opinion as teacher of this Church, which he instructs by means of his daily decisions on all points of morality and dogma, is the greatest and leading authority here on earth. We adhere to it in heart and spirit, without waiting for the solemn promulgations that a variety of circumstances can often delay or even block. I repeat this to you, dear children, for you to make of this principle the habitual norm of your conduct and for you to transmit it to those who come after you, as you receive it from me. (To the Fathers and Brothers [scholastics] at Billens, September 11, 1832, *Oblate Writings*, 8, p. 67-68).

F-X. Cianiulli, *Mgr. de Mazenod et le pape*, “Études oblates” 15 (1956), p. 204-220.

February 22, 1840, Saint Eugene's uncle, Fortuné de Mazenod, bishop of Marseilles from 1823 to 1837, died. Eugene always held him in high regard and loved him. He lived with him during the period of emigration, at Aix from 1818 to 1823 and then at the bishop's palace from 1823 to 1840.

The General Chapter of 1826 decreed "to record, in the proceedings, a statement of gratitude to Bishop Charles-Fortuné de Mazenod, distinguished benefactor and protector of the little Society". (Rambert, I, p. 456).

February 23

#### THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

During the parish missions the ministry of reconciliation turned out to be the best tool to show the understanding, kindness, and mercy of God. Even as a young priest, during the Lenten preaching at the Church of the Magdalene in Aix, St. Eugene would present himself to the people with these words:

God will seem so lovable to you, he will fill your hearts with so great a consolation, and he will invest you with so great a strength... you will fly to the summit of the mountain. (*Colloquial Instruction on Confession*, March 28, 1813, *Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 47).

Thirty years later he will describe the Oblates as "instruments of God's mercy":

I find your splendid letters of great interest, as you must be well aware. Our whole hope for the future is under your watchful eyes: I would go so far as to say, within your hands. For this reason, I am all the time praying, dear son, that God will give you his help. I remain full of confidence in your zeal and piety, I might add in your experience, for you have now had our scholastics in your care for quite a long time.

Our young family's religious formation should of course be altogether paternal, but it must be manly too. It is a question of forming men of God, and in your position you are well able to say if such men

are the kind who spare themselves. I find a lot of consolation in everything you put into your report on our scholastic brothers. I thank God and the Holy Virgin for it.

My prayer is that the scholastics be really imbued with what the Church expects of them; a mediocre virtue will not be an adequate response to the demands of their holy vocation. Should they turn out like the common run of cleric, they would not be achieving their goal, it would fall short. They are called to a quite different perfection, they must strive towards it, or rather I go further, they have to be actually walking this path so as to become in God's hands instruments of his mercy. They have to realize that their ministry is the continuation of the apostolic ministry, and that it is a question of going to the length of performing miracles. The news that reaches us from the foreign missions is proof of this. What encouragement for our young scholastics to read the marvels worked by their confreres in far away countries! So let them lose no time in becoming saints, if they have not done so already to the height called for in response to the Sovereign Pontiff's appeal. (Eugene de Mazenod, to Fr. Mouchette, December 2, 1854, *Oblate Writings*, 11, p. 252-253)

*February 24*

#### THE MINISTRY OF CONFESSIONS

*During the missions, the ministry of confession had an essential role. After the home visits inviting people to the mission and the visits to the sick, it was in the sacrament of Penance that each person could be touched personally by the gospel. We can understand that it was worth giving time for it. The first Constitutions and Rules of the Missionaries of Provence (1818) help us to understand the value of this ministry.*

Concerning confessions the missionary will keep in mind what St. Ignatius, St. Philip Neri, and many others perceived, namely, that the work begun in the pulpit has to be completed in the tribunal of penance. If grace has touched a soul by the strength of the word of God, ordinarily it is in the tribunal of penance that grace molds and justifies it. Preaching, indeed, has no other end than to lead sinners to the pool

of salvation. What would become of those whom the Lord is drawing to himself, if there were no hand to plunge them into the healing waters, where their first innocence is restored by the cleansing away of the shameful leprosy that gnaws on them; if the minister to whom the Lord gave the commission to loosen and break their bonds, and set them free, were to draw back because of vain fear, and let those very souls perish, whom the Lord had given him to save? Why has Jesus Christ clothed us with the ministry of peace? Why did he give us this word of reconciliation, if not that it be applied effectively to sinners so that their sins no longer be imputed to them, and that they receive pardon, and be truly reconciled to God? “God . . . has given us the ministry of reconciliation. I mean that God, in Christ, was reconciling the world to himself, not counting men’s transgressions against them, and that he has entrusted the message of reconciliation to us” (2 Cor 5: 18–19).

Woe to the fainthearted priest who is deterred by fear of danger from the exercise of this ministry. Such a one, far from providing for his own salvation, runs the risk of losing his soul by hiding in the earth the talent that is to be returned with interest, by making sterile the source of regeneration of souls which Jesus Christ conferred upon him.

It is beyond all doubt that the hearing of confessions is to be preferred to preaching, when there is room for choice, because the private direction and admonition given in the tribunal of penance may in a measure supply the place of instruction and preaching. . . . If grace has touched a soul by the strength of the word of God, ordinarily it is in the tribunal of penance that grace molds and justifies it. (Woestman, ed., p. 36-38)

*Februaury 25*

#### MINISTERS OF MERCY

*The Constitutions and Rules of the Missionaries of Provence (1818) dedicate a long chapter to the pastoral practice to be followed in this sacrament: neither too lenient nor too strict; receive sinners with inexhaustible charity; support with kindness and mercy those who are discouraged....*



In the administration of this sacrament one must be careful not to be too lenient nor too strict. Both extremes are equally foreign to the mind of the Church and to the practice of the saints. And it is recommended that these be studied with more attention as our guides, rather than the systems which certain individuals find so easy to formulate in theory, but which, in practice, are not so easy to apply to the concrete situation and to the people and their problems.

For the rest, let the missionaries be ever ready to receive sinners with inexhaustible charity. Let them encourage the penitents by their affability, and by showing a sympathetic heart. In a word, let them treat them as they themselves would wish to be treated if they were in the same unfortunate condition. (Woestman, ed., p. 38)

*At a time when the penitent was required to come back to confession several times at regular intervals to make sure of the sincerity of his perseverance, St. Eugene invites his priests not to delay absolution too long, waiting, as it were, for a kind of impeccability. He explains this to a pastor who was little pleased with the results of the mission:*

We must remember that reconciliation in the sacrament of Penance does not give impeccability any more than justification in baptism does.... Our Lord in instituting the sacrament of Penance in such a way that it may be worthily received several times by the same person, has reassured in advance the priest who administers it according to the rules, and at the same time has held back the poor sinner from the despair to which he might have given in without this provident mercy. (Eugene de Mazenod to the pastor of Brignoles, August 23, 1821, *Ob- late Writings*, 13, p. 54).

February 26

#### MINISTERS OF MERCY

*Following a minor incident during a mission, where it seems that some young people had disturbed the service, St. Eugene writes to Father Eugène-Bruno Guigues scolding him for having been too hard on them: "May God save you, my dear friend, from refusing communion to those who, after being found guilty of the mischief which you mention to*

me, have been repentant.” Then he states a principle that goes well beyond the episode in question, reminding him of what a missionary is:

Oh! You are sent by God to forgive greater sins than theirs and even greater scandals than the one they may have given by their thoughtlessness. Once they had been reconciled, it was your duty to admit them to the Holy Table to make them fulfil, at the same time, their Paschal duty and the obligation they had undoubtedly been feeling to receive Communion which they had neglected. I am afraid that the anxiety in which I find you has not permitted you to accord a fairly kind welcome to these young people. The opposite gesture would have won their hearts and would have urged them to draw towards you those who were more guilty than they. And if these latter end up by surrendering themselves, no doubt you must make them also receive Communion at the end of the mission. Remember that you are sent to sinners, and even to hardened sinners. You must expect resistance from the devil; he will not easily let go of his prey. This resistance manifests itself now in one way, and now in another. Jesus Christ is always the victor, “*Christus vincit.*” He demands sacrifices, “*Christus imperat.*” He establishes his reign in souls, “*Christus regnat.*” [...] We are the ministers of his mercy, and so let us always have the tenderness of a father towards all.... The father of the prodigal son was not content with putting the best robe on him and having a ring put on his finger, he had the fatted calf killed as well. In the same way, we must not only reconcile sinners, but in the view of all the graces granted to them during the mission, of the guarantees their fidelity gives to respond thereto and of the efforts they have had to make for all this, we admit them to the sacred banquet, we give them the bread of life so that they can advance in this new path which they are to follow, and may, at the same time, fulfil an imperative duty that urges them. (Eugene de Mazenod, to Fr. Guigues, February 20, 1837, *Oblate Writings*, 9, p. 13-14).

MINISTERS OF MERCY

We are never to forget that one of the principal ends of our Institute is to help the most neglected souls. For this reason, the unfortunate inmates of prisons have a rightful claim upon the charity of the Society.

Above all, we will endeavor by the gentlest exhortations to bring them often to confession and also to receive from time-to-time Holy Communion. (*The Rule of Saint Eugene de Mazenod*, Chapter three, § 4, art 1, 3, Woestman ed., p. 39)

*In 1847 St. Eugene protested against a decision of the Attorney General of the Republic forbidding priests who wanted to intervene on behalf of the condemned. On that occasion, he writes:*

But this judge does not know that *we are by vocation men of mercy!* We simply show mercy not only in the prisons and on the gallows in favor of the greatest criminals, but always and everywhere. It is our ministry.... We cannot agree to certain demands... of those who would confine the priests in the church to never be seen elsewhere and be able to have the slightest influence on society. (Letter to the Bishop of Digne, in Rey, II, p. 244.)

*It will be especially in the area of pastoral care that St. Eugene shows the direction of his moral thinking. This is evident, for example, in his differences with Msgr. Arbaud, Bishop of Gap. In the Chronicles of the Laus House, Fr. Simonin writes:*

In a long letter of January 22, 1827, the bishop complained about the Fathers at N.D. du Laus whom he considered lax in their moral principles. He singled out, among others, Fr. Touche, for this reason, could no longer be welcomed in certain parishes. Having formulated in five propositions the implicit moral principles, supported and followed by the members of the Congregation, the bishop ended his tirade by writing: "What would Benedict XIV have thought of these corrupters of morality?". Father de Mazenod had no trouble exonerating his missionaries; he reminded the bishop, who was a bit Jansenist, that moral principles, supported and followed in practice by them, were nothing

but the principles accepted, supported and practiced by Blessed Alfonso de' Liguori, principles that Rome was far from opposing. (G. Simonin, *Chronique de la Maison du Laus (1818-1841)*, "Missions OMI", 35 [1897], p. 363-364)

February 28

THÉODORE LEON LABOURÉ (1883-1944)  
SIXTH SUPERIOR GENERAL (1932-1944)

*He was born in France and was attracted to the Oblates by an uncle who was already a missionary in Ceylon. At the end of his novitiate he was sent to the International Scholasticate in Rome, where he studied at the Gregorian University. He taught dogma in San Antonio, and after some time in parish work he became the provincial of the Second Province of the United States. The General Chapter of 1932 chose him to succeed Bishop Augustin Dontenwill as Superior General. Under his leadership the Congregation continued to expand its fields of apostolate: Laos, Philippines, Haiti, Brazil, Labrador, Cameroon, Congo, British Columbia, Yukon....*

*The last years of his administration were deeply troubled by the events of the World War of 1939-1945. In 1943, Father Labouré, who was in need of complete rest, returned to France and left the general administration in the care of Father Hilaire Balmes, whom he appointed vicar general. He died in Paris on February 28, 1944. He wrote 19 circular letters (nn. 152-170).*

After the first moment of surprise, emotion and natural anxiety at my election [as Superior General], I remembered that I no longer belonged to myself, that on the day of my Oblation I gave myself entirely to the service of Our Lord and His Divine Mother, and that the only important thing for me to do is the holy will of God. [...]

At the beginning of my term as General, there is no need to speak of an action program; it is clear in our Holy Rules and our Traditions "Evangelizare pauperibus misit me," and on my last day when I will give account to God of my management, I hope to be able to say as my venerable predecessors did, "Pauperes evangelizantur ". [...]

The Oblate spirit is reflected not only in the external union of our efforts and wills in the apostolate; it is also reflected in the need that is felt to know each other better and to stay closely united by the bonds of the same charity. [...]

In the past as in the present, our family has been composed of men *ex omni tribu, lingua, et populo, et natione*; and yet the work of evangelization was always successful because it was done *more Oblatorum*. We were not concerned then to channel our efforts based on our nationality: an Oblate went wherever obedience called him, and he gave himself entirely to the work of God and the Church, to the evangelization of the poor, without asking whether or not his companions were from the same country as himself. They were Oblates: that was enough, and the union of hearts created the union of forces. [...]

That is the glorious tradition of our religious family; it is there, in each one's dedication to the common work that we must seek the true good that will unite us all. (*Circular Letter*, No 152, December 3, 1932, *Lettre circulaires*, 4, p. 236, 238-239)

A. Desnoyers, *Le T.R.P. Théodore Labouré, o.m.i.*, "Études oblates" 3 (1944), p. 69-73.



# March

**I**n the month of March 1813, Saint Eugene preached during Lent in the Church of the Madeleine in Aix-en-Provence. This month we will read texts concerning this preaching, on the themes of the poor, and the most abandoned souls.

March 1

MARCELLO ZAGO (1932-2001)  
ELEVENTH SUPERIOR GENERAL (1986-1998)

*He was born in Villorba, in the Diocese of Treviso (Italy) o August 9, 1932. This is how he describes the origin of his vocation: "During an hour of private adoration before the exposed Blessed Sacrament in the crypt of the seminary I realized clearly that the Lord was calling me to be a missionary, to put my life in his hands.... The mission was for me a call to personal holiness and to the service of the universal Church."*

*A missionary in Laos, a professor of Missiology, a formator, Marcello Zago was a strong supporter of the missionary vocation of every Christian: "The mission ad gentes is not optional for the Church."*

*As Secretary of the Holy See's Secretariat for Non-Christians, he worked passionately for interreligious dialogue, especially with the Buddhist world of which he was an expert. He was elected Superior General on the first ballot on September 13, 1986. He was one of the main organizers of the Day of Prayer for Peace held in Assisi on October 27, 1986. On March 28, 1998, the Holy Father appointed him Secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and titular archbishop of Roselle. He died on March 1, 2001.*

*He left many letters to the Congregation and a rich bibliography. (Cf. M. Rostkowski, Il patrimonio teologico e missiologico di Mons.*

Marcello Zago, o.m.i., “*Vie Oblate Life*” 59 [2000], p. 295-429). *Among them this one is noteworthy*: In the Footsteps of St. Eugene. Letters and Texts on Formation, General House, Rome 1997, 226 p.)

The first missionary attitude is to love the people and groups of people to whom we are sent, with their history and their culture, with their values and also with their faults. When meeting with some missionaries who saw only the shortcomings of the people to whom they were sent, I said that they should either leave the mission and commit themselves elsewhere or convert themselves. Loving the people to be evangelized is, in fact, to share the attitude of God and of Christ. For God so loved the world that He sent His Son (Jn 3, 16). And Christ so loved “his own” that he gave his life for them (Jn 13: 1). And “his own” is the humanity of all time, for which he gave his life.

But this love is not blind. It also loves when it recognizes the objective flaws and endeavors to correct them. It is a love that discerns and even more favors the good in others, even if it is not in our power to create it as God does in us. And to love, you have to accept the other and the context in which he finds himself. We must accept the pluralistic society, composed of groups with different visions. We have to accept the youth with their culture. We must accept immigrants etc.

To accept others and their context does not mean approving everything and leaving it intact, but helping it grow according to the plan of God, and the internal needs.

To love means giving oneself to the other, leaving family and culture, security and future as is witnessed by leaving one’s own country. In missionary countries this gift becomes more and more frequently a sacrifice of one’s life and even martyrdom. (*La missione ad gentes interpella la Chiesa che è in Italia. Nuovi aeropaghi della Missione*. Conference at the National Missionary Congress, Belluria [Italy], September, 10-13, 1998).

*In Memoriam Marcello Zago, O.M.I. 1932-2001*, “*Vie Oblate Life*” 62 (2003) p. 157-502; P. Gheddo, *Marcello Zago. Una vita per la Missione*, Editrice Missionari OMI, Roma 2005, 134 p.; F. Ciardi, *Marcello Zago, uomo del dialogo. Un’antologia*, Ancora, Milano 2007, 136 p.



March 2

COLLOQUIAL TALKS IN PROVENÇAL AT THE MAGDALENE

February 23, 1813, Saint Eugene's spiritual director, Fr. Duclaux wrote: "I highly approve that you undertook to give some instructions in one of your parishes during Lent. I hope you will succeed well by preparing them with care, that is to say, by making them clear, strong and pious, you will attract a lot of people and you will bear much more fruit than most sermons.... I suggest you apply yourself very specifically to instructing the people...." (Rey, I, 131-133).

When did Saint Eugene begin his famous preaching at the Church of the Magdalene in Aix? Was it on Ash Wednesday 1813, which fell on March 3 that year, or more than likely on the First Sunday of Lent, March 7? Notice was given to all the parishes in the city. There would be "talks in the Provençal language, intended only for craftsmen, servants and beggars."

"There was great surprise, especially in the high society, to which the speaker belonged. Some praised such a pure and generous zeal, many others blamed him for forgetting, as they said, his status, and for neglecting the good that he seemed called to offer the ruling classes, in favor of people who certainly would not benefit from his efforts; all doubted seriously his success. Among the clergy, there was much suspicion about this seemingly compromising novelty; several were not afraid to call it reckless and inappropriate...." (Rambert, I, p.123)

"The crowd was immense; there was a rush to go and hear some clear, understandable, friendly, sweet and at times vehement talk. The people, especially, were delighted to have their own orator, clearly their own since he spoke their language.... The crowd was so great at the fourth conference that the humble missionary felt obliged to thank his audience." (Rambert, I, p. 126)

Almost 50 years later, in the Funeral Oration for Bishop de Mazenod, Jeancard recalled this in an oratorical style that gives us a glimpse of the popularity of these instructions: "Soon the whole population was there in crowds and the large building could not contain this influx of people eager to hear simple language that crept into their hearts with all the charm of the mother tongue.... The effect of these sermons that

*were given every Sunday was immense. The indifference of the multitude was defeated, the poor, the simple, and the ignorant had their substantial share of the bread of the Word...."*

In the course of this holy season there will be an abundance of instructions for the rich, people with an education, etc., but won't there be any for the poor and unlettered? The Pastor's love has seen to it that there will be; what a shame not to profit from the occasion.

Get them to admit that they do not understand very much of studied discourses, especially when they are addressed in French.

However the Gospel must be taught to all and it must be taught in such a way as to be understood.

The poor, a precious portion of the Christian family, cannot be abandoned to their ignorance.

Our divine Saviour attached such importance to this that he took on himself the responsibility of instructing them and he cited as proof of the divinity of his mission the fact that the poor were being evangelized, *pauperes evangelizantur*

In effect, the knowledge of the truth that he came to bring to men being necessary to obtain eternal life, to save oneself, it was necessary that it be put within the reach of all, a big difference from the ancient philosophers who taught only a small number of pupils, and repulsed the multitude, and which thus carried within itself the mark of error as the truth must be known to all, all having an equal right to its possession.

We place ourselves therefore at the disposition of the simplest among the ignorant. Like the father of a family, etc., we will gather together our children to uncover for them a treasure, etc., but courage, constancy will be needed to acquire it, etc. (*Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 35-36).

### March 3

#### COLLOQUIAL TALKS IN PROVENÇAL AT THE CHURCH OF THE MAGDALENE

*During the Sundays of Lent 1813, Saint Eugene continued the colloquial talks in Provençal at the church of the Magdalene.*

So come, whoever you are, come assiduously to some instructions that must undeceive you on the score of many a fatal error, and enlight-

en you on what are your only true interests. Come especially you poor of Jesus Christ and may God grant that I may make my voice heard in the four quarters of the world to reawaken so many foolish people from the fatal torpor that brings them to their doom.

We will begin with teaching you what you are, your noble origin, what rights it gives you, and what obligations too it imposes on you, etc.

Man is God's creature, etc.

We will begin with teaching you what you are, your noble origin, what rights it gives you, and what obligations too it imposes on you, etc. ... Come now and learn from us what you are in the eyes of faith. Poor of Jesus Christ, afflicted, wretched, suffering, sick, covered with sores, etc., all you whom misery oppresses, my brothers, dear brothers, respected brothers, listen to me. You are God's children, the brothers of Jesus Christ, heirs to his eternal kingdom, chosen portion of his inheritance; you are, in the words of St. Peter, a holy nation, you are kings, you are priests, you are in some way gods, *Dii estis et filii excelsi omnes*. (*Notes for the preliminary instruction*. See *Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 37)

#### March 4

##### COLLOQUIAL TALKS IN PROVENÇAL AT THE CHURCH OF THE MAGDALENE

*We continue our reading of the Notes for the Lenten Instructions given at the Church of the Magdalene in 1813:*

So lift up your spirits, that your defeated souls may breathe, grovel no longer on the ground: *Dii estis et filii excelsi omnes*. (Ps. 81:6).

Lift yourselves towards heaven where your minds should be set, *conversatio vestra in caelo* (Phil. 3:20), let your eyes see for once beneath the rags that cover you, there is within you an immortal soul made in the image of God whom it is destined to possess one day, a soul ransomed at the price of the blood of Jesus Christ, more precious in the eyes of God than all earth's riches, than all the kingdoms of the earth, a soul of which he is more jealous than of the government of the entire universe.

Christians, know then your dignity, with St. Leo I will call you sharers in the divine nature, etc.

Your Creator did not place you on the earth to amass riches... nor for honours, glory or reputation... nor for the pleasure of the senses... nor even for knowledge....

And you, in constant flight from your only good, prostituted this heart, which he gave you for loving him, to avarice, love of pleasures; you ran in pursuit of passing creatures which all in their own way diverted you from your end by promising you the happiness that it is useless to search for outside God.... And so it is that after living 20, 30, 40 years and more without seeking God, without having God as the goal of your thoughts, action, you have wasted your whole life, merited nothing and, if you had to appear today before his fearful judgment seat, you would not have one good work to offer him in compensation for your innumerable infidelities.... (Notes for the preliminary instruction, *Ob-late Writings*, 15, p. 37-38)

### March 5

#### COLLOQUIAL TALKS IN PROVENÇAL AT THE CHURCH OF THE MAGDALENE

*We continue our reading of the Notes for the Lenten Instructions given at the Church of the Magdalene in 1813:*

Workers, who are you in the eyes of the world? A class of people destined to spend their lives in the painful exercise of an obscure toil that places you in dependence on and submits you to the caprices of all those from whom you must wheedle a job.

Servants, who are you in the eyes of the world? A class of people slaves of those who pay your wages, exposed to contempt, injustice and often even ill-treatment at the hands of demanding and sometimes cruel employers who think they have bought the right to treat you with injustice with the paltry wage they pay you.

And you, tillers of the soil, peasants, who are you in the eyes of the world? However valuable your labours, you are valued only for the strength of your arms and if your sweat, distasteful as it is to them, gets any attention at all, it is only because it falls on and enriches the ground.

And what about you poor beggars, obliged by man's injustice or the harshness of fate to go cap in hand for your pitiful sustenance, to

beg brazenly the bread you need for staying alive. The world sees you as the refuse of society, to be kept out of its sight and avoided so as not to be pained by your plight that they have no wish to relieve.

That is what the world thinks. That is what you are in its eyes! But all the same that is the master you have chosen, the one you have so far grovelled to. What reward can you expect? Insult and contempt, that is the reward it sets aside for you; you will never have any other from that source. (Notes for the preliminary instruction, *Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 38-39).

\* \* \*

BLESSED JUAN JOSÉ CABALLERO RODRÍGUEZ (1912-1936)  
MARTYR OF SPAIN

*He was born on March 5, 1912. He was a senior scholastic, perpetual Oblate since February 1936, and subdeacon at the age of 24. He was a great personality, enterprising, organized, methodical and persevering in everything he undertook. Originally from Fuenlabrada de los Montes (Badajoz), he was the only martyr from Extremadura. He was one of the veterans, since he had been in Pozuelo since the beginning of the community in 1930, but in spite of this he was behind his novitiate companions, because he had had to interrupt his studies to do his military service in Melilla. On February 25, 1936, he made his perpetual vows and had just been ordained subdeacon on June 6, when the persecution took place, with his ordination to the diaconate and priesthood scheduled for the following months. The reports of his formators present him as an excellent religious, pointing out, in addition to the above, his maturity, discretion, frankness and kindness with everyone, and they conclude, paraphrasing the Gospel, affirming that he was “a good Israelite in whom there is no guile” (Report for perpetual vows and the subdeaconate, PD, p. 1143).*

*Under his enthusiastic direction, at the end of the school year, the missionary week, which was scheduled for July 24-31, 1936, began to be organized. The missionary spirit was lived with intensity in Pozuelo. Joaquín Martínez, OMI: “They lived their consecration to God with enthu-*

siasm and were nourished by the missionary impulse that pushed them towards the Mission ad extra and by the desire to be priests. In a special way, the whole community had its eyes fixed on the mission that our Congregation had entrusted to the Spanish Province in Latin America. I know this, not only from references, but because I have lived it since I was very young; I am referring to the missionary spirit and the enthusiasm they had for the missions, and in fact, the surviving companions of the Servants of God, most of them ended up in Latin America”.

*When the relatives of Juan José Caballero came to visit him, they could see the climate of persecution: “In 1935, my father and uncles came again to Pozuelo to see Juan José. The Servant of God was accompanying them to the train station when groups of young people and others insulted them and even threatened them. The Servant of God decided to return to the Convent so that his relatives could go to the train station in peace”.*

*He was expelled from the house of Pozuelo on July 24, 1936 and took refuge for some time in the community of Diego de Leon and later in a boarding house in the center of Madrid. Although he enlisted as a republican soldier, he did not manage to escape the religious persecution and was arrested and taken to the Modelo Prison and then to the San Anton Prison. From there he was taken with his brothers to be martyred on November 28th.*

## March 6

### COLLOQUIAL TALKS IN PROVENCAL AT THE CHURCH OF THE MAGDALENE

*Eugene tells his friend Forbin-Janson about his experience preaching at the Magdalene during the Lent of 1813:*

Each Sunday in Lent I have preached in Provencal at 6:00 am, in the Magdalene church for the instruction of the people. As you can imagine curiosity brought lots of others besides country-folk; but the latter and the low class of society, whom I had principally in mind, turned up in such numbers that I had reason to hope that it will in his goodness have redounded to God’s glory.

When I think how easy I found it to express myself in a tongue which I have never made great use of, as I have scarcely lived in the place, I am tempted to see in this a kind of miracle. There is nothing to be surprised at, however, as I used to ascend the pulpit as I descended from the altar, and you know that I did not forget to beg the Master present to speak himself by my mouth.

The fact is that on Saturday evening, as I was thinking over what I had to say, I found I could not string together three words in Provencal. (To Forbin-Janson, April 9, 1813, "Missions OMI" 89 [1962], p. 123-124. See also *Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 49)

Eugene's uncle, Roze-Joannis, was struck by the reports of this preaching. In a letter dated March 13, 1813 he said he knew of the admirable effects of zeal which were produced by the Christ-like spirit which inspires you. The graces He communicates to you so abundantly are not for you alone but are also meant for the welfare and salvation of many. The Church, today, more than ever before, has a great need of ministers who, by their teaching, will rekindle the Faith that has been extinguished, and by their example, will serve as models for the flock and awaken pastors from their apathy. I am fully convinced that God has raised you up among us for that double purpose. By practicing as well as teaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as you are doing, you will prove to certain doubting Thomases that you have entered the Sanctuary not through any human motives, but through a God-given vocation.... (Leflon, I, p. 413)

### *March 7*

#### COLLOQUIAL TALKS IN PROVENCAL AT THE CHURCH OF THE MAGDALENE

*We continue our reading of the Notes for the Lenten Instructions given at the Church of the Magdalene in 1813:*

When we ascended this pulpit, dedicated as it is to truth, for the first time, we frankly confessed our fears that our lack of familiarity with the Provencal language would constitute an obstacle to the fruitfulness of our instructions. Encouraged however by a desire to serve you, we placed all our trust in the Lord and our hope has not been in

vain, as the outcome has been that the holy Word transmitted to you has received an eager welcome. Praise the Lord for that, my brothers, and so overjoyed am I on that account that I am unable to contain it.

But called by my vocation to be the servant and priest of the poor to whose service I would like to be able to devote my whole life, I cannot help being touched when I see the eagerness of the poor to hear my voice; but what fills my cup of joy to overflowing is that this abundant concourse is clear proof that there are still in our town a considerable number of true Israelites who have not bent the knee to Baal, Christians who still love their religion, love to receive instruction, want to practice it, for it is quite evident that only love of your holy Law brings you to our presence, since in imitation of the Apostle we have not come to announce the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the elevated discourses of a human eloquence and wisdom, no, we have not used human wisdom as we talked, but the simple word of God stripped of every ornament, placed so far as in us lay within the grasp of the simplest. Continue, my brothers, to listen to it with faith and attention.

Our temples are your asylums. There it is in your needs and sufferings you find the helps and consolations that you looked for in vain elsewhere. Your Master lives there and awaits you there to bring you an efficacious remedy for all your ills. By the ministry of his priests he regenerates you in the waters of baptism, he reconciles you in the tribunals of penance, instructs you in the truth-demanding pulpit. He gives himself to you to be your strength against the enemies of your salvation, your support in the fatigues of your pilgrimage. Take your delight then in living in this holy place. (*Colloquial Instruction on Confession*, [March 28] 1813, *Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 39-40)

*March 8*

COLLOQUIAL TALKS IN PROVENÇAL AT THE CHURCH OF THE MAGDALENE

*On the Sundays of Lent 1813 St. Eugene continues preaching at the Church of the Magdalene.*

Every Christian knows that there is a sacrament of penance instituted by O.L.J.C. for the remission of sins committed after baptism....



Come and show your wounds to the only doctors whom God has established to cure them; as you know, the lepers in the Gospel were ordered to go and present themselves to the priests, and the Lord who had heard their prayer wished to heal them only through the ministry of those to whom he had given the power on earth. It is the same for us, it is the Lord who heals, for it belongs only to God to work this miracle; but he heals through his ministers, and he heals as God, for note that one word suffices for this resurrection, as he needed but one word to create the Universe....

I am going to make use of the short time that remains to make you aware in a succinct way of the benefits that result from a good confession so that you do not labour under the impression that the price of returning to God and of giving him a heart that you ought never to have taken from him is too high.

The first gain, one truly beyond price that the sinner derives from a good confession is that of returning to God's grace. One would have to grasp all that the friendship of its God means to a soul to have a just idea of this precious gain. Let him just remind us of what he himself says in Scripture: that the love of the tenderest mother for the dear babe at her breast is still not to be compared to the love he has for us; that he has reserved in his mercy ineffable treasures of graces and happiness for those whom he loves, that he prepares for them an eternal dwelling of glory and felicity, in a word, that nothing short of his omnipotence suffices to satisfy the passion that he has to make happy the faithful soul....

But my brothers our menacing tone is only for the pulpit, in the sacred tribunal our language is quite different, perhaps then we are all too indulgent....

Then it is with open arms the ministers of Jesus Christ press them close to their hearts and take delight in pouring out balm on all their wounds to ease them. Yes, my brothers, come, and you will see with what joy we will help you to take up your yoke that will seem too heavy only for the first few moments of your conversion, for when once you are freed from sin, light will take the place of the deep shadows that reigned in your souls, God will seem so lovable to you, he will fill your hearts with so great a consolation. (*Colloquial Instruction on Confession*, March 28, 1813, *Oblate Writings*, 15 p. 39-47)

March 9

## MISSIONARIES OF THE POOR

*Starting from the experience of the first missions and the service to the poor and those in prison, the typical Oblate vocation begins to mature:*

Will we ever have an adequate understanding of this sublime vocation! For that one would have to understand the excellence of our Institute's end, beyond argument the most perfect one could propose to oneself in this world, since the end of our Institute is the self-same end that the Son of God had in mind when he came down on earth: The glory of his heavenly Father and the salvation of souls.... He was sent especially to evangelize the poor *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me* [Luke 4:18]. And we have been founded precisely to work for the conversion of souls, and especially to evangelize the poor.... (*Notes of annual retreat*, 1831, *Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 184).

*The Final Declaration of the Congress on the Charism of the Founder Today affirms:*

Our motto has two inseparable words: evangelize the poor [...]. We are sent to the most abandoned, those who nobody cares for, those most in need of the Good News, and especially to the little ones, the oppressed of our modern societies. We must not forget that the situation of being abandoned is not limited to a single social class and may vary according to place and time. (« *Vie Oblate Life* » 36 [1977], p. 304).

March 10

## CO-OPERATOR OF CHRIST THE SAVIOUR

The most striking aspect of the spirit of Eugene is the vigorous way in which he lived and communicated his relationship with his Saviour. It was like a magnetic field in which he was pulled towards his Saviour, and everything that he did was born from there. Whoever came into contact with this force was attracted to it. He only gave to others that

which he himself had received and lived. If one takes his “Good Friday experience” as being the summary of the experience of several years of where he stood with his God, then we can justly say that the whole of his ministry was to bring as many as possible to make the “Good Friday experience” in their own lives and situations. This is the core of his spirit for me: that he had become so united with his Saviour as to understand himself as being a “co-redeemer.” Through his ministry, each person he encountered was invited to the same relationship of being a redeemed sinner in union with the Saviour. [...]

He chose young and enthusiastic men to be inflamed with his ideals, and he formed them according to his God-given spirit. His major preoccupation from 1816 until his death was to ensure that each Oblate became and continued to be a source of energy and life as a co-operator of the Saviour. For this he gave them a Rule and set up structures to ensure that the most efficient ways of doing this were employed. To keep the spirit alive and kindled he maintained personal contact with his Oblates and wrote countless letters to them. He rejoiced and encouraged them when they were living according to this spirit and corrected and fulminated when his spirit was not properly understood or lived. The growth of the Congregation in his last decades of life, and the expansion and achievements of the Congregation until today, where there are Oblate missionaries in 68 countries, attests to the success of his efforts at transforming his companions. [...]

His spirit and presence continue to live in the Church and in his Congregation today as Father, Founder, and Intercessor. (F. Santucci, *Eugene de Mazenod. Co-operator of Christ the Saviour, Communicates his Spirit*, AOSR, Rome 2004, p. 379-380)

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*On March 10, 1814, Abbé Eugène de Mazenod receives the last sacraments. It's been just over a year since the beginning of his ministry, full of fiery action and zeal. In the midst of his work God stops him. He contracted typhus during his ministry with the prisoners. The young people of his Association enter the church of Mary Magdalene and stand before the fourteenth-century statue of Our Lady of Graces, brought there by St. Bonaventure, to ask her to heal their beloved priest.*

*Mary listens to them. Eugene recovers. At the same time the Lady of Graces is preparing for him a far greater grace, that of a new conversion.*

*In his first year of ministry at Aix he had given evidence of a sincere and complete gift of self. During the months of convalescence, in the solitude and silence that his country house provided, he realizes how his apostolic work was subtly tainted. The disease was a "shot between the head and neck that God has given me." God had stopped him to purify his life and mission. From the disease a new man will be born, ready to found a new religious family in the Church.*

*March 11*

#### THE APOSTLE IS MORE PERFECT THAN THE CENOBITE

*In the Lent of 1848, St. Eugene proposed that his faithful forget themselves in order to be reach out to others.*

Undoubtedly, Lent is for the Christian a time of renewal in faith and in piety; it is necessary that each one work on himself for his improvement before God by the meditation on the word of God, which is dispensed then with more abundance, and by the aspirations of prayer, multiplied more than ever before the holy Altars. But is this intimate operation of the will, which is supported from above, all that should be done? [...]

What the practice of the saints recommends to us for a few days of recollection, what some extraordinary vocations have determined for souls called away from the common life to an interior and personal life, such that one builds for oneself in the depths of one's being a profound solitude, that one traces all around oneself a kind of spiritual circle of the things of God, or else, completely turned in on oneself and only occupied, in the order of salvation, with one's own interests, is this all Christian perfection in all States demands, and do we not have to exhort you to do anything more during Lent, to make it bear the fruits of sanctification?

There are, for most of you, our dearest brothers, duties which outweigh these solitary cares of the soul, if not at all times, at least some-

times in one's life. There are merits which are also above the merits of this very individual existence. The Apostle is more perfect than the Cenobite. "*The virtues of those who preach the truth,*" says Pope Gregory, "*are the ornaments of heaven.*" Now the Apostle, inspired by a sublime charity, sometimes forgets himself, makes a complete abnegation of what is proper to himself, in order to give himself up entirely to the care of saving his brothers. He would like, like Saint Paul, to be anathema to them; and Jesus Christ, the eternal and perfect model of all Christians, if he spent his first thirty years in the obscurity of his hidden life, was he not entirely preoccupied with us and the glory of his Father? Did he not then devote himself entirely to us? Did he not accept to be truly anathema to men? Did he not "bear their iniquities" (Is 53:4) and suffer their sorrows?

Well then! Our dearest brothers, it is this Divine Model imitated by the Apostles that we have come to propose to your zeal... (Eugene de Mazenod, *Pastoral Letter*, February 28, 1848)

\* \* \*

*On March 11, 1842, St. Eugene consecrated the first Oblate bishop, Hippolyte Guibert who, as Archbishop of Paris, will also become the first Oblate Cardinal.*

March 12

#### THE MOST ABANDONED

*Other texts on the specific mission of the Oblate:*

The Founder was moved by the plight of the Church and of souls. Those who are most deprived of spiritual help are the poor, the little people, so it is to them that the Congregation will first address itself. It will be primarily attentive to their spiritual distress, but always remember that the disinherited of all categories have a preferential right to its care. (E. Lamirande, *Les pauvres et les âmes les plus abandonnées d'après Mgr de Mazenod*, "Études oblates" 20 (1961), p. 19).

Saint Eugene de Mazenod was struck by the spiritual abandonment of the poorer classes of his time. He founded a band of missionaries to evangelize them. Generations of Oblates, seeking to remain faithful to his inspiration, have sought to discern who were the abandoned of their times. Their discernment has led them to give their preference to the materially poor and marginalized. Especially in recent years there has been a marked concern for active solidarity with these people, a solidarity which is manifested in both lifestyle and choice of ministries. As in 1816, the “poor with their many faces” are the preferred subjects of the Oblate’s contribution to the evangelizing mission of the Church. (R. LaFramboise, *Poor*, DOV, p. 704).

### *March 13*

#### DEVOTED PRINCIPALLY TO THE WORK OF PREACHING MISSIONS

*More on the specific mission of the Oblate, as stated in the Bull of approval of the Rules by Leo XII:*

It is now eleven years since our predecessor, Pius VII [...] expressed the desire after the revolutionary storm to see missionaries recall to the right path of salvation the sheep that had gone astray. And it was but a short time afterwards that a small band of priests was formed in the diocese of Aix, in Provence, in southern France, to undertake this sacred ministry [...].

This Congregation has several aims, the first and most essential being that its members, who are bound by vows [...] devote themselves principally to the work of preaching missions to the poorer classes in the common tongue, especially in places destitute of the aid of religion. This Society proposes furthermore to assist the clergy, either by taking on the direction of seminaries [...], or by being continually ready to assist the parish priests and other pastors in the work of reforming the morals of the people through preaching and other spiritual exercises. They also generously bestow devoted care on the young, and they strive to withdraw this chosen portion of the Christian people from the seductions of the world by forming them into pious associations. Lastly, they preach the divine word and administer sacraments to those in

prison [...]. (Leo XII, *Apostolic Letter Approving Our Religious Family*, “Missions OMI” 60 [1926], p. 318-319)

## March 14

### CELEBRATING GOD’S GIFTS

*On March 14, 1842, St. Eugene made a list of the anniversaries he was to celebrate each year. It was a way to look at his own journey and to thank God.*

Memorable days for me, whose anniversary I need to celebrate: August 1, 1782, my birth; August 2, 1782, my baptism. I made my First Communion on Holy Thursday and I was confirmed by Cardinal Costa, archbishop of Turin on the feast day of the Holy Trinity, but I am not sure whether this was in the year 1792 or even in 1793. In the first supposition, Holy Thursday would correspond to April 5 and the Holy Trinity to June 3; in the second, this would be March 28 and May 26.

On November 4, 1808, I took the soutane, on December 27, 1808, I was tonsured by Bishop Andre, former bishop of Quimper. On May 27, 1809, I received minor orders from His Excellency Cardinal Fesch; on December 23, 1809, I was made sub-deacon by Bishop André, former bishop of Quimper; on June 16, 1810, I was made deacon by Cardinal Fesch; on December 21, 1811, I was made priest in Amiens by Bishop Demandoix of Amiens. Cardinal Mattei, who should have ordained me, was in exile, and I not having wanted to receive the priesthood from the hands of Cardinal Maury, at the time administrator of the diocese of Paris.

On November 1, 1818, I made my oblation in the congregation, and, on October 14, 1832, I received episcopal consecration from the hands of His Eminence Cardinal Odescalchi and from the archbishops of Chalcédoine and of Ravenna, thereafter Cardinals Frezza and Falconieri. I was transferred to the see of Marseille on October 2, 1837. Yet to be known is the day of my death, the anniversary of which others will have to celebrate and for which I invoke in advance the mercy of God. (March 14, 1842, *Oblate Writings*, 21, p. 29-30)

March 15

THE BEGINNING OF THE MISSION IN NATAL

*On March 15, 1852 Bishop Jean-François Allard and four Oblates landed in Durban after four months at sea. Thus began the presence of the Congregation in South Africa. In the 1853 Instruction for Foreign Missions Saint Eugene wrote:*

The word once addressed to the prophet Isaiah, regarding the announcement of the glory of God to the Gentiles by the ministry of persons who were sent to make Him known in far off isles, and that Christ, in the days of his mortal life, transformed into a binding mandate, when he said to his Apostles: “Go and preach the gospel to every creature” has never ceased to be carried out in the Church. It was especially a kind of sacred instruction for all those religious Orders, that united their concern for their personal perfection to zeal for the salvation of others, and made it their purpose to work with all their might to save souls, both in lands already Christian as well as in those still in darkness and in the shadow of death. Thus, in ages past the great Benedictine, Franciscan and Dominican missionary families spread to the most varied and remote regions to preach, without respite, the kingdom of God.

Jealous of walking in the footsteps of those glorious predecessors, members of the Society of Jesus, with Francis Xavier at their head, brought the light of the Gospel to the peoples of the East and West Indies. Animated by the same spirit, the Priests of the Mission and with them, the religious of many Congregations dedicated themselves, with indefatigable zeal, to the same holy work.

In its turn, our modest family, from the day that its inscription on the list of religious Orders helped its growth and increased its strength, has felt burning in itself the apostolic flame, and behold for many years, in response to the call of many bishops, it has assured the ministry of Foreign Missions and already has a fine service record. (Eugène de Mazenod, *Instruction relative aux Missions étrangères*, Rome, General House, 1939, p. 3-4).



# AFFILIATION WITH THE SISTERS OF THE HOLY FAMILY OF BORDEAUX

*On March 15, 1861, Saint Eugene wrote a circular letter to all the Oblates in which he made known the affiliation with the Sisters of the Holy Family of Bordeaux, which was decided together with the Council on February 10, 1861.*

A spiritual association is now formed between the Congregation of the Oblate Fathers of Mary Immaculate and the Association of the *Holy Family* which consists of different Works or Branches related to it. [...]

As a consequence of this affiliation, the two Societies will henceforth form only one as to the spiritual domain and there will be communications of merit and privilèges to the degree that the different positions render possible.

The Superior General of the Oblates gives his consent, for himself and his successors, to accept the government of the *Holy Family* as he does for his own Congregation. [...] as a consequence of this affiliation, the two works will see each other as forming but one single family and will reciprocally render each other all the good services that their respective positions allow them to offer or to claim. [...]

The spirit of charity, zeal and holiness that we have tried to inspire in all our children guarantees that in all circumstances the *Holy Family* will find in you priests according to God's heart as well as devoted Fathers. Here are some points, however, that should be kept in mind. [...]

You will pray for them, you will consider yourself fortunate to be able to help them, to find vocations for them, to contribute to the success of their works; but never, unless specially authorized thereto or with an explicit invitation, are you to meddle in their works, even under the pretext of exercising your holy ministry. (*Oblate Writings*, 12, p. 228-239)

March 16

## FOREIGN MISSIONS, THE BEST OF ALL WORKS

Foreign Missions will be regarded by us as one of the eminently suitable means of procuring the glory of God, contributing to the extension of Religion, and of adding to the luster of our Congregation, without taking into account that a ministry such as this can only give rise to greater merit. These missions are indeed a source of spiritual goods, which are poured out on multitudes of souls, converted or maintained in the true faith, and they are likewise a palpable proof of the divinity of the Catholic Church, and of the zeal of our Congregation for the glory of God and of his unfailing charity towards the most abandoned souls. [...]

A burning desire to spread the faith, a magnanimous heart and a strong will, readiness and momentum in action, firmness and constancy in trial, good health and energy in their undertakings as well as in the face of the difficulties that life might bring, there, in brief, is what will be necessary to ask of the candidates for this the best of all works. (Eugene de Mazenod, *Instruction relative aux Missions étrangères*, General House, Rome 1939, p. 4-5)

March 17

## THE MIRACLES OF THE MISSION

### *More on the specific mission of the Oblate:*

My prayer is that the scholastics be really imbued with what the Church expects of them; a mediocre virtue will not be an adequate response to the demands of their holy vocation.... They are called to a quite different perfection, they must strive towards it, or rather I go further, they have to be actually walking this path so as to become in God's hands instruments of his mercy. They have to realize that their ministry is the continuation of the apostolic ministry, and that it is a question of going to the length of performing miracles. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Mouchette, December 2, 1854, *Oblate Writings*, 11, p. 253)

Like us I'm sure you give all the credit for our work's success to his grace and his grace alone. That's what gets through to the heart while our words merely enter the ear, and here we see precisely where the immense difference lies between our sermons and those of fashionable preachers which are infinitely superior in other respects. At the voice of the missionary miracles abound and he is so struck by the wonder of so many conversions that the poor instrument of these marvels is the first to be confounded, and while praising God and rejoicing he humbles himself in his littleness and nothingness. What sign of approbation can come up to a miracle, and never were there greater ones than those that are worked on missions, those you have yourself worked. (Eugene de Mazenod, to Fr. Vincens, January 17, 1835, *Oblate Writings*, 8, p. 144).

## March 18

### CONTINUING THE GREAT WORK OF THE REDEMPTION OF MANKIND

#### *More on the specific mission of the Oblate:*

We are, or we ought to be, holy priests who consider themselves happy and very happy to devote their fortune, their health, and their life in the service and for the glory of our God. We are put on earth, particularly those of our house, to sanctify ourselves while helping each other by our example, our words and our prayers. Our Lord Jesus Christ has left to us the task of continuing the great work of the redemption of mankind. It is towards this unique end that all our efforts must tend; as long as we will not have spent our whole life and given all our blood to achieve this, we having nothing to say; especially when as yet we have given only a few drops of sweat and a few spells of fatigue. This spirit of being wholly devoted to the glory of God, the service of the Church and the salvation of souls, is the spirit that is proper to our Congregation, a small one, to be sure, but which will always be powerful as long as she is holy. Our novices must steep themselves in these thoughts, which must sink deep in them and be often meditated. Each Society in the Church has a spirit which is its own; which is inspired by God according to the circumstances and needs of the times wherein it pleases God to raise these supporting bodies or rather it would be better to say

these elite bodies which precede the main army on the march, which excel it in bravery and which thus obtains the more brilliant victories. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Tempier, August 22, 1817, *Oblate Writings*, 6, p. 35).

### *March 19, St. Joseph, the Spouse of the Virgin Mary*

#### THE MAIN PATRON OF THE CONGREGATION

*Saint Joseph has an important place in the life of the Congregation. The 1865 Manuel of Prayers referred to him as “the main patron and special protector of the Congregation.” It offered him more ornate litanies than those in current usage. (Cf. Manuel de prières et cérémonial, Paris, 1865, p. 54-57).*

*St. Eugene refers to St. Joseph as “my patron saint, [the] great Saint Joseph,” and also as “our great patron Saint Joseph.” When the treasurer of one of his houses exposed the deplorable state of its finances, he replied: “First make a novena to St. Joseph. He is the foster father of the Congregation.” Similarly he recommends invoking St. Joseph for vocations; he puts new recruits “especially under the protection of our Great Patron Saint Joseph”, and he himself prays for the scholastics at the Mass he celebrates pontifically on “the precious day of our great feast of St. Joseph.” When illness struck one of his men, it was still to St. Joseph that he had recourse.*

*The first decree of the Ordo of 1839 with which the new Bishop of Marseilles announced that he has chosen this great saint for his special patron, for that of his diocese and for all the faithful entrusted to his pastoral care:*

Our greatest desire has always been to honor with our whole heart, and to exalt with all our might the excellence, holiness, power and admirable predestination of the blessed and glorious St. Joseph. He was from all eternity, and by a unique privilege, chosen among men to be the husband of the spotless Blessed Virgin Mary and the foster father of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is to him that were entrusted the care and protection of the Immaculate Mother of God, the sacred person of the Incarnate Word, and

also the life, care and protection of his sacred humanity. It is he who the Eternal Father put at the head of the Holy Family, and considered him so highly that He entrusted him to Joseph, or shall I say, that He seemed to abdicate the non-transferable authority that He has over his only Son, in whom He has placed all his kindnesses. Enriched by so many heavenly favors, St. Joseph deserves not only to feed, shelter and save the King of heaven and earth, but to govern and control him as a subject. What is not his power over the Mother and the Son of God! To crown these gifts, this great saint never ceased to live in the company of Jesus and Mary, the most holy society, the most sanctifying that ever was, to lead with them a very holy life, and to be closely united to them in a very spiritual relationship.

Truly, drawing with marvelous abundance from the waters of grace at the fountains of the Savior, we can not estimate to what degree he developed and increased these eminent virtues which God had bestowed. It was fitting indeed to the wisdom and goodness of God, who grants favors and graces in proportion to the functions to which he calls someone, to adorn St. Joseph with the richest treasures of virtues, to make him capable of fulfilling the high office to which he was raised, the most sublime ever given to a creature. We also see him holding the first place after Mary. It is for these reasons that we have wanted for such a long time to give the very powerful protector of Jesus and Mary, so generous to all who call upon him, a clear testimony of our sovereign reverence. (Rambert, II, p. 576-577).

M. Gilbert, *Le Bx Eugène de Mazenod et la dévotion à saint Joseph*, « Vie Oblate Life » 39 (1980), p. 125-143.

\* \* \*

BLESSED JOSÉ VEGA RIAÑO (1904-1936)  
MARTYR OF SPAIN

*José Vega was born on March 19, 1904, in Siero de la Reina (León). Two of his brothers entered the Oblate Congregation. He professed first vows on July 31, 1922. A month later, he moved to Rome for ecclesiastical studies. On August 15, 1925, he made his perpetual profession in Roviano and on July 3, 1927, he was ordained to the priesthood in*

*Rome. As a priest, he continued for two more years in the Eternal City, as secretary to the Procurator General to the Holy See, while completing his special studies.*

*In the Scholasticate of Pozuelo, with his serious preparation of the classes, his great intellectual capacity, his spirit of faith and his sincere and regular piety, he was always valued by all as a good teacher and exemplary religious. In addition, he worked apostolically with passion in the evangelization of the workers in the area, for which reason he was always in the sights of the militiamen.*

“The behavior of the refugees was of non-activity, except for Fathers Francisco Esteban and José Vega who continued to give spiritual help to the hidden Oblates and other people, especially religious, even risking their lives. José Vega Riaño took it upon himself to personally protect three scholastics who were suffering from fever by finding them a family known to him who could take them in. He also took care of their spiritual life, making sure that Fr. Mariano Martin, who was hiding in the boarding house on Carrera de San Jerónimo, visited them to facilitate the sacrament of Penance. Another special event was that on October 12, Feast of Our Lady of the Pillar, someone brought them consecrated forms and they spent the whole day in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. At nightfall they received communion, which was the viaticum for almost all of them, because on the 15th they were all arrested and taken to the Modelo Prison”. (Fortunato Alonso)

*Most likely, he was “taken” from the Modelo Prison on the afternoon of November 7 and taken with a large group of prisoners to Paracuellos de Jarama, where they were machine-gunned. He was the first Oblate to die there.*

*March 20*

UT PROFERATUR IMPERIUM CHRISTI

*More on the Oblate vocation from the writings of Fr. L. Deschâtelets, Superior General:*

Dear Fathers, what is Oblate Spirituality? Charity! Charity! Love! Love! Charity and love fill the pages of the life of the Founder and of

the Rules which he has given us as a guide for our lives and our apostolate. We could make many distinctions, but Oblate spirituality means love! [...]

Our spirituality makes us optimistic. Is there room for pessimism with such love of God in our soul? Are not joy and contentment the spiritual fruit of charity? Look at our history; there is nothing gloomy in it. Read the life of our venerated Founder; read his letters.... You will find optimism everywhere. The Founder was always assured beforehand of the success of his enterprises.... This optimism has made us daring. Where others were afraid to go, we gladly went. What looked too humble for some, we readily accepted. We are always heedful of and faithful to these words of our Holy Rule: *Nihil linquendum inausum ut proferatur imperium Christi*. We must do everything to extend the empire of Christ. (L. Deschâtelets, *Oblate Spirituality*, “Études oblates” 8 [1949], p. 155-161)

*March 21*

#### APOSTOLIC LETTER OF APPROVAL OF THE INSTITUTE

*On March 21, 1826, Pope Leo XII signed the Apostolic Letter of Approval of the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. The original of the “Brief”, on vellum, is kept in the Archives of the Generalate in Rome.*

LEO XII POPE

To future memory

[...] Already eleven years have passed since our predecessor of happy memory Pius VII, shortly after he had led, with the help of God, safe and unharmed the ship of the Church so miserably shaken on all sides, had openly indicated that in France, because of the turmoil in the civil and ecclesiastical situations there was a need for preachers of the Gospel who would call to the right path those who were straying. A handful of priests arose to devote themselves without delay to this sacred ministry in the Diocese of Aix in the southern province of France (Provence).

The great fruit with which divine clemency had deigned to reward their efforts could no longer remain hidden. As it began to spread, several bishops from neighboring dioceses urged these priests to bring such an important work to their flocks.

Filled with blessings that came from heaven, they sought more and more to bind themselves to the things of heaven, to commit themselves seriously to their own perfection and at the same time to devote themselves with all their strength and with all their heart to the salvation of souls.

And while they had to go to different dioceses proclaiming penance, they found it necessary to write laws and canons so that a bond and protector of the nascent society would be established by choosing for themselves the title of Missionary Oblates of St. Charles, although they were commonly called Missionaries of Provence (of the Southern Province of France/Provence).

This society requires that its members, who are bound by the perpetual and simple vows of chastity, poverty, obedience and perseverance in the same institute, to be dissolved only by its supreme moderator or by the Roman Pontiff, will devote themselves with care to the principal work of the sacred missions; above all they will evangelize in the local language the uncultured people in places lacking any help. Let the missionaries, who are engaged in seminaries, offer fraternal assistance to the clergy for their suitable formation; let them be ready to help the parish priests or other pastors in the reform of the customs of the people by preaching and other spiritual exercises; let them especially give solicitous attention and care to the youth; let them strive hard to remove the best part of the Christian people from the temptations of the world; let them administer the divine word and the sacraments to those who are imprisoned and accompany to their final end those sentenced to death.

Now the priests who constitute this society began to spread far and wide, abandoning those comforts which were sought by all; from here they have already obtained four houses and a residence; they have obtained the sacred faculties in the dioceses, in the hospitals of Aix, in the prisons of Marseilles and of Aix itself, and finally they are called here and there to lead some Episcopal seminaries.



This being the case, our beloved son Charles Eugene de Mazenod, vicar of the Bishop of Marseilles, provost of the college of canons of the same cathedral and founder of the above-mentioned society, has addressed to us also in the name of the members a petition to the effect that, for the greater glory of God and to promote the salvation of souls, we approve this family as well as its laws and, in order that any confusion with other societies bearing the name of Oblates of Saint Charles may be avoided, that we adorn the same (society) with the title of Missionary Oblates of the Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary.

We therefore, after having examined it well and since Pius VII himself, our predecessor, and we ourselves have showered it with favors and indulgences and after several bishops have considered it extremely useful and in the future of no small support in the sad events of the Church and for its honor, recommending the solicitude and care of the same Charles Eugene de Mazenod, who, a man of rectitude and erudition and to the great joy of our soul, first began the work and strenuously has not neglected to promote the work begun [...] with a happy and willing spirit we constitute the same Congregation and we want it to be constituted with the name of the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of the Most Holy Virgin Mary conceived without sin. [...]

Finally, therefore, we erect this family in the hope that its sons, who under some laws, necessary to form souls to piety, have dedicated themselves to the ministry of the word of God and recognize as their patroness the Mother of God conceived without sin, will seek with all their strength and example to bring into the bosom of the Mother of Mercy the men whom Jesus Christ, suspended on the cross, wished to entrust to her as children.

Given in Rome at Saint Peter's *sub anulo piscatoris*, March 21, 1826, the third of our pontificate. ("Missions OMI" 79 [1952], p. 565-574)

## March 22

### THE OBLATE TRADITION OF EVANGELIZATION IS STILL ALIVE

Our best Oblate tradition of evangelization remains alive and we must continue it. The goal to be achieved is the credible proclamation

of Christ, Saviour and Liberator, and this to the poor i.e. to those who do not know Christ, are far from him, and against the idols also of the Western World. [...]

We Oblates ourselves need to be evangelized. [...]

Decisions regarding our mission cannot be based on ideology or prejudice but on the Lord's will and work. Our future choices need to be made in favour of the poor, wherever they may be, whoever they may be. [...]

We need to listen to Christ well: know his life and charity well, as the Founder did; we need to preach the same message Christ did, and communicate the same certitude. We also need to listen well to the world [...].

While we cannot ignore the negative in our world, we are challenged by the positive: God loves our world as it is, wants to save it, and thus calls and sends us. (*Acts of the Congress on Evangelization and the Oblates*, Section VI - Oblate Evangelization Today, « Vie Oblate Life » 42 [1983], p. 365-366)

*March 23*

#### THE MISSION BELONGS TO THE CHURCH

If the Father, in sending Christ and the Spirit, reveals himself as love and as community of persons, the *object* of our mission is not only to proclaim this revelation but also to build up communion in God's Spirit – ultimately in the kingdom of God, through the service of the Church. Therefore, the *subject* of mission is most appropriately a community, in that it can never be an isolated person. Mission is essentially linked with the Church, the place where the new life in communion with the risen Christ is first lived. It proceeds from the Trinity to the Church and then, through its individual members, it may go out to the world.

The 1998 Chapter expresses its conviction that “evangelization is not the work of lone rangers, but is a community effort, of the Oblates and the entire Christian community” and adds, “It is the Church which evangelizes, and sends us forth on mission.” (EPM 27)

Because of this, we Oblates should be happy to have received, through our Founder, the charism of common living, because it already

expresses where mission starts from and aims at: to be “closely united in the bonds of fraternal charity”, as it is written in the 1818. The capitulants of 1998 explain the link between community and mission in these terms: “Community is God’s gift to us, and through us, a gift to all people. Among other things, it signifies the communal life to which all of humanity is called. Community is good news for the Church and for the world and it is in this sense that community is itself already a form of mission.” (EPM 27) (W. Steckling, *Oblate Mission Today*, Letter to the Congregation, November 21, 2006).

*March 24*

#### WE BRING THE IMMENSE HOPE OF CHRIST

“Respond to the thirst of our world for hope.” (WH p. 13), that is how the last Chapter describes the content of our mission. Loss of hope is the big danger of post modernity, and also affects us Christians who live in the present time.

How do we raise hope in ourselves? We need an intense “mystical”, spiritual life! All that C. 33 says about the Eucharist, the Word of God, the Liturgy of Hours, the prolonged silent prayer and reconciliation is not exaggerated. We may find nourishment especially in Scripture texts that speak about the exile, or in second Isaiah, or in Exodus.

How do we transmit this hope? While some means of communication are less understood in a culture formed by the media, there are still many simple ways to transmit the hope of Christ: attention to the person, hospitable communities, care of the poorest of the poor. St. Eugene and his companions, as well as Blessed Joseph Gerard, would not wait for people to come to them, they would go out and visit, giving preference to the sick, even those dying of contagious diseases. Besides announcing the word where possible, Oblate missionaries have always built schools and formed leaders, established hospitals, and promoted agriculture, defended justice and change of structures, promoted peace and advocated for their people, putting the voiceless in a position that their voices could be heard.

We have many examples in the congregation of witnesses of hope in the midst of very difficult situations, among them prophetic figures

like Blessed Joseph Cebula, Albert Lacombe, Mauricio Lefebvre, Bishop Benjamin de Jesus and Archbishop Denis Hurley, to name just one from each Region. (W. Steckling, *Oblate Mission Today*, Letter to the Congregation, November 21, 2006).

*March 25*

#### JOY AND GRATITUDE FOR THE APPROBATION OF THE CONGREGATION

*On March 25, 1826 Saint Eugene wrote a letter from Rome to all the Oblates in which he communicated that he had received the Brief of Approval (March 21, 1826) signed by Leo XII, which approved the Congregation.*

Rejoice with me and congratulate yourselves, my beloved, for it has pleased the Lord to grant us great favours; Our Holy Father the Pope, Leo XII, gloriously reigning from the chair of St. Peter, has sanctioned with his apostolic approbation, on March 21 of this current year, our Institute, our Constitutions and our Rules. [...] What prayers of thanksgiving, in keeping with such a favour, can we possibly offer to God who is so great and so good? Is it not by being consumed by an ardent piety and by performing with an eagerness and a greater joy than ever the duties of our holy vocation? If hitherto [...] you have been bearers of the Word and bringers of life to the peoples you have evangelized, what will you be in the future now that, with the strength and support that Apostolic authority gives to our Institute as well as to our Rules and Constitutions, our so young and recent Society has been raised to the dignity of a religious Congregation like the venerable Societies which have preceded us, for example those of the Priests of the Mission of Saint Vincent de Paul, of the Most Holy Redeemer, of the Most Holy Cross and of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, etc.?

There is none amongst you who, while happy over the grace obtained, cannot understand at the same time what a strict account we must render for it; the Church has the right to expect work which is not inferior to the benefit bestowed; certainly it is a benefaction which strikes you, like us, with astonishment since you well know the almost

insurmountable obstacles which blocked the way to this quite un hoped for favour. [...] In this affair of an extreme importance for the Church, for the Society and for each of us, the Sovereign.

The Pontiff did everything of his own accord and under the prompting of the Holy Spirit who guides him always in the government of the Church. [...] The Pro-secretary of the Sacred Congregation concerned with Bishops and Regulars [...] in the first report that he made to His Holiness about our affair, concluded, in accordance with the practice of the said Congregation, that our Constitutions should simply be praised, our most Holy Father, reiterating his satisfaction, let him know to his great surprise that it was his will that our Society, of which the worth seemed manifest to him, receive the guarantee of the solemn approbation called “in special form” and that she thus be constituted in the Church as a real Order of religious. [...]

In such circumstances, the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in charge of the examination of the Code and of our Rules had to be apprised of the desire of the Holy Father. [...] His Holiness [...] approved our Institute and its Constitutions and Rules and gave the order to expedite the Letters in the form of a brief on February 17, 1826. [...]

Now, my Reverend Fathers and Brothers most beloved in the Lord, what more shall I say to you to whom the divine Spirit who inflames your hearts has inspired everything, if not, after these so numerous and so great signs of the protection of the Most High, that you ought to give yourselves eagerly to the promotion of the glory of God, ready to endure for his honour the most dire sacrifices; that you have been chosen, by a special grace, in these times of calamity, to rekindle the flame of piety of the first disciples of the faith, reproduce in your life the illustrious examples of so many Religious who, by the attentive exercise of these same virtues you practice, have arrived at the summit of holiness and have thus consoled the holy Mother of Christians who deplores the destruction of these Orders, crushed in several places by the violent tempest of the persecution; finally, that by a sustained effort you ought to bring help to souls, especially, following the spirit of our Institute, the most abandoned, repeating without cease with joyful eagerness this word of the Apostle: “I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls.”

In consequence, receive with delight this code of our Rules that I joyfully send you. Keep these Rules with the most scrupulous care; they have been judged by the Sovereign Pontiff as very apt to bring souls to perfection; may the peace of God which surpasses all sentiment keep your hearts in Christ Jesus, and may the Lord grant that you increase, as faithful stewards, and render you rich in charity for each other and towards all. Amen. (*Oblate Writings*, 7, p. 68-71)

*March 26*

#### TO PREACH CHRIST AND CHRIST CRUCIFIED

“The cross of Jesus Christ is central to our mission. Like the apostle Paul, we “preach Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2: 2). If we bear in our body the death of Jesus, it is with the hope that the life of Jesus, too, may be seen in our body (cf. 2 Cor 4:10). Through the eyes of our crucified Saviour we see the world which he redeemed with his blood, desiring that those in whom he continues to suffer will know also the power of his resurrection (cf. Phil 3: 10).”

*This text of the current Oblate Constitutions (C 4) reflects a missionary “style” that was already present in the first Constitutions:*

There is nothing more reliable than the preaching of the word of God....

It should be understood that it is in direct opposition to the spirit of our Rule to aim at elegance of style in preaching, rather than solidity of doctrine. Too many there are, who strive to win applause by the elevation and tinkling harmony of their language. Quite different is the road which we are bound to follow. We must seek only to instruct the faithful, to be attentive to the needs of the greater part of the audience, and we must not be content to break the bread of the word of God for them, but also, as it were, to chew it for them. We should see to it that, when our sermons are over, they, instead of presuming to bestow foolish admiration on what they have not understood, will rather return to their homes instructed and well disposed, instructed, and able to repeat in their families what they have learned from our lips.

Experience proves that it is possible to attain this desirable end, the only end indeed that we may lawfully set before us in this perilous ministry, which so many vain and proud priests have exercised to their own misfortune and without obtaining the salvation of others. We shall not attain it, however, unless we renounce our own personal glory, and repress in the depth of our hearts the vain praises of men; in a word, unless like the Apostle we preach Jesus Christ and him crucified “not with pretentious speech, but in the demonstration of the Spirit,” that is to say, unless we make it evident that we are penetrated with what we teach, and that we have begun to practice, before attempting to instruct others. (*The Rule of Saint Eugene de Mazenod*, Woestman, ed., p. 32-33)

March 27

#### OBLATES OF MARY WHO CARRY THE CROSS

*Following the teaching of Saint Eugene, the Superior General, Louis Soullier, in one of his circular letters writes:*

Like the Divine Missionary who wanted to be an Oblate, *Oblatus est quia ipse voluit*, we are happy to bear the name of missionary Oblate. What does that mean? We want to devote ourselves to the salvation of souls, even becoming victims, if necessary. *In agone procedant decertaturi usque ad internecionem* (Preface). Jesus Christ wanted to rule by the cross; he wants the cross to keep its divine power: *Nos evacuetur virtus Christi*. When God makes an apostle, he puts a cross in his hand and tells him to go show that cross and preach it. But first he plants it in his heart and according to how deep the cross is embedded in the heart of the apostle, the cross he holds in his hand makes more or fewer conquests.

Oblates of Mary, you who wear the cross on your chest as an authentic sign of your mission, look at it as the symbol of all the sacrifices your holy ministry impose on you so as to fulfill it worthily and faithfully. (L. Soullier, *Circular Letter* No. 59, February 17, 1893, *Lettres circulaires*, p. 20-21)

March 28

## THE OBLATE CROSS

“The Oblate cross which is received at perpetual profession is a constant reminder of the love of the Saviour who wishes to draw all hearts to himself and sends us out as his co-workers.” (C 63)

The cross, as mentioned previously is at the heart of our life and mission. To follow Jesus is to accompany him to Calvary in order to enter into the mystery of the resurrection with him. St. Paul used to say, “The only knowledge I claimed to have was about Jesus, and only about him as the crucified Christ” (I Corinthians 2:2). This cross, received on the day of profession, continually reminds us of the love of the Saviour and our own mission: he sends us out as his co-workers in the work of salvation.

“They will have no other distinguishing mark except that which is proper to their ministry, namely the image of the Crucified Lord. This crucifix will serve as the credentials of their embassy to the different peoples to whom they are sent. It will be a perpetual reminder to the missionaries themselves of the humility, patience, charity, modesty and of all the other virtues with which they are to carry out their most holy and sublime ministry.” (*Constitutions* de 1818). (F. Jetté, *O.M.I. The Apostolic Man*, p. 329)

March 29

## THE CROSS AS CENTRAL

As Jesus is trying to explain his mission to his disciples, he tells them: “To you has been given the [deep] secret of God’s Kingdom; but to those who are outside everything comes in parables.” (*Mark* 4:11)

What is the “deep secret” which is the key to understanding Jesus and his message?

The Gospels tell us that, in following Jesus, we can either be “in” or “out”, depending upon whether we understand a certain secret or not. Those who “get it” are genuine disciples and those who “don’t get it” remain on the edges, outside. But what is it that they, the disciples and



we, need to “get”? What’s the secret we need to grasp? In essence, the secret is the cross. We need to grasp the wisdom of the cross, the brokenness of Jesus on the cross, and accept the invitation that is inherent inside the cross and be willing to live that out. The Gospels contain the idea that if you understand the cross you will then understand everything else as well, you will know the deep secret. Conversely, if you do not understand the cross you will not understand the Gospels at all. The cross is the key that unlocks the understanding of everything else. If you understand it, you are “in”; and if you do not understand it, you are “out”. Moreover, you are never “in” or “out” once and for all; you step in and out. For example, when Peter betrays Jesus, the Gospels tell us that “he went outside”. They are speaking of much more than him stepping outside the door of a house. In betraying Jesus, Peter, at that moment, went “outside”, outside the understanding of the Gospels.

Eugene de Mazenod clearly grasped “the secret”. The cross was central to his personal spirituality and he made it central to the Oblate charism. In his diaries he writes of a foundational religious experience that left a brand on his soul forever. Praying before a crucifix one Good Friday, he was touched at the depth of his soul by the meaning of Jesus’ death on the cross and what that death meant in terms of forgiveness both in his personal life and in the life of the world itself. After that experience, like St. Paul who had a similar experience, he too could say: I preach nothing but Christ crucified. (1 Corinthians 2:2) This now lies at the very center of the Oblate charism and ethos and is the very antithesis of any prosperity gospel, namely, of any spirituality whose preaching implies that if we follow Christ we will be specially rewarded with good fortune in this life. The cross offers us a share in Christ’s life, ministry, and suffering, not special favors in this life. The cross of Christ, like Jesus’ other sayings about the cost of discipleship, suggests, as Daniel Berrigan so poignantly puts it, that: “Before you get serious about God you first consider carefully how good you are going to look on wood.”

Of course there’s a cost to this, beyond what this means in one’s personal life. An emphasis on the cross, on the cost of Christian discipleship, on accepting pain and humiliation in this world, draws (for a religious community) a sparse audience in most affluent circles. It is radically anti-cultural in most places within our world and can, as a

consequence, leave the Oblates culturally marginalized. (R. Rolheiser, *The Oblate Charism Today: It's Essence, Modesty, Vitality, Struggles, and its Urgency*, "Oblatio" 7 [2018], p. 532-533)

March 30

THE LIPS OF JESUS CHRIST THAT ANNOUNCE THE WORD OF GOD

*On the specific mission of the Oblate, from the reflections of Fr. L. Soullier, Superior General:*

Always have in mind these words of the Apostle Paul: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? [...] Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message," (Rom 10: 14, 17). And they could not hear it if preachers did not preach the Word of God. The Apostle's reasoning is urgent, his logic is strong. These words of St. Paul are addressed to us: *Opus fac evangelistae*; like our Divine Savior we must say: *Oportet me evangelizare regnum Dei, quia ideo missus sum* (Lk. 4:43). I must announce the kingdom of God, because that is why I am a missionary. [...] And we, the Oblates of Mary, are sent by the Holy Church to preach; that is our goal, that is our mission, it is our duty. [...] The Oblate must repeat the words of St. Paul: *Necessitas enim mihi incumbit; vae enim mihi est si non evangelizavero* (1 Cor 10:16). It is a duty: woe to me if I do not evangelize. [...] So, the character of our Congregation, clearly stated, approved by the Holy Church, and confirmed by nearly a century of work, is that of the apostolate. We are missionaries in name and in fact. To evangelize the poor, that is our first goal. How? "It is especially through the preaching of the Word of God, which is good for the souls and strengthens them, as our Holy Rules tell us." [...]

In the Holy Church, the mystical body composed of a large number of members, others will be the eye that watches, the hand that works, the foot that bears; as for us, we are the lips of Jesus Christ, announcing to the people the Word of God. (L. Soullier, *Circular Letter* No. 59, February 17, 1893, *Circulaires administratives*, 2, p. 5-10).

MISSION AND THE DESIRE FOR PERFECTION

In whatever part of the world our missionaries spread their zeal, they must never forget that their desire for perfection must be all the more intense when, against their will, they find themselves far from the company of their brothers. Secondly, they will be all the more attached to their religious obligations and exercises of Christian piety when they find themselves deprived of the advantages of community life. Let them strive to cultivate in their heart the taste for prayer; let them take care not to omit meditation and the daily examination of conscience; let a regular contact with the Scriptures and some ascetic book serve to fill them with pious thoughts and good desires; in their devotion to the Holy Eucharist in the daily celebration of Mass and in the sacrament of Penance, let them steadfastly adhere to the requirements of the Rule. Similarly, they will take one day a month for spiritual reflection and, every year, in accordance with the practice of the Congregation, they will do together the exercises of the retreat. (Eugene de Mazenod, *Instruction relative aux Missions étrangères*, General House, Rome 1939, p. 8).



# April

**T**he anniversary day of some martyrs will lead us to meditate this month on martyrdom. The anniversary of St. Eugene's first communion will allow us to read some texts about the Eucharist. Chastity will be a third theme for reflection this month.

*April 1*

## EUGENE RECEIVES THE PALLIUM FROM PIUS IX

*On April 1, 1851, at the end of his stay in Rome, where he was together with p. Tempier for the approval of changes to the Rules, Eugene was awarded the Pallium by Pope Pius IX. He writes to Fr. Vincens:*

Everything has been concluded to our satisfaction. Not only have the Acts of our chapter been approved, and that without recourse to the General Congregation of Cardinals, a process that would have been interminable, but the Pope has given me a Brief in the same vein as that I got from Pope Gregory XVI. Our apostolic vicariate for Natal has been erected; our Congregation is better known and held in higher esteem, the future of the important mission of Ceylon is settled in such a way as to lead us to hope that our ministry will gradually extend throughout the island. The Pope has crowned all his other kindnesses by not wanting to allow me to depart without giving a signal proof of his goodwill and according a very rare privilege; he has bestowed the pallium on me....

I make you expressly responsible, my dear Father Vincens, to express to all our Fathers and Brothers, whether scholastics, novices of coadjutor Brothers, my warmest regards and I transmit to them the special blessing I obtained for them from the Holy Father. I give them my blessing too, yourself included, with all my heart. (*Oblate Writings*, 11, p. 32-33).

*In the Brief for the conferral of the pallium, we read:*

Pope Pius IX. For perpetual memory. The Roman Pontiffs who, being divinely established for the supreme government of the Church, have the right to confer the insignia of sacred honors, are wont to grant upon their request to archbishops to whom it belongs by right, the honor of using the Pallium which contains the fullness of the pastoral office. But they have also sometimes granted it to bishops by a special favor as a reward for outstanding merit of these prelates, or to note the vibrancy of a bishopric they deemed worthy of the honor and privilege. [...] Bearing all this in mind, we find various and very valid reasons, to decorate the episcopal See of Marseilles with the great honor and privilege of the Pallium. [...] The zeal of their fathers for religion has not failed in the heart of the faithful of Marseilles, as evidenced by the numerous works of Christian charity and religious institutions in this city, which are thriving, and prosperous. [...] But if the praises deserved by the life of the flock are the glory of the pastor, praise is certainly due to our venerable brother Charles Joseph Eugene de Mazenod, now Bishop of Marseilles, who leaves nothing to be desired in the performance of the duties of pastoral care of the flock entrusted to his care, and who, as founder and superior of a Congregation of priests under the title of the Oblates of the Blessed Virgin Mary Conceived without Sin, must share the joy we feel seeing her children working hard in the vineyard of the Lord with a great benefit for souls. These are the reasons we had that for perpetual testimony of our good will we grant to the episcopal See of Marseilles the decoration and honor of the Pallium. (Rey, II, p. 277-278).

*Saint Eugene immediately informed the Chapter of the cathedral of Marseilles of the papal brief by which it had been honored with the pallium. The canons of the Chapter unanimously voted a message of thanks to the Pope, in which, among other things, they noted the role of their bishop in the life of the diocese and of the Congregation:*

We are aware, Holy Father, that this confidence is the result of the one you have placed in our bishop. You judge the flock by its shepherd. Indeed, it's from him, it's mostly by drawing inspiration from his spirit that his priests have learned more and more the inviolable devotion to the Holy See and the zeal for the house of God and the faithfulness that

distinguishes them in the exact observance of ecclesiastical discipline. His people are also formed on the same model. That is why we are filled with the purest joy of filial piety, hearing you pay justice to the eminent merits of our prelate and glorifying by your holy words his great work as a pastor among his flock and as a Father of another spiritual family as edifying as it is numerous. Our region has been the cradle of this society of evangelical workers and the legitimate interest it inspires in us is encouraged by the special protection that Your Holiness gives it. (Easter Monday, April 21, 1851)

*April 2*

LÉON FAFARD (1850-1885)  
FÉLIX MARCHAND (1858-1885)  
MARTYRS IN CANADA

*On April 2, 1885, Holy Thursday, Léon Fafard and Félix Marchand were killed by the Mestizos at Frog Lake. Their bodies were found holding the bloody Oblate cross in their hands as if to signify the identity of their mission with that of Christ, the participation in the folly of the cross. On April 11, Fr. André noted in his diary:*

A letter arrived this morning from Battlefort with the most terrible and distressing news. [...] The good and dear Fathers Fafard and Marchand, and two Brothers, were killed by some members of the Big Bear band. [...] The good Father Fafard, who was so devoted to them, worked day and night to complete the buildings constructed at such great cost. [...] On the Sunday I spent at Frog Lake, how edified I was to see this dear Father busy all day hearing the confessions of the native children [...]. The Fathers were slain, because in their charity, they wanted to defend the white people and save them from the blows that threatened them. ("Missions OMI" 23 [1885], p. 299-301).

*Bishop Grandin expressed some meaningful words when he wrote to the parents of Father Fafard: "...Dear Mrs. Fafard, you can compare your pain to that of the Blessed Virgin, and with all the more reason to that of the victim of Calvary; the dear martyr also died for the salvation of his brothers, for the salvation of his executioners."* (Bishop Gran-

*din, Letter to the father and the mother of Fr. Fafard, martyred at Frog Lake, August 27, 1885, "Missions OMI", 23 [1885] p. 421).*

*To the parents of Fr. Marchand he wrote:* The two Fathers "were very close, sharing as it were the same Mission. They were both members of the same religious family, they loved each other and met often, supporting each other in their many difficulties. Both were also victims of their dedication, martyrs of charity...." (*Letter of the Servant of God Bishop Grandin to the father and mother of Fr. Marchand, martyred at Frog Lake, August 27, 1885, "Missions OMI", 69 [1935] p. 55).*

G. Montmigny, *Oblate victims in the Far North* (Héritage oblat, 11), Rome 1998, p. 7-14.

*April 3*

#### THE DESIRE FOR MARTYRDOM

To be an Oblate means to be disposed to martyrdom. It is a recurring theme in the writings of the Founder and in the first generations of Oblates. [...]

Towards the end of his novitiate, December 15, 1852, *Vital Grandin* writes to his brother: "The name of "Oblate" that I must carry in an exemplary way explains the commitment I acquire. I must be a victim, and not just a victim at a specific time, but every day. This is the true meaning of the crucifix that I will wear around my neck and that will remind me at all times that the path of the Oblate is a path of sacrifice and constant immolation ... to date there are no martyrs in our congregation. "Oh, if only I could have the joy of being the first Oblate martyr!"

In 1866, *Alexander Taché* remembered his arrival at the Rivière Rouge mission in 1845. Thinking of the first missionaries who were massacred there by the Sioux Indians in 1736, he wrote, "... we pray therefore to this jealous apostle, to instill in us the zeal that consumes our lives in the service of this holy cause and, if necessary, shed our blood for it too."

In the course of a retreat in 1888 from his mission in Saskatchewan, *Ovide Charlebois* writes: "... All I ask (Oh God) is to accept every moment of my life as small acts of martyrdom. If I were not worthy to shed my blood for You, may my entire life be a continuous martyrdom.



Yes, my God, from this moment I want to live my life as a martyr. Thus, I offer you the martyrdom of my life, my Good Jesus, and I sign it with my blood so that you cannot reject me. I not only want my physical suffering as a tribute to my martyrdom, but also, and above all, all my moral suffering: temptations, dryness and distractions during prayer, my pride, etc. ... I want this to be my main act on this day; I start my life of martyrdom. O Sacred Heart, teach me to live in this way, You, whose life was all a continuous martyrdom.” That same year he wrote down, not without a certain realism: “Since on my last retreat, a pious idea filled my mind..., that of being a martyr, is not a small claim, is it? Now, of course, you will ask who my assassins will be. Very easy; the mosquitoes, my Pierrie [an orphan Indian who, on the advice of Mons. Grandin, Father Ovide had welcomed not to live completely alone in the mission], the children of my school, my mistakes, my temptations, my anxieties, the difficulties of my life, etc. etc. It is not a small martyrdom of a few hours that I want, but a martyrdom that lasts a lifetime. Since there is not a single moment that is free from suffering, I have said to myself: Why not accept everything in the light of martyrdom? Is this not as pleasant to God as the momentary suffering of true martyrs? I feel like I’m on a brazier that burns me slowly, keeping me alive in this way for as long as possible.”

The desire for martyrdom was a reality for many Oblates from the beginning of our Congregation, driven by the same spirituality of the Founder.

More than 100 Oblates have died tragically during the exercise of their ministry. Some thirty of them have been proclaimed blessed and recognized as martyrs of the faith, a very small number considering that there have been 15,000 Oblates during these 200 years. Nevertheless, we find here a sign of the radicality that is required of all those once offered in oblation to God, to the Church and to the poor, a stimulus for living our charism just like we read in the preface: disposed to sacrifice goods, talents, rest, one’s own person and life for love of Jesus Christ, service of the Church and the salvation of their brothers and sisters. (F. Ciardi - A. Ruiz González, *Presentation*, in *Oblación y Martirio, Actas de la Conferencia, Pozuelo, 4-5 de mayo 2019*, F. Ciardi - A. Ruiz González (editores), (Oblatio Studia, 8), Missionarii OMI, Rome 2019, p. 11-13).

*April 4*

## OBLATE MARTYRDOM IN INDIA

In India, as a land of diverse religions, languages, and cultures and similarly, as the cradle of different religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism etc., oblation and martyrdom are also the concrete realities inevitably encountered in the context of mission and ministry in India. And according to the study, it is proven that India stands out as one of the countries where Christian persecution and the modern day martyrdom taunts on and off the life of every Christian as the minority group in population. At the same time within the context of Oblate community, an experience of martyrdom is also caused by the multiple factors such as blend of various cultures, traditions, life styles, mentality, dress code, temperaments etc. When the Oblates from various part of the country start living together in a community, it inherently involves the martyrdom of acceptance, sacrifice, sharing of the responsibility, cooperation, healthy confrontation as some of the salient features of the multi-cultural context of an Oblate community life in India. Thus, living a community life in this situation is a kind of Oblate martyrdom through the way of life.

In India, the Oblates are serving the poor in different parts of the country with various challenging ministries in difficult missions. At some parts of the country, they engage in the ministries that endanger their survival, missionary works and daily living. Oblates' ministry for the poor include pastoral ministry, education ministry, tribal ministry, social service, youth animation, women empowerment through self-help activities, awareness program, family counselling, ministry to the under-privileged children, ministry to the sick, ministry of inter-religious dialogue etc. Noteworthy to be mentioned are the mission and ministry among the tribals in northern part of India, where the modern day martyrdom is concretely part of everyday experience. For instance, the Oblates' presence, mission and ministry with the tribal and indigenous people North and North-East India is indeed an experience of Martyrdom. As the Oblates engage themselves in the ministry of empowerment of the poor from the clutches of inequality, injustice, casteism, cultural and social evils etc, they are faced with the opposition from

fundamentalist governments, groups and anti-social activists etc. Apart from these challenges, the experience of martyrdom in the mission also consists of the difficulty to adopt the tribal culture, language and life-style, deprivation of basic facilities such as road, transport, electricity etc. The Oblates live their martyrdom through the inspiration of the Oblate cross and love of the crucified Saviour. And amidst such difficult realities of mission and ministry, the Oblate cross becomes the inspiration and consolation for the Oblates to carry out the cross-centred Oblate mission. (J. Jesuraj, *Oblate Cross: An Inspiration to Martyrdom*, in *Oblación y Martirio, Actas de la Conferencia, Pozuelo, 4-5 de mayo 2019*, F. Ciardi - A. Ruiz González (editores), (Oblatio Studia, 8), Missionarii OMI, Rome 2019, p. 58-60)

*April 5*

#### ST. EUGENE'S FIRST COMMUNION

*On April 5, 1792 Eugene made his first communion in Turin. It was Holy Thursday. The memory of that first encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist will always be alive in him, even as an old man, as Mgr. Ricard, one of his first biographers, testifies:*

One Holy Thursday – please allow me this personal memory – we were in the Marseilles Cathedral. The Bishop [Eugene de Mazenod] was officiating with the majesty and calm recollection that made him famous among all the prelates, his contemporaries. Suddenly we saw him cry and despite trying to conceal it he could not. The seminarians who were around the bishop's throne, touched by the emotion of the Pontiff, looked at him with emotion. Becoming aware of it and turning to one of them, the author of these lines, whose myopia made him focus more intently: “My boy, he said with that simplicity that made him win hearts, do not be so surprised, today is the anniversary of my first communion!” (Mons. Ricard, *Mgr. de Mazenod évêque de Marseilles...*, Paris 1892, p. 12).

*Forty years later, in prayer before Jesus in the Eucharist, he looks back upon his past life as a fruit of grace:*

It is enough for you to know that God in his goodness is helping me as usual, that is to say, he is revealing himself as he is, infinitely good, infinitely merciful, every time I approach him; that he is purifying my heart, illuminating my feeble understanding, stirring up my will and bringing it to perfection.

I am happy in his presence, whatever my feelings may be like when he communicates his divine Spirit to me. I invoke that Spirit as you can imagine in my present situation, with assiduity and persistence, I dare not say with fervour.

Thus, whether my thoughts go to the immensity of God's goodness that he has accompanied me from childhood and led me to perform the various tasks that he has confided to me in the course of my life, or whether I meditate on the interior workings of grace, all of a kind to arouse my gratitude and love, or whether I reflect on my sins, my innumerable infidelities, which would make the very stones cry out against me and make me the first of my accusers, I know all the time that it is my Father who is in heaven I am dealing with, who has at his right hand his Son Jesus Christ, our Saviour, who is our advocate, our mediator, who never ceases to make intercession for us, with that powerful prayer which has the right to be heard and which is in actual fact always heard if we put no obstacle in its way. (To Fr. Tempier, October 10, 1832, *Ob-late Writings*, 8, p. 74-75)

\* \* \*

BLESSED VICENTE BLANCO GUADILLA (1882-1936)  
MARTYR OF SPAIN

*Born on April 5, 1882, Vincent, after completing his novitiate in August 1901, went to the International Scholasticate in Rome. He was superior of the Juniorate and Master of Novices. Eight courses of novices passed through Fr. Vicente Blanco's school for the formation of religious. Emilio Alonso, who lived with Fr. Blanco and succeeded him as superior of the Juniorate, says: "I dare to think that there is not one [of the novices] who did not profess profound veneration and respect for him, even among those who did not persevere. All will be unani-*

mous in giving testimony of admiration and esteem. The secret lies in the fact that Father Blanco was not an ordinary religious, but a man of great virtue, especially of great prudence, of solid piety, zealous and self-sacrificing for the interests of the Congregation. Although his exterior appearance was austere, he was a man of great heart. He was also profoundly humble, rigid with himself, but understanding and indulgent with others”.

*In 1932 he became superior of the scholasticate of Pozuelo.*

*Vicente, along with four other Oblates, took refuge in the house of his family:* “One night in July 1936, Father Vicente, Publio Rodriguez and three Oblates, whose names I do not remember, arrived at our house looking for refuge because they had nowhere to go, since they had been thrown out of their convent in Pozuelo. My parents set up a room, put mattresses on the floor, gave them clothes so they could sleep and rest. [...] my mother told Fr. Blanco that they could not stay in the house because if the militia came back again and searched the house, they would kill them and my father, and what would become of her with four small children. Fr. Blanco spoke with my father, and they decided that they had to leave the house. [...] Fr. Vicente Blanco said to my father: “Dacio, why are you worried? If I die, it will always be as a priest, and I will never stop being a priest.”. *Maria Ángeles concludes by stating the following about their disposition to martyrdom:* “Regarding the reaction to the prediction of the martyrdom of Fr. Vicente and Publio, from everything that I have experienced and I have also stated, they were very clear that they were going to be killed for being priests and religious. Regarding the question of whether they could free themselves from death, the only way was to state that they were neither religious nor priests, and on the contrary they confessed that they were; and regarding the conversation between my father and Fr. Vicente Blanco, although I was a child, I can confirm that Fr. Vicente was proud to be a priest”.

April 6

## ON RECEIVING THE EUCHARIST

*Eugene de Mazenod, in his Notes “On frequent Communion”, dating from the period of his seminary: 1808-1812, wrote:*

Frequent reception of the sacred Body and precious Blood of Jesus Christ imposes the obligation:

- to live in recollection, by this I mean interior, face to face with the Bridegroom of my soul, who deigns to take it as his permanent home;

- to often call to mind the enormous sins of my past life because, by dint of hating them, I can free myself of them more, offering them, weakened by penance, to Jesus Christ so that he may destroy them completely, consume them once and for all in the blazing fire of his divine love that resides in his adorable heart;

- with scrupulous attention to avoid any kind of voluntary failing, however small it may seem, for the sole reason that this saddens my God, the love of my heart, who has done such great things in me and for me;

- Not to be content to carry out the principal and inalienable duties of my state, but to embrace with joy and conviction all the practices of virtue and penance that will help me advance in perfection, from which I am still so appallingly far; to tend, in a word, toward that perfection as if it were my natural environment, and therefore to be strongly convinced that any action, any practice, no matter how small, futile, trivial, childish or common it may seem, must also be useful for me to advance even one millimeter in this blessed way; I must not consider it from top to bottom, but I have to take receive it with joy, as a means that the divine and paternal Providence of my God gives me to get out of my state of apathy and to help me fly to Him. (*Sujets de méditations*, Arch. Post. DM IV 5)

April 7

THE EUCHARIST, SOURCE OF ALL INTERIOR CONSOLATION

*Amid difficulties and trials, Saint Eugene experiences the consolation that comes from the Eucharist.*

Although I expect each day more bad news, when they arrive it is impossible to ward off a profound impression of sadness, especially when domestic sorrows come and pile themselves on top of the burden already too heavy to bear. I will say to you however that I am not discouraged and that I am afflicted without being laid low. It seems to me that Our Lord will help us by his grace to endure all our sorrows.

This morning, before communion, I dared to speak to this good Master with the same freedom that I would have had if I had had the happiness to live when he walked on earth, and if I had found myself in the same predicament. I said Mass in a particular chapel, I was not impeded by anyone's presence. I exposed to him our needs, asked his light and his assistance, and then I surrendered myself entirely to him, wishing absolutely nothing else than his holy will.

I took communion in this disposition. As soon as I had taken the precious blood, it was impossible for me to withstand such an abundance of interior consolations that it was necessary, in spite of my efforts not to reveal before the brother servant what was going on in my soul, to utter sighs and shed such a quantity of tears that the corporal and the altar cloth were saturated. No painful thought provoked this explosion, on the contrary, I was well, I was happy and if I was not so miserable, I would believe that I loved him, that I was grateful. This state lasted quite a long time; it was prolonged during my thanksgiving, which I only shortened for a reason.

I concluded from this that our good Saviour had wished to give me proof that he accepted the sentiments that I had just expressed to him in the simplicity of my heart. I share with the same simplicity what has happened with you, for your own consolation and for your encouragement. Do not bring it up again to me, and continue to pray for me. (Eugene de Mazenod, to Fr. Tempier, August 23, 1830, *Oblate Writings*, 7, p. 211-212)

April 8

FRANÇOIS DE PAULE HENRI TEMPIER (1788-1870)  
FOUNDER'S FIRST COMPANION

*On April 8, 1870 Fr. François de Paule Henri Tempier died in Paris. He was the Founder's first companion, the one that St. Eugene considered "another self".*

One day the postman brings a letter to the address of Mr. Tempier. The postmark indicated the city of Aix as the place of origin. The young vicar opens the letter and reads quickly... no signature, not a hint, no name to show whose hand had written these lines, however, it was very important to know it, because the letter was serious and contained strange proposals, projects inspired by a zeal that embraced too much to come from a man. The unknown author of the letter invited Mr. Tempier to go to Aix to discuss a plan of life of which he outlined the main lines. Common and regular life, missions to preach to the poor and to the people in the rural areas, a love of poverty, silence, mortification, etc.... It was almost the project of a new religious Order.

Mr. Tempier did not need to read the letter a second time to guess who the mysterious author was. The fiery style, the generous thoughts, the proposals of zeal and dedication, boldness to brave all obstacles, to see as practicable and feasible a project that offered so many difficulties, all this could only come from one man.... Yes, said Tempier, this letter is from the Abbé de Mazenod.... (A. Rey, "Missions OMI" 72 [1938], p. 90)

*Responding to St. Eugene's letter, Tempier writes:*

Arles, October 27, 1815. [...] I see what you are looking for most in choosing your collaborators: you want priests who do not follow routine and humdrum, as the predecessor of Father Charles used to say; who are ready to follow in the footsteps of the apostles, to work for the salvation of souls without expecting any other reward here on earth than a lot of suffering and fatigue. By the grace of God, I feel this desire in me, or if I do not have it, I want to have it very much; and together



with you, everything will become even easier for me. So, count on me completely. (*Oblate Writings*, II, 2, p. 20)

*In a later letter:*

Arles, December 20, 1815. Holy friend and true brother, I do not know how to thank you for all that you have done for my salvation. You are truly the friend who is the dearest to my heart. You were in my affections before, I esteemed you very highly and I never failed to talk about you whenever I was with my friends; but ever since you cast your eyes on me in order to associate me with your apostolic works and to make me part of the fruits of holiness that await us in our dear Congregation, I cannot but think of you with the deepest sentiments of gratitude and thank God continually for having inspired in you this design of mercy for me. I would only like you to temper in your mind the exaggerated opinion that you have of my so-called *necessity*, 8 as you call it, so that you will not be misled when you will have the chance to judge it. You will soon recognize that while there is a certain amount of good will in me, there is not much else. (Tempier to de Mazenod, *Oblate Writings*, II, 2, p. 21)

Y. Beaudoin, *François de Paule Henry Tempier, Second Father of the O.M.I. (1788-1870)*, *Oblate Writings*, II, 1, Rome 1987, 242 p.; II, 2, Rome 1987, 212 p.

*April 9*

WHAT MORE DOES ONE NOT ASK OF JESUS IN THE EUCHARIST?

During my thanksgiving after Mass a few days ago, God inspired me to pay solemn homage to our Lord Jesus Christ during the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament which takes place in all parishes on Thursdays, Sundays, Mondays and Shrove Tuesday.

I will go to the kneeler where I will adore our beloved Saviour with all the power of my soul, 1 - to render Him due homage; 2 - in reparation for all the offenses which He receives all the time but more particularly in these days of dissipation; 3 - to ask Him for the graces I need to govern well the people He has entrusted to me; 4 - to ask forgiveness for

my own sins and for any negligence in His service and in carrying out my duties; 5 - to beg Him, since I am so happy in His divine presence now hidden from my eyes under the Eucharistic veil, not to allow me to be separated from him for all eternity, that is to say, ask him to live and to die in His grace.

What more does one not ask for when at the foot of the throne of mercy, when one adores, loves, and sees Jesus, our master, our father, the Saviour of our souls, when we speak to Him and He answers our heart with an abundance of consolations and graces? Oh! How quickly this half hour passed, so delightfully used. It is something beautiful in the eyes of religion to see the first pastor himself coming again and again into the middle of every part of his flock to invoke God's mercies and to give an example of the duties which he has to fill in regard to Jesus Christ when He shows Himself to His people to receive its adoration and to listen to its requests. The bishop, before whom all people should bow respectfully comes to prostrate himself again and again his forehead to the ground to humble himself [p. 95] before the sovereign Master of all things, and offers Him incense as a sign of adoration. Then, recollecting himself in His presence, in a most humble attitude, prays especially for the people around him and for all those whom he represents. When the attending Canon gives the signal, all genuflect again and retire quietly, heart filled with inexpressible happiness. (Eugene de Mazenod, Diary, February 7, 1839, *Oblate Writings*, 20, p. 36-37).

*April 10*

#### THE DESIRE TO SEE HIM ADORED

At St. Joseph, I entered the church with the Holy Viaticum, miserably accompanied as usual. I took my place behind the Blessed Sacrament after prostrating to let it pass. How happy I would be if, by all these external acts of my adoration, I could teach my people how to honor Jesus Christ in his sacrament of love. I would like to make myself even smaller still and forget myself completely in his divine presence to stress the glory due to Him and to have Him honored as he should be. That is my heart's most constant desire, and I never miss any occasion to instill these principles whether by my words or by my actions. But I

would like to make known to the entire world the interior consolations I experience every time I carry out this duty. It has come to the point that when in my presence, to conform to the rules I prescribed during my uncle's episcopacy, they prostrate themselves on two knees when passing in front of our Saviour, I feel an inexpressible joy and satisfaction which thrills me so tenderly sometimes that I am moved to tears. It seems to me that I adore Him through everyone who passes in front of Him. I am happy to see Him receive this respect, and I accompany with an intimate movement of my soul this external act which exalts the greatness and power of my God. I say interiorly: yes, He is worthy of it, this [p. 97] honour is due to Him. Prostrate yourself even more. I adore Him with you and through you. Would that He be known and loved by all those whom He has redeemed, He who is God like his Father, who did not need us and who sacrificed himself for us. (Eugene de Mazenod, Diary, February 10, 1839, *Oblate Writings*, 20, p. 38-39).

\* \* \*

BLESSED DANIEL GÓMEZ LUCAS (1916-1936)  
MARTYR OF SPAIN

*He was born on April 10, 1916, in Hacinas (Burgos). His vocation came spontaneously in an environment of knowledge of the Missionary Oblates. Two of his cousins were Oblates. So, at the age of 12, Daniel entered the seminary of Urnieta. At the novitiate in Las Arenas, he made his first profession in 1935 and went on to Pozuelo to continue his studies. He was a 20-year-old scholastic, having finished his first year of philosophy, naive and good-natured. Although he was not very intelligent, he tried very hard and in the end he got good results. He liked sports and his healthy cheerfulness made him loved by everyone.*

*He was expelled from the house in Pozuelo on July 24, 1936, and took refuge for some time in the house of the tailor who made the cassocks for the community with other Oblates. This is how Porfirio Fernandez, one of the survivors, tells of his arrest: "I was lying down with Daniel Gómez and five others, on the holy floor. When they came in and saw us like that, they did not even ask us questions; it was very clear that we were hiding. Immediately two cars arrived and loaded us all up*

and took us to the police station. Thank God they didn't get involved with the family, thank God. He was imprisoned in the Modelo Prison and later in the San Anton Prison". *On November 28 he was "taken out" with twelve other Oblates to be incarcerated with them, that same day, in Paracuellos del Jararna. He was 20 years old.*

*April 11*

## THE EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

*In his Pastoral Letter of 1846, Bishop Eugene urges the faithful to nourish themselves with the Eucharist.*

How can you solemnize worthily the feast of Easter and the other Christian holidays? It will be, dear brothers, not only by doing what is strictly mandatory, but also by faithfully conforming yourselves to the intention of the Church. Now, the intention of this holy Mother is that you not limit yourself to fulfilling the precept of nurturing yourselves with the Eucharistic bread once a year. She wants her children to receive this bread of life at least on each of its solemnities. On these days she calls them, invites them to the sacred banquet. It is especially through this that she wants to associate them to her feasts. She celebrates a divine wedding, in a holy union with her heavenly Bridegroom and earnestly desires that all his people should be able to participate in the joy of this ineffable union by taking their place in the banquet hall after they have first dressed in the nuptial garment. We have told you: united to Jesus Christ, we are in a great solidarity with him upon which our salvation depends. The Christian life is just a perpetual communication with Jesus Christ. It behooves us, then, to profit with grateful fidelity from the invitation of the Church to tighten more and more our ties with our Savior who, incessantly, *eagerly wants to eat the Passover with us* (Lk. 22:15).

In the early centuries of Christianity, as you know, all the faithful received communion every time they assisted at Mass. Several centuries later, communion was still of obligation in the main solemnities, as it is today in the Easter season. The mind of the Church is always the same and it is clear that, if she no longer orders it, she wants her chil-

dren to celebrate its feasts with her sitting at the table around which the Lamb of God will celebrate with them in heaven, the eternal feast. (Eugene de Mazenod, *Pastoral Letter*, Lent, February 8, 1846).

\* \* \*

*April 11, 1816 St. Eugene and Fr. Tempier make mutual vows of obedience (See Holy Thursday).*

*April 12*

#### THE EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION, AN ACTION OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

*In the same Pastoral Letter, Bishop de Mazenod explains how the common priesthood of the faithful finds its highest expression in the mystery of the Eucharistic celebration.*

As in the early Church all were of one heart and one mind, [likewise the faithful gathered for Eucharistic celebration] they all had one sentiment, the same word and the same voice. Seeing them gathered in the holy place to worship together with the most solemn worship the mystery that is taking place for them and how they share in the graces that are its result, we recognize brothers “happy to live together under one roof” (Ps. 132) and to sit down at the same table. The brotherhood of Christians, their union with God is manifested in the most visible way; you feel that you are in the house of the Lord, the only true bond of minds and hearts. Something tells the soul that especially in that moment the word of the Divine Master is realized: *where they are many, where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them* (Matthew 18:20) to give them what they ask.

The sacrifice of our altars is offered through the ministry of the priest on behalf of the Church. The people offer it with the priest. Through this sublime sharing in the mystical immolation of the God made Man, a royal priesthood is carried out (1 Pt. 2:9) the one with which all Christian souls are invested in union with Jesus Christ the High Priest. [...]

But the relationship between the priest and the people is never so evident, the community of action between the one and the other never so great, as in the solemnly sung Mass. Here nothing is done in a dark and private way. The participants are not content to speak to God in secret; they are all called to make their voices heard. From the beginning, the priest does not cease sending up pleas to God for them, and each time just as he finishes, a prolonged *Amen* goes up from all parts of the assembly thus ratifying the prayer. The participants always say that their voices are one. The Epistle and the Gospel are sung for them. They continue, all together, the angelic hymn sung by the priest. They sing their profession of faith with him. He calls out to them several times and they respond. Upon entering the dreaded action of the sacrifice, he turns to them to tell them to raise their hearts and soon there is a marvelous dialogue between him and them that a song of thanksgiving flows forth from the mouth of the priest. Immediately, the voice of the people joins itself to his to sing the heavenly *Trisagion* that the prophet Isaiah, transported in vision before the throne of God, heard from the mouth of the Cherubim. Even the Sunday prayer is solemnly chanted by the priest, while the adorable victim is on the altar and the participants, attentive to all the petitions submitted on their behalf, continue the prayer pronouncing themselves the last demands. During the solemn Mass, they are not simple listeners, but part of everything, they constantly intervene to protest loudly their support of what is happening on the altar. And this participation of the assistants is not only that of the clergy, but of all the faithful in that holy place.

The piety that would prefer a solitary recollection to this solemn participation in the sacrifice would not be a piety that is well understood. Good and solid piety never strays from the inspirations and practices of the Church that has always desired that her children preferably attend the solemn offices to which she takes care to summon them. (Eugene de Mazenod, *Pastoral Letter*, Lent, February 8, 1846).

April 13

## THE EUCHARIST: MYSTERY OF LOVE

*In the pastoral activity of Bishop de Mazenod, the Eucharist seems to be the center towards to which he wants to draw the faithful: “A desire that was really close to our heart – he writes to the clergy of his diocese – is to see the devotion to the Blessed Eucharist grow more and more among the faithful entrusted to our pastoral care” (December 31, 1852). At the end of his life, he is finally able to institute perpetual adoration, a practice he had learned about during his travels in Italy.*

Dear brothers, from the first moments of our participation in the administration of the diocese of Marseilles, namely the re-establishment of the episcopal see in 1823, even before we were elevated to the episcopate, we wanted to establish here in imitation of Rome and the great cities of Italy, the solemn and perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament of our altars. We tried many times to find the means to carry out this idea so dear to our heart, but always we were stopped by the difficulty caused by the small number of churches in our diocese. [...] We offered to the Lord our pious desires and asked him to find some means of removing the obstacle that hindered our devotion to Jesus Christ in the sacrament of our altars.

We have not pleaded in vain for this favor. The Congregation of the Fathers of the Blessed Sacrament came to ask permission to form a community in our episcopal city. We welcomed this Congregation in hopes of finding, with its help, a way to facilitate the realization of our desires.

Thanks to the Lord we have also been able to combine the distribution of the days when the solemn adoration takes place in every church so that the goal we had set was necessarily reached without any need to extend the adoration beyond a triduum, something which would have favored the most important.

Dear brothers, we have the great joy of informing you of this solution that we have desired for so long and now we would like to share with you the feelings that are in our soul and make you appreciate, as

is proper, the grace offered you by the immense love and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is what it is: our purpose is to have you enjoy the most perfect happiness of possessing our Divine Savior and of obtaining, through the most precious worship given to his adorable person, an increased participation in the graces that flow from its fullness. [...]

Although he is in a state of glory in heaven, in the Eucharist he is mystically in a state of immolation and victim as on the cross. *He is the Lamb of God slain from the beginning of the world* (Rev. 13.8) for the salvation of men. He is not only the victim, but also the priest who offers himself and offers himself unceasingly for us. *He is the pontiff who lives always to make intercession for us* (Heb. 7:25), to bring to us all the graces merited by his sacrifice, to divert from us the blows of divine justice and to protect us, with a prayer that is always heard, from the punishments incurred by our infidelities.

Behold, dear brothers, Jesus Christ as he is in the sacrament of our altars. With the little faith and charity that fills us how could we – I will not say not have known him – but also neglect him when the heavens and the earth cannot contain him and he out of love for us, has enclosed himself in the narrow space of the Eucharistic species? He has indeed *emptied himself* (Phil. 2:7) for us, as he did in his Incarnation when he *took the form of a slave* (Phil. 2:7). He did even more: in the Divine Sacrament he wanted to become our food, to make our union with him even more intimate and, in some way, to have us identify ourselves with him. Again, how could we neglect Him in this highest expression of his love? (Eugene de Mazenod, *Pastoral Letter*, December 21, 1859).

*April 14*

IN THE EUCHARIST THE INCARNATE WORD REMAINS WITH US

*Continuing the previous Pastoral Letter, Saint Eugene writes one of his most beautiful theological pages on the Eucharist.*

*The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us* (Jn 1:14), He became one of us, and he who is the only Son of God, equal and consubstantial with the Father, consented to become the *Son of Man* (Mt



8:20), *He dwelt among us, full of grace and truth* (Jn 1:14). By him, human nature was raised up to God, and men united to him by grace were called to share his glory, they were associated with the infinite merits of his passion and death on the cross. But what he did once during his mortal life, he continues and renews constantly. He immolates himself on our altars and remains with us in the Holy Eucharist. He told his disciples that he would be with them *all the days until the end of time* (Mt 28:20), and he accomplishes this promise through the help he gives incessantly to his Church, but also by his real presence in the temples that he has chosen to be *God's dwelling with the human race* (Rev 21:3).

He is there as he is in Heaven, body and soul, as a man. He is there as God, with his divinity that is essential to his person, his omnipotence and his boundless love. His glory is the same as in heaven, but it is veiled under the Eucharistic species. However this glory, which is hidden to us and which bursts forth and spreads over the angels and the saints who are illuminated by the rays that surround Him, is revealed to the eyes of the heavenly spirits. They contemplate it with thanksgiving, and continual praise, they adore it as creatures who bow deeply before the Creator and in the ecstasy of the most ardent love. They come invisibly to surround the tabernacle where the Lord *delights to be with the children of men* (Pr 8:31), to make up for their failure, and to offset by their praises the praise they forget to make to the infinitely good God who never forgets them. With their mind constantly fixed on their Master, the Blessed Spirits do not cease asking pardon for the tepidness and even the insults of which He is so often subjected by the ungrateful people among whom He continues to remain and where He will remain without interruption until the end of time.

If for a moment we were allowed to see in another way than by faith the person of Jesus Christ in heaven, if our mortal eyes could contemplate *in the light of God*" (1 Tim 6:16) *the One who is the eternal light itself* (Wisdom 7:25), we would receive the impression that nothing in all creation, neither in heaven nor on earth, would seem worthy to be compared to what is due our Divine Savior. The tribute of all that exists outside of God would be nothing to glorify Him, as he has the right to be, because everything he has created, even in heaven, gives Him a glory that is infinitely below that which is in Him.

This incomprehensible greatness is not the only title that we can recognize in Jesus Christ to motivate our deepest adoration of the Divine Eucharist. Jesus Christ is in the Eucharist on the throne of his love and on the altar of sacrifice. His infinite goodness for us keeps Him perpetually chained there, where He is virtually a prisoner of his immense charity. He is there during the day, He stays there in the night and he never leaves the dwelling he has made to be with us. He desires never to separate Himself in his immortal life from the ones he has created, and to live with them as He did during his mortal life. Thus He is in our cities and in our countryside, under gilded ceilings as under thatched roofs, in the richest temples of the civilized world, and in the poorest huts of the wilderness, under the polar ice, as under the tropic lights. He is everywhere where his Church is. He wants to be wherever there is a human soul to love and to save. He is accessible to all, always ready to receive them, to talk with them, to speak to them interiorly, to listen to them and to fill them with consolations, blessings and all kinds of graces. (Eugene de Mazenod, *Pastoral Letter*, December 21, 1859)

*April 15*

#### AT THE WELLSPRING OF LIFE

*Before being taught to the diocese, St. Eugene recommends frequent communion to members of his family, starting with his grandmother:*

How blind we are, to have there with us the wellspring of all consolation and to persist in our refusal to approach it and draw water. Come to me, cries out the Bridegroom continually, come to me all you who suffer life's woes and undergo afflictions, and I will give you rest. My greatest desire is to be with the children of men. My only reason for remaining on earth after my glorious Ascension was simply to be able to give each one of them the means of drowning in my living waters the fiery ardours life's painful journey brings. Come, come, I am the bread of life; I am the strength of the weak, the stay of all. Woe to him who refuses my tender invitation, for whoever does not eat of my flesh will not have life in him....

The body of O.L., the only and abundant fountain, which has this special quality that flows but drop by drop for those who stand afar off while it abounds and overflows for those who have an insatiable thirst for its waters.

What a mistake to believe that to dispose oneself worthily for frequent participation of that kind, one must shut oneself up in inaccessible solitude and leave to others the trouble of looking after one's worldly affairs. The early Christians, who got their instruction from the very mouth of the Lord and the Apostles, did not think that way, they received communion every day in spite of their occupations and the small failings St. Paul and the Fathers reproached them with.

Another mistake people today only too frequently fall into is to imagine that one has to be perfect to receive communion often. We will not be perfect until we get to heaven; and the one and only way to come anywhere close to it here below is to receive communion often. That is the doctrine of the holy Council of Trent which teaches that this divine Sacrament is a remedy to heal us of our daily failings....

Let us go as often as we can to the sacrament where our Lord's love spent itself on our behalf. Let us recall his command; let us thank him a thousand times for giving it to us.

May the sight of him beneath the species of bread bring us to the knowledge that it is frequent nourishment that this symbol calls for from us, that our soul to sustain itself needs to return there often, as our body so as not to lose its strength does not satisfy itself with eating just once in a while. (Eugene de Mazenod, Letter to his maternal grandmother, Catherine Elizabeth Joannis, on her name day, December 3, 1810, *Oblate Writings*, 14, p. 166-168)

*April 16, Saint Bernadette Soubirous*

SAINT BERNADETTE SOUBIROUS

*Oblates have been part of the history of Lourdes right from the beginning. We mention only three significant events. 1) When Bernadette was learning to read and write, she met Fr. Ferdinand Gondrand, who had been invited by Msgr. Laurence to preach a retreat for priests in Lourdes in 1860. This Oblate, won over by the visionary and convinced*

of the truth of her story, began a correspondence with her, even allowing himself to ask her for a written account of her experience. In May 1861 he came to Lourdes a second time, again to preach a retreat. Bernadette granted his request May 28, 1861. It is the first written account of the apparitions. Having learned of the death of Bishop de Mazenod, Fr. Gondrand had rushed back to Marseilles. Bernadette's letter was returned to her and she kept it until her death. 2) In 1876, Pope Pius IX delegated Cardinal Guibert, Archbishop of Paris, to consecrate the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in his name. 3) People of other nations came to Lourdes from the beginning, but it was only in 1881 that a national pilgrimage as such came from outside of France: 300 English pilgrims, including the Duke of Norfolk, led by Father Ring, an Oblate. The Oblates began to be an official part of the Shrine's Chaplain corps in September 1985, caring especially for the youth programs and the international pilgrims.

The wonder of having been chosen despite her unworthiness filled the life of Bernadette. She teaches us, by both her words and her writings, how to enter into Mary's Magnificat.

To Sister Madeleine Bournaix who asked her if she had good memories of the apparitions, she replied: “Oh! Yes I do, but I had no right to this grace” (Word 170).

Mother Marie-Thérèse Bordenave was surprised that Bernadette had never had a temptation to pride. After all, would it not be normal to believe oneself important after eighteen apparitions of the Blessed Virgin? But Bernadette corrected her: “What do you think of me? I know that if Our Lady chose me, it's because I was the most ignorant? If she had found someone more ignorant than me, she would have chosen that one” (Word 268).

Bernadette said she was irresistibly drawn to Mary. She gives us the key to this attraction each time she is presented with a replica of the famous statue of the Grotto, the Virgin with clasped hands and eyes raised to heaven: “No, she was not like that. The Blessed Virgin looked at me, like a person who speaks to another person” (Word 635).

Some sentences gleaned here and there from her *Private Notes* help us to enter into this mystery of God's look, like this one: “The more I

look at my God, the more God looks at me. The more I pray, the more He thinks about me.”

This is all the more important to Bernadette because she had no role, no place anywhere before the divine intervention.

“I was nothing and out of this nothing Jesus made something great.” (B. Dullier, *Prier à Lourdes avec Bernadette*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris 1993, p. 47, 50-51).

*April 17*

#### EUCCHARIST AND OBLATION

*The testimony of two Oblates, one of the early ones, the scholastic, François-Marie Camper (1835-1856) and a priest of the last century, Fr Joseph Ladié, 1930-1991; and the reflection of an Oblate theologian.*

I have a great desire [...] to conform my life always and in all circumstances to the life of Jesus victim on Calvary and in the Blessed Sacrament. Oblate means victim, I want to be the victim of Jesus, as He is every day mine. Because of that I like to consider his hidden life, his humility, gentleness, patience, sacrifice and continual state of humility, annihilation and sacrifice in the sacrament of the altar because of me; and I wish I could, out of love of Him [...] practice, in union with Him all the virtues He practiced, suffer like Him, offer myself like Him.” (*Vie de François-Marie Camper, scolastique minoré de la congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, par un prêtre de la même congrégation*, Paris, E. Repos, 1859, p. 207-208).

I’m living and discovering the Eucharist in a special way. I say Mass usually seated in the community chapel [because of illness]. Well, when at the consecration I say, “This is my body, that is to say my life given for you,” I tell myself: I am part of the Mystical Body of Christ; so I really can offer myself, give my life for the Church, the world, the Congregation, the Province, the people who are dear to me, etc. Similarly, when I say “This is my blood...,” I can give the gift of my illness, my weakness, of my sufferings.... I never thought I would live my

priesthood as I do now, I never felt more “Oblate”, “offered” than as I do now and when death comes, the Oblation will be complete. Yes, you will recite the *De Profundis*, because I will need it, but you will sing even more loudly the *Magnificat* “because the Almighty has done great things in me, his humble servant...” (Fr. Delalio, “*Canterete il Magnificat...*”, in “Missioni OMI”, March 1991, p. 50).

For us Oblates, the Mass [...] is the center to which all other [religious practices] should converge. Why? Christ is the first “Oblate of Mary Immaculate”.

But the Mass is not only the sacrifice of Our Lord Jesus Christ; it is also the sacrifice of the Church, our sacrifice. [...] Therefore each morning we should be able to bring to the sacrifice a rich personal oblation; and even better, our whole day should be a perpetual oblation leading to the Eucharistic sacrifice of the following day; all our actions should be accomplished with such inner perfection that they become a precious gift, an offering without spot, worthy of being placed on the altar next to Jesus’ oblation. Then the Mass will be our sacrifice, because it will be the sign of our own oblation [...].

Through the transubstantiation, Jesus becomes our victim and creates in us this interior oblation of which He will be not only the sign, but the cause. Let us give ourselves over to the transforming action of our victim that will shape us in His image and likeness. [...] He puts our thoughts in harmony with his, our heart in harmony with his. (J.-M. Simon, *Essai d’une spiritualité oblate*, “Études oblates” 15 [1956], p. 247-249).

\* \* \*

FRANCIS EUGENE GEORGE (1937-2015)  
CARDINAL, ARCHBISHOP OF CHICAGO

*On April 17, 2015, Francis E. George died at the age of 78, after a long fight with cancer. On July 10, 1990, Pope John Paul II appointed Francis him bishop of Yakima, in the United States. Born in Chicago on January 16, 1937, he was ordained a priest on December*

21, 1963. After teaching for a few years, he was elected Vicar General of the Oblates (1974-1986). His episcopal consecration was on September 21, 1990. April 30, 1996, John Paul transferred him to the Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon. Less than a year later, on April 8, 1997, he named him the eighth Archbishop of Chicago, the first native archbishop of the city. He was made a cardinal in the consistory of February 21, 1998.

Being a bishop is something that fits into the charism of an Oblate vocation. The Founder became a bishop after founding the Congregation, after having received the grace of his vocation as an Oblate of Mary Immaculate. He said that the apostles are our first fathers, and the bishops collectively are the successors of the Apostolic College. When I read the Founder's writings now, I find a change in my interest. For years, the writings which especially interested me were his letters at the time of the founding of the Congregation and those of Father de Mazenod himself as a missionary to the poor. Now, I look more to the texts written later, with all the sometimes boring details of his letters and diaries, because in these details, I see the soul of a shepherd of a local church, of a bishop. [...]

The Congregation is first of all a school of prayer. The formation in prayer puts us on the path of constant conversion to Christ crucified. [...] The spirit of the 17th century, the French School of spirituality, inspired our prayers for particular examen and the exercise of oraison, a silent prayer usually in common before our Eucharistic Lord. De Mazenod considered this a way of being together when the missionaries were physically separated. I was very happy to spend time at oraison with you last night. It has been a long time since I have been able to participate in this Oblate prayer.

Conversion to Christ through meditative and contemplative prayer, which was presented to us in the novitiate, is supported by the discipline of the community. Here we learn fraternal charity. We learn that each of us is not the most important person in the Congregation and in the world. It's a way of life that prepares missionaries in pastoral charity, because you cannot love the people, if you do not love your brothers. This is the pastoral charity which is the distinctive priestly virtue in the documents of Vatican II and the documents of the Church. It replaces,

in some way, our more traditional terminology of zeal for souls, which is how our Founder spoke of our first priestly virtue.

All these elements of spiritual formation remain in my heart and my mind, though I am rarely in community. I think this is true for all Oblate bishops. In a way it shapes our life, it makes us grateful to the Congregation, to you all, and to Christ for the call to be Oblates Mary Immaculate. (F.E. George, *Conversion : Prière, communauté, mission, «Vie Oblate Life»* 69-70 [2010-2011], p. 333-335)

*April 18*

BLESSED LOUIS LEROY (1923-1961)  
MARTYR IN LAOS

*Louis Leroy was born October 8, 1923 in Ducey (Manche). He was the eldest son of a farming family of four. After primary school in Villiers-le-Pré (50), he worked ten years on the family farm. Upon his return from military service at the age of 22, he began moving toward the missionary life with the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. After a period at Pontmain to catch up on his studies, he bravely pursued six years of philosophy and theology in Solignac.*

*On July 4, 1954 he was ordained a priest at the Abbey of Solignac. He wrote to the Superior General of the Oblates: "Before I knew the Oblates the missions in Asia attracted me, and I wanted to leave my work as a farmer for these missions.... The difficulties the Laos mission has had and perhaps will have again have only increased my desire for this country.... I would be very happy to receive my obedience for Laos if you feel it is good to send me there...." He shared his hope to die a martyr with some of his companions.*

*He lived for six years in Laos. At the end of 1957 Louis Leroy arrived at his final post in the Ban Pha Mountains. Tirelessly, he visited the villages assigned to him, walking for 2, 3 or 5 hours in all kinds of weather and on impossible slopes. He writes: "[The missionary] quickly realizes that only the grace of almighty God can convert a soul." In one year, he will "cover at least 3,000 kilometers on foot with a backpack. It's hard on certain days, especially when one's health is not at its best, but I'm very happy to have to work in this area."*



*On April 18, 1961 Fr. Leroy was praying in his poor church. A detachment of guerrilla soldiers came to get him. According to the villagers, he knew this was his final departure: he asked permission to put on his cassock, put his cross on and with his breviary under his arm said goodbye. Without a hat and barefooted he followed the soldiers. In the forest, a few shots and it was over.... His childhood dream of witnessing to Christ, even in martyrdom, was granted.*

[...] Having a little free time today, which does not happen often, I just want to give you some news about myself and my area.

You have probably heard from the radio and newspapers about the events taking place in Laos. Currently, as far as we can judge, it is rather quiet; once, about seven hundred soldiers passed through my village. They said nothing to me or to the people. We know nothing of the future, so we carry on as in the past, trusting in God.

As for me, my morale is excellent. I'm very happy with my hard but splendid missionary life. My past wishes about missionary life in the bush are fully realized. As for the apostolate, I have a lot of work to do. During the past year, I have distributed more than 4,000 communions, heard more than 2,000 confessions, 19 baptisms; this number will be much higher next year as currently I am instructing 70 catechumens. The majority of them could be baptized around Easter 1960.

Does this mean that everything is perfect? Certainly not. Recently, an apostate Christian let her 10-month-old baby die without baptism. Another apostate has taken up the art of witchcraft. Another, baptized last year, has practically never set foot in church since he became a Christian. In one of my villages, where Christians are a minority among the heathen, sorcerers are active and are able to disturb some of the Christians, telling them when they are ill that only a return to the worship of the spirits can bring healing. Fortunately, this perfidious advice is not always heeded.

The sick and injured take up a lot of time and require long and tiring journeys. Among the patients I treat, one Christian had his face, hands and a knee burnt. I visited him three times; it takes three and half hours on foot in the mountains to get there and there are many injured and sick like this.

The many pagans around me, whom I meet every day or who come for treatment, are not decided to become Christians.

This is an overview of my area, which once again I highly recommend to your prayers. Pray also for me, so that God can accomplish through me all the good he wants to accomplish.

[...] I leave you now, by telling you that my prayers for all your intentions are more frequent – and how many they are – than my letters. Not a day goes by without me talking about you to the Lord and the Blessed Virgin, in whom I renew my religious dedication. (Louis Leroy, *Letter to the Carmelite Sisters of Limoges*, 1959)

April 19

#### THE IDEAL OF MARTYRDOM

*During his retreat in preparation for priestly ordination, St. Eugene speaks explicitly for the first time of the possibility of dying a martyr as a result of imitating Christ, despite the revulsion at the thought of death:*

There is in me too much attachment to life, that the natural horror of death has too strong a hold on me and is not, by any means, as subjugated as it should be,” yet “it seems to me I have no fear of it when I envisage it as happening through martyrdom or in a hospital in service to the victims of the plague. (Notes made during the retreat in Amiens, December 1811, in preparation for the priesthood, *Oblate Writings*, 14, p. 220-221).

*In his reflections on his first Mass he wrote:*

First Mass, Christmas Eve: for myself.... The grace of making reparation for my faults by a life wholly and solely employed in his service and for the salvation of souls; the Spirit of J.C. Final perseverance, and even martyrdom or at least death while tending victims of the plague, or any other kind of death for God’s glory or the salvation of souls. (My Mass Intentions, *Oblate Writings*, 14, p. 230).

*Mission and martyrdom appear linked. A text of 1812 underlines this:*

The conversion of one soul is the most important work, for which Jesus Christ would freely again give his life and would pour out all of his blood, if it were possible....

Oh! If we could have a true idea of the value of a soul, a soul redeemed by all the blood of a God made man, we could then imagine the reward that awaits the one who saves it from the hands of his irreconcilable enemy. Then perhaps we would awaken from our sleep to exert all our efforts to give our lives, if necessary.... (*Sujets de méditations*, Arch. Post. DM IV 5)

*April 20*

### BLESSED MICHEL COQUELET (1931-1961)

#### MARTYR IN LAOS

*Michel Coquelet was born August 18, 1931 at Wignehies, in Northern France. In 1942 he entered St. Gregory College of Pithiviers, and in 1945 the Minor Seminary of Solesmes, in the Diocese of Cambrai. In 1948 he entered the novitiate of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Ordained on February 19, 1956, after his military service in the Sahara, he received his obedience for Laos on January 25, 1957.*

*Michel's four years of missionary life in Laos were an ordeal. According to his superiors, he was assigned to a very poor village, a village of neophytes whose instruction had been minimal and intermittent. His thoughts on the subject, recorded in the mission's log, show the extent of his missionary suffering, but also of his great spirit of faith, tinged with a humor that was one of the endearing traits of his character. He is there, simply; he makes himself all things to all....*

*On April 20, 1961, Michel Coquelet was making his rounds at Ban Huay Nhèn near Tha Vieng (Xieng Khouang). Guerrilla soldiers came to arrest him with the leader of the Christian village and his secretary and took them on the road to Ban Sop Xieng. Father Coquelet and his companions were killed by the roadside.*

Solignac, October 1, 1956

Very Reverend and beloved Father,

*"Studiis absolutis, Superiori generali ... singuli praesto erunt.* [At the end of his studies, each Oblate will put himself at the disposition of

the Superior General.]” It is after having read and reread this article of our Holy Rules that I take up my pen to write to you not a “demand” of obedience according to my taste, but to offer myself to the service of Lord of the harvest, in the field that you will show me.

I would have been happy to merely reiterate here the old phrase: “*Ecce ego, mitte me!*” [Here I am, send me!] But I fear that this indifference might be seen by you as a lack of enthusiasm for the various ministries of the Congregation. On the other hand I know you want to know the aspirations God has put in my heart, and above all, that you only send volunteers to the missions.

So that is what I will tell you simply: I volunteer for the Missions, and especially for the Mission of Laos! I have had this desire since the novitiate, where I remember being impressed by a conference of Father Morin, who later died there of typhus. There was something supernatural radiating from this Father, and such intensity when talking to us about his “poor Mission” of Laos, that was so much in line with the Congregation, I felt ready to follow him there. Easy enthusiasm of the young? Maybe. But there must have been something else, since it still continues after seven years, and this thought helped me in my life of work and prayer in the seminary.

I send you this in total submission, happy to defer to your decision, because it would be difficult for me – a man being a bad judge in his own cause – to distinguish nature from grace. Now in prayer I ask God for the grace to be ready to accept whatever your decision will be, whether or not it conforms to my aspirations, for the sole reason of obedience to His will.

Please accept, my very Reverend Father, with the assurance of my humble prayer, the expression of my filial respect and my entire submission, in Our Lord and Mary Immaculate. (Michel Coquelet, to Father Lo Deschâtelets, Superior General of the Missionary Oblates)

## EUGENE LEAVES AIX: THE BEGINNING OF EXILE IN ITALY

*April 20, 1791, St. Eugene who was 9 years old, left Aix for Nice accompanied by his uncle Louis de Mazenod. Thus began his exile in Italy.*

As he had been declared under arrest by the revolutionaries, on his return from his mission to the Estates General, my father left France and went to Nice and soon from there he sent me his brother to bring me to him. I left Aix with my uncle on April 20, 1791, and arrived in Nice on April 23, which was Holy Saturday. There really must have been a genuine fear of the threat made to do away with the children of the nobility, for my mother to have consented to let me undertake this journey even before I had quite got over an illness that had taken a lot out of me. My two grandparents, grandmother, my uncle the priest, my whole family together raised not a single objection to the prompt execution of my father's orders. I was not yet nine years old. All I could do was to keep the secret as a grown-up would have done. This was enjoined upon me, and faithfully observed. (Eugene de Mazenod, *Souvenir de famille, Oblate Writings*, 16, p. 26).

*18 years later, writing to his mother, he shows that he had learned a great lesson from exile:*

I will allow myself just one more word, that is to remind you that we are Christians, that the earth we are so attached to is naught but a place of passage and exile, that one would have to be out of one's senses to be attached to something that can be of no help to us for our celestial Fatherland; finally, and putting it all in a nutshell, we can have no other end than to do God's will. Now when this will is sufficiently clear to us, we must follow it and count ourselves very fortunate, even offering unceasing thanksgiving when he calls us to the greatest thing on earth and in heaven. If only we could always see things in their true light! (Eugene de Mazenod to his mother, St-Sulpice, February 28, 1809)

What did celibacy mean for Saint Eugene? When we look into de Mazenod's writings we will not find many explicit references to this vow. In his time, sexuality, today's "number one theme", was not discussed in the open. However, some casual phrases of Eugene show us his healthy understanding of marriage, or point out the efforts needed to lead a chaste celibate life.

"Marriage is holy, therefore, it cannot be an obstacle to holiness", he writes to his sister on the occasion of her marriage. (Letter of December 4, 1808, *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 35, p. 79)

"Marriage is a good thing for those who are called to it", he tells his mother. (Letter to his mother, November 29, 1809, in *Oblate Writings*, I, vol. 14, no. 64, p. 146) However, Eugene realizes that he is called to another state of life. His commitment to chastity and celibacy is firm. Charles Antoine de Mazenod, father of the Founder, writes about him from Palermo, in 1814: "He is solid as a rock and pure as a lily". (*Positio super introductione causae*, Romae, 1935, p. 651) Our *Dictionary of Oblate Values* comments on this: "The reason why he was *solid as a rock and pure as a lily* was not because he had lived a sheltered life, but rather that in all circumstances, he willed to remain true to himself." (H. J. Trümper, *Chastity*)

His personal integrity induces him to lead others towards the virtue of chastity. He puts his youth sodality in Aix under the patronage of Mary Immaculate for this reason. He also introduces strict rules for the youth group about attending certain public performances and the theatre. He often warns the young, the Oblates and the people of his diocese with words like these: "Is it not at these shows that this demon, this vice of impurity, since we have to use the word, reveals himself with the fullness of his power?" ("Lenten Pastoral Letter, 1843", in « Scripta Servi Dei », Vol. I, Oblate General Archives, sheet 119) To an Oblate plagued with temptations against his vow he gives advice full of common sense. (*Selected Texts*, 216)

Faithfulness to a chaste life has not led St. Eugene to attitudes of a lonely bachelor. Everybody knows of his deep friendships and of his

very big heart, especially for the Oblates. He calls his affection for them “a relationship springing from the heart and which forms true family ties between us [...] This, I have not come across anywhere else. [...] I am saying that it is this sentiment, which I know comes from Him who is the source of all charity, which has evoked in the hearts of my children this reciprocity of love which forms the distinctive character of our beloved family” (Letter to Father Anthony Mouchette, December 2, 1854, in *Oblate Writings*, I, 11, No. 1256, p. 253-254)

Eugene’s life illustrates what C. 16 says: “Consecrated celibacy calls us to develop the riches of the heart. It is an affirmation of life and love; it expresses our total gift of self to God and to others with all our affection”. (Wilhelm Steckling, Superior General, Rome, *Letter to the Congregation*, February 17, 2003)

*April 22*

#### OBLATION AND CELIBACY FOR THE SAKE OF THE KINGDOM

We will speak again of our particular vocation. If we want to add more about chastity in the life of our Founder we have to move to the basic values that motivate his life. One of these is “oblation”. For St. Eugene, our designation as “Oblates” is more than a generic term: it means total gift of self in union with Christ. The vow of chastity is one of the expressions of this total giving of ourselves to God and to our neighbor.

For the Founder, oblation is linked to mission. When Jesus speaks to the Twelve of celibacy “for the sake of the Kingdom” (Mt 19:12) he indicates its missionary dimension. Members of religious orders can understand their mission in a variety of ways according to their particular vocation: for example, a contemplative will see it differently than an active religious. An Oblate should understand that he is celibate because his particular mission requires it (C 12). Doing what he does he is no longer fit for marriage (a “eunuch”, Mt 19:12) since he is totally taken up by a missionary love for the poor. “God wishes to reveal himself to the world as its Savior. We are called to cooperate with Him in this endeavor of love,” as the last General Chapter declared. (*Evangelizing*

*the Poor at the Dawn of the New Millennium* (EPM), 9). Our mission to the poor and abandoned takes up all of our vital energies.

The beauty of total oblation is expressed in the person of Mary, handmaid of the Lord, whose surrender to God's will has been complete. Her oblation has been spotless and pure. Our Constitutions say of her, in the section on chastity: “Mary Immaculate, Virgin and Mother, will be the Model and Guardian of his consecrated love” (C 24).

Another approach to oblation would be from the mystical marriage of the Church with Christ, her bridegroom. We find an echo of this in our Constitutions: our choice is to give witness “to the depth of the Church's covenant with Christ, her only Spouse” (C 15). St. Paul writes: “I am jealous for you just as God is; you are like a pure virgin whom I have promised in marriage to one man only, who is Christ” (2 Cor 11). Would Paul, or in fact God himself not vouch jealously for the integrity of our oblation, our consecrated love?

Our considerations so far about spirituality are the basis for the last part of this letter which will deal in a more practical way of the vow of chastity in relation to our missionary life and to the different cultures in which we live. (Wilhelm Steckling, Superior General, Rome, *Letter to the Congregation*, February 17, 2003)

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BLESSED SERVILIANO RIAÑO HERRERO (1916-1936)  
MARTYR OF SPAIN

*He was born in Prioro, Province and Diocese of León, on April 22, 1916. After completing his novitiate, he professed first vows on August 15, 1933, and went to the scholasticate of Pozuelo. He was a sociable and jovial young man, brilliant in his studies, fond of history and writing poetry. The formators had written that he was “a promise for the Province”. He had finished his second year of philosophy.*

*On July 22, 1936, he was arrested with all his brothers of the community in Pozuelo. In a not entirely unexpected and always violent way, the convent was turned into a prison. Serviliano was taken with his fellow prisoners to the General Directorate of Security, in the center of*



*Madrid. Released the next day, he began a life in hiding with some of his companions, until October 15, during a search and seizure raid, he was again arrested and imprisoned.*

*His martyrdom was particular for several reasons: we have abundant and magnificent testimonies of the moment in which he was called to prison, he was the only one whose corpse could be recognized and therefore we know that he was cruelly tortured before his death.*

*Father Delfin Monje, an eyewitness writes: “On Sunday, the 8th, very early in the morning, we noticed a lot of militiamen coming and going in the gallery. Something serious was afoot. The lights were turned on and suddenly the hateful word, “Hear!” rang out. The roll call began. It was terrifying. We thought the cells were being emptied. How many would parade downstairs? If I say two hundred, maybe that’s an understatement. Until eight o’clock we were between life and death waiting for our name to ring out in that tragic lottery. In the great raid of that day one of our own fell, Brother Serviliano Riaño”. And Father Mariano Martin relates: “He was on the top floor of the fifth gallery, and as soon as he knew that he was one of the expedition, he came to my cell and called out saying: “Father Martín, Father Martín, give me absolution, they are taking me away! I gave it to him through the eye of the door, and we never heard from him again”. Then he approached a companion and said: “If you leave here alive, go to my father and mother and tell them not to worry about me, that I die happy”.*

*He was martyred in Soto de Aldovea, a place near Paracuellos, on September 7, 1936. He was 20 years old.*

*April 23*

## CHASTITY, A TESTIMONY TO THE RISEN LORD

The vow of chastity is inspired by the attitude of our Lord Jesus who wanted to live this chastity himself and recommended it to men (Mt. 19:12). It is also inspired by solidarity with men, prompting the one who commits himself to it to bear this renunciation in the spirit of brotherhood to help his brothers and sisters of the earth, who are united in marriage, to sanctify their married love.

Far from drying up the heart of the consecrated person, this vow should promote the development of a free and pure affection, deeply human and universally welcoming.

Before men, this vow testifies to the existence of the risen Lord, already present among us, and to the primacy of his Kingdom. "There are some, said Jesus, who renounce marriage for the Kingdom of Heaven. Let anyone accept this who can!" (Mt 19:12).

To give such a witness the religious must be truly called by the Lord, clear in his commitment, and generous in the daily sacrifices it demands.

"[The religious] is as good as his heart, that is to say that profound and secret center of the whole being, the place where one says the "yes's" and "no's" that decide a life. That is where the adult finds the unity of his personality, the link with all his powers (mind, will, and emotions), and the source of all his commitments. The quality of his chastity is the quality of his heart. Hence to the question: How can and should [the religious] live chastity, we could answer in one word: through conversion and the purification of the heart." (F. Jetté, *La vie religieuse dans le charisme oblat*, "Vie Oblate Life" 41 [1982], p. 109).

April 24

#### CHASTITY AND PURITY

The scope of the vow of chastity extends far beyond the sexual sphere. More than being about sex, chastity has to do with love, with the heart, investing the entire human person, involving it entirely. The seat of purity is the heart.

Scripture says, "What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of a man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness." (Mk 7:20-23)

It is interesting to note how, in the 12 words which make up this list of "bad things", only two have to do, more or less directly, with the reality of chastity, at least as we usually define it. Purity is opposed, in this text, to bad intentions, evil, betrayal. Because of this, Jesus, after having washed the feet of his disciples, stressed the fact that not all were

pure, and the reference is clear: Jesus alluded to the intention which one of his disciples had in his heart to betray him (cf. Jn 13:10-11).

It is the word of God which makes us pure. In the parable of the vine and the branches Jesus says, “You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you” (Jn 15:3). The word heard, accepted, meditated upon, lived and shared, continually purifies us and permits us to be in the presence of God, to “see” God. The path of chastity passes through our personal relationship with Jesus, who becomes our friend, companion, confidante and guide. It is a relationship that has to be nourished daily, more than that with anyone else, because out of this relationship is born the way to love “as He loves”, with his heart, to love with a heart of flesh. You learn to love by loving. You learn to love as Jesus does through an internal, personal, intimate relationship with him. (P. Archiati, *Chastity*, “Oblatio” III (2014), p. 222-223).

*April 25*

#### THE CHRISTIAN YOUTH CONGREGATION IS BORN

*The Sunday after Easter 1813 fell on April 25. On that day “were laid the foundations of the holy Association of Christian Youth.”*

The Director of this nascent congregation [Eugene de Mazenod] called to his side Messrs [then follows 7 names]. After laying out for them his plan and showing them the advantages that would accrue to them from it, they began together the pious exercises of the Congregation to the great happiness of all. It was agreed seeing the unhappy circumstances of the times to keep to a small number of religious practices which one would be careful to disguise as games. The first session took place in the garden called the Pavillon l’Enfant [at the north gates of Aix]. After a short prayer the group plunged happily into games. The day drawing to a close, we entered a salon of the Pavillon, and while the gentlemen rested, the Rev. Director gave them an instruction that was followed by a decade of the rosary. At nightfall we returned to town, sorry that the day had been so short and looking forward already to another meeting that would take place the following Sunday. (Eugene de Mazenod, *Diary, Oblate Writings*, 16, p. 135-136)

April 26

## THE PURPOSE OF THE YOUTH CONGREGATION

*The first group consisted of 8 boys, aged 12 to 16. Ten years later, in 1823, when Eugene had to leave for Marseilles, the young men numbered 400. Fourteen of them followed him into the religious and priestly life, becoming Oblates.*

*Few of them had ever seen a priest who was so interested in young people and was so close to them. In the Oblate General archives in Rome, there are 238 original letters written by these young people to Eugene – testimony to the affection and the gratitude that they had for him.*

*Eugene was a priest for just two years and had not wanted a parish so he could be free to start an innovative ministry. The group which he was giving life to was illegal and went against the provisions of Napoleon that prohibited any form of youth association. He writes this about it: “The enterprise is difficult.... It is not without danger.... but I am unafraid, for I place all my trust in God, because I seek only His glory and the salvation of the souls he has redeemed by His Son Our Lord Jesus Christ....”*

*The first young men met at the seminary in Aix, in the house of Eugene’s mother, in the garden and in the house of the Misses Mille, and at the country house owned by his mother.... When finally two years later, in 1815, Eugene bought a room in the Carmelite convent to be used as the house of the Missionaries of Provence, he brought his youth there. So it was the young people who opened the first house of the Oblates and were the first to live there. The same thing happened in Marseilles, when in 1821 the Oblates were called to take care of the children and young people of the Panier district, the poorest and most colorful of the city.*

*The purpose of the Association, which after the fall of Napoleon could be called a “Congregation”, was twofold: to help remedy - by their example, their advice and their prayers - the plight of Christianity at that time, and to work effectively for the holiness of its members (art. 1).*

*There were three areas of activity: games and parties. ("You run, you jump, you will sing, in a word we will have fun as long as you can, intimately convinced that the more you will enjoy it, the better..."), then a commitment to study and work, and prayer. About prayer: "It must be looked upon as the soul and the preservation of Christianity and piety.... It should not be fleeting and momentary ... but continual... a thought of faith frequently directed towards him, to get his grace in our souls."*

*What was the model of this group of young people? The first Christian community of Jerusalem: "They will remember that they are called to perpetuate the examples that the early Christians were giving the world.... They will treat each other as brothers, in imitation of the first Christians, of which they will strive to reproduce the examples." Concretely, this meant helping each other in the different situations or circumstances in which they could find themselves such as illness, poverty....*

É. Lamirande, *Les règlements de la congrégation de la Jeunesse d'Aix et nos saintes règles*, "Études oblates" 15 (1956), p. 17-33; J. Pielorz, *Début de la congrégation de la Jeunesse, 1813-1815*, "Études oblates" 19 (1960), p. 157-163; Y. Beaudoin, *Introduction et publication du Journal [des délibérations] de la congrégation de la Jeunesse d'Aix, 1813-1821*, *Oblate Writings*, 16, p. 121-205.

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#### OUR LADY OF GOOD COUNSEL

*The dedication of the Oblate General House in Rome to Our Lady of Good Counsel took place in 1954, during the Marian Year called by Pope Pius XII (1939-1958), who during that year made the proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We can refer to the General House's Codex historicus, May 28, 1954: "At 8 pm, blessing by Father General of the mosaic of Our Lady of Good Counsel placed over the small entrance door on via Aurelia, in the presence of the whole community and many visitors present in Rome on the*

occasion of the canonisation of Saint Pius X. It is considered as part of the Marian celebrations taking place in Rome during this Jubilee year for the centenary of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception”.

W. Brown, *Origins of Our Patroness of the Oblate Casa Generalizia*, “Oblatio”, VII (2018), p. 487-492.

April 27

#### THE DIRECTION OF YOUTH

*St. Eugene wrote a very detailed Rule for the Youth Association: 544 articles! Daily Mass, fifteen minutes of spiritual reading, visit to the Eucharistic Jesus, and a community meeting on Sunday and Thursday: these were radical changes to every bourgeois and mundane style of life.*

*It was enough to discourage anyone who did not want to take it seriously. Perhaps this was Eugene's intent, to weed out all those unwilling to go all out. Through the creation of the Association he in fact proposed the reconstruction of a society that was no longer Christian, which had lost its religious and moral values.*

*He seemed to have a special charisma to attract young people, to be with them, to get them excited about the Gospel. He himself was aware of this. He wrote to a friend: “It seems that the young people cannot live without me. I can touch with my hand the immense good that the Lord works through me. Almost all the young people have changed dramatically. They almost do not recognize themselves, so much so that all the parents of the city would like to entrust their children to me.”*

*Eloquent in this regard is the testimony of one of his contemporaries: “As soon as he came out, they all rushed to meet him, some jumping to his neck, some taking him by the belt, others kissing his hand or his robe.... He remained calm and happy, caressed them, and showed his great love for them, just like a father with his children. He welcomed the son of a shoemaker as well as the son of a deputy with the same warmth and brotherly affection.”*

*It was not, however, his personal work: he entrusted it to his missionaries, as a priority. In the Oblate Rule he wrote a chapter entitled: “The Direction of Youth”, which states: “The direction of youth will be considered an essential duty of our Institute. The Superior General will assign one or more missionaries to this, but he will look after it himself with the diligence that the other duties of his office will allow. He will require a report on the state of the Youth Congregation, which will be established in each of our houses, with the solicitude and details like those of the novitiate. He will make it a duty to know all the members by name and will have frequent dealings with their families.”*

Y. Beaudoin, *Le Fondateur et les jeunes*, « Vie Oblate Life » 36 (1977), p. 135-149; B. Dullier, *Eugène de Mazenod et les jeunes*, « Documentation OMI », 247 (juillet 2002).

*April 28*

#### VOCATIONS: WHERE SHOULD WE START?

Where should we start? This question immediately comes to mind whenever one tries to discuss the vocation scene today...

Where should we start? We must start with ourselves! What have we done to promote and foster vocations? It is enlightening to discuss why there is a decline in vocations and why some are attracted to the priesthood and religious life. It is interesting to explore the responsibilities of vocation directors. All of these factors give us a greater understanding of the vocation picture but they really don't get to the heart of the matter. For years we have known all the aforementioned facts. The “vocation crisis” is no longer a crisis, it is a way of life. The fact that must be faced now is: What can be done to alleviate the situation? That is why we must start with ourselves.

We, the individual, are the ones who create the moral climate in which we live. If the climate is not conducive to nourishing of vocations, it is the people of God who are to blame... let me center in one portion of the People of God – the priests and religious.

Once again let's turn to the Council Fathers for advice: “In the first place, therefore, by the ministry of the Word and by personal testimony

of a life radiant with the spirit of service and true pascal joy, priests should have it dearly at heart to demonstrate to the faithful the excellence and necessity of the priesthood.” (Opt. Tot. 11)

Likewise in *Perfectae Caritatis*: “Religious should not forget that the good example of their lives affords the highest recommendation for their community, and the most appealing invitation to embrace the religious life” (24).

What does it all mean? First of all, that we should be men of prayer. Far too often we use prayer as our last resort when it should be our first line of action. We should pray that laborers be sent into the vineyard for the harvest. We should urge others to pray for vocations. In our parishes there should be frequent votive Masses for vocations and their preservation. We need not wait for March, the traditional month of vocations, or for World Vocation Day in April, but constantly we should pray for vocations and encourage others to do so.

Secondly, we must truly put on the mind of Christ as St. Paul urges us to do... We must be convinced of who and what we are. Imagine if every priest and religious could radiate the conviction of a true Apostle of Christ. There would be no vocation crisis.

Where do we start? We start with ourselves! If young men and women are going to be inspired to follow Christ in a special manner, we must begin to make Christ present to them... We must begin to renew our own lives; we must give joyful witness of the Hope that is within us. We are not expected to be perfect but we should be different. Much depends on us. (H. Feldmann, omi, *Where should we start*, “Missions OMI” 98 [1971], p. 454-457)

*April 29, St. Catherine of Siena*

#### THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

*In his first trip to Rome Eugene went to Siena (cf. Letter to Tempier, from Rome, December 3, 1825). In Rome he also met the Archbishop of Siena. But in his writings there is no mention of the saint. However, they both have a great passion for the Blood of Christ in common.*



*Redemption was through the blood of Christ, the Church is purchased at the price of his blood, and souls redeemed by this blood have infinite dignity. These are frequently recurring themes in his writings:*

And what reason could you possibly have for wanting me to delay any longer from committing myself, and devoting to the Spouse of J.C., which this divine Master formed by the shedding of all his blood, every moment of a life I received only to use for God's greater glory.

Dear mother, if you really grasped a great truth, that souls ransomed by the Man-God's blood are so precious that, even if every human being, past, present and to come, were to spend, to save just one single one, every thing they have by way of talents, wealth and life, it would still be time well, nay admirably well spent.... (To his mother, October 11, 1809, *Oblate Writings*, 14, p. 139)

The conversion of one soul is the most important work, for which Jesus Christ would freely again give his life and would pour out all of his blood, if it were possible.... Oh! If we could have an idea of the value of one soul, a soul redeemed by all the blood of a God made man... then perhaps we would wake up from our slumber and make every effort, even to giving our lives, if necessary. (*Notes at the seminary*, 1808-1812)

As long as there are men on earth we are all children of the Father who is in heaven and neighbor to each other.... It's not only the blood of the same human brotherhood that we share, but the blood of our Redeemer, which we all share in the same grace and the same sacraments. (*Pastoral Letter*, February 24, 1847)

Every day the Lamb of God offers himself to us on our altars; he is there as on the cross to "draw us to him" (Jn 12:12), and every day he calls us to the communion of his body sacrificed for us and his blood shed for our salvation.... Let them come to the minister of reconciliation to confess and renounce their sins and having become whiter than snow they may present themselves with confidence to the throne of grace and take a full part in the divine mysteries; the blood of the Lamb with which they will be nourished will sanctify them further, and when

they have “seen and tasted that the Lord is good” (Psalm 33 to 34:9), they will want happily to taste ever more often the happiness that they will have known. (*Pastoral Letter*, February 20, 1859)

E. Lamirande, *Le sang du Sauveur. Un thème central de la doctrine spirituelle de Mgr de Mazenod*, “Études oblates”, 18 (1959), p. 363-381.

*April 30*

#### ADVICE FOR LIVING CHASTITY

There is nothing simpler, more common, my dear friend, than to have temptations, to be wearied, even agitated, by detestable thoughts; the greatest saints have gone through these trials and all good men who still live on earth are exposed to this cruel persecution that the enemy of salvation wages even against the children of light. Should one therefore be surprised? Should it cause one to sink into sadness? Certainly not since it is not a right of Satan and all his lackeys to trouble our soul and cause it to lose the peace which the Holy Spirit who dwells in us has come to establish. Even if the body should feel the annoying impression or vehemence of these thoughts, or perhaps only the effect of the blood and its tempers, one must take care not to indulge in an examination which is ever dangerous.

Your habitual disposition to love God, your constant will not to willingly offend him ought to suffice to reassure you fully. It is not so easy to turn away from him whom one loves above all, when one lives by the life of grace, when from morning to evening, one tries to accomplish not only his commandments but his counsels, when one tries to make progress every day in perfection. Oh! No! It would be quite another thing if we were concerned with those men who live in forgetfulness of their duties, who lead a soft, useless life, who walk without fear of God, who have no love for him, who trouble themselves little about offending him; that would be different, but I repeat, he who like all of you lives only for God and does everything to please him, such a one, I will say it a thousand times, does not pass from this state to that of sin by surprise. No, my dear child, the Master whom we serve, who is the

omnipotent God, does not permit that. He is there, with his grace, and as long as we do not expose ourselves voluntarily to the danger of losing it, he undertakes to preserve it in us.... (Eugene de Mazenod to Bro. B. Bernard, deacon, June 16, 1824, *Oblate Writings*, 6, p. 143-144)



# May

**I**n this month that popular piety devotes to Mary, we will choose first of all some texts on the Virgin, Mother and Queen of the Congregation and the Lay Oblate Associations. Because we are near the feast of Pentecost during this month we will read other texts concerning the Holy Spirit. Finally, on the 21st, the feast of St. Eugene we will have an opportunity to hear him speak of his spiritual fatherhood.

May 1

BLESSED MARIO BORZAGA (1932-1960)  
MISSIONARY MARTYR IN LAOS

*He was born in Trent in 1932. He entered the novitiate when he was twenty years old. At the end of 1957 he left for the mission in Laos with the first group of Italian Oblates. The Paksane mission was the site for his orientation. There he learned the language, local culture and the missionary life. Then he went on to the Kiu Kacham district of Luang Prabang. In late April of 1960 he left for a tour of some villages south of the Astrid road with Paul Thoj Xyooj, a young Hmong catechist. He never returned from that trip and was never heard of again, until 40 years later there was some news of their having been killed at the hands of guerrillas.*

*Along with many writings, he left a lengthy Diary that has been published several times: "Diario di un uomo felice" [Diary of a Happy Man], Vita trentina editrice, Trent 2005, 748 p.*

September 20, 1956 - This morning the voice of Jesus passionately echoes in my ear: "Take the cross". The acceptance of the priesthood for me is none other than the acceptance of the chalice of blood, the bit-

ter cup that causes nature to tremble like a wounded lion, but that saves souls. Away from me the thought of a bright and joyful priesthood. I want to prepare myself for the priesthood of Gethsemane, the priesthood of Mary exhausted by all the sorrow, the priesthood of the martyrs: I am a priest of the blood and of the flesh crowned with thorns: all other desires must not be part of my priesthood.

September 28, 1956 - The Cross has joined God to man, man can return to join God with the cross. That is my answer to Jesus on Calvary. He loved me and followed the will of the Father even to the Cross, I also love him and so I want to follow the will of God to the Cross and abandonment, giving up everything I have, so that there is nothing left but an intimate union with Jesus. I am sure that Jesus is there in the cross even though I do not feel him, as I do not feel his presence in the Eucharist.

February 19, 1957 - During the Via Crucis, holding my crucifix fervently in my hands, I considered how Jesus also chose me to be a continuation of his Way of the Cross: the bearer of the Cross, a priest. Sometimes I am filled with sadness thinking how I must suffer, since Jesus chose me for this, but then I think that this is not about discussing a possibility for tomorrow, but to establish a sound principle: "The entire life of Christ was the cross and martyrdom. I am another Christ, so...." Christ who chose me is the same one who gave life and strength to the martyrs and to the Virgins: they were men and women like me, filled with nothing but weaknesses; they were chosen for the battle, received the weapons, they fought and won. I was also chosen for martyrdom. And if I want to be a holy priest, I must not desire anything else, because this is the mystery that is held in my hands every day: the mystery of blood, total immolation, a complete gift of himself, of innocence the fruit of renunciation, humility before the greatness of God.

April 19, 1957 - Good Friday. The martyrs are to be imitated, not praised! The martyrs? Jesus is the first and greatest martyr! Today is his feast. I hope, I believe that He did not die in vain for me. "I'm going to immolate myself for you". Is my life going towards an immolation? Yet I am sure that Jesus commanded me to go. It is the mystery of the Blood, the Blood of the Redeemer, only those who immolate themselves can understand it.

F. Ciardi, *Il sogno e la realtà. Mario Borzaga, martire*, Ancora, Milano 2016<sup>2</sup>, 158 p.; P. Damosso, *Romanzo d'amore. Mario Borzaga*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (Milano) 2014, 300 p.; R. Silvestri, *Cammino cantando. Padre Mario Borzaga martire missionario*, Aracne, Ariccia (RM) 2014, 88 p.; G. Viviani, *Per le strade che avevo sognato. Il beato Mario Borzaga dalla Bolghera al Laos*, Vita Trentina, Trento 2016.

\* \* \*

BLESSED JUAN PEDRO DEL COTILLO FERNÁNDEZ (1914-1936)  
MARTYR OF SPAIN

*He was born in Siero de la Reina, province and diocese of León, on May 1, 1914. He finished his second year of theology and made his perpetual oblation in 1935. He was pious, regular, frank with his superiors, affable with his confreres and a lover of his vocation. It was a little difficult for him to accept corrections, but he took them into account. The formators appreciated his good "intellectual capacity, his practical judgment, and his good qualities with which he could render great service to others". He was 22 years old.*

*On July 22, 1936, he was arrested in his community with the other members of the community. Two days later, in the early morning of the 24th, he was "taken out" with six other companions. When Juan Pedro Del Cotillo was named, Father Vega, interceding for him, said: "Do not take this boy away, he is sick at heart". "For what we are going to send him, he is quite well," they replied. Juan Pedro had recently been diagnosed with some heart complications, although the doctor had assured them that they could be cured with a little care.*

*They were shot in the Casa de Campo park in Madrid.*

*A testimony of a sister of St. Joseph of Cluny, found in the general archives of Rome, gives us precious information from the spiritual point of view about the moment of death: "On the night of July 23-24, Fr. Pérez in the company of seven scholastics whose names I do not know, were taken to be shot in the Casa de Campo (the king's country house); a servant of the people who followed the convoy, attended the capital*

execution; he affirmed that they died piously, one kissing his crucifix” (Declaration of Mother Elisabeth du Sacrement, superior of the community of St. Joseph of Cluny of Pozuelo).

May 2

#### IDENTIFYING ONESELF WITH MARY IMMACULATE

*In his famous Circular 191 on the Oblate vocation, Fr. Léo Deschâtelets speaks of the special bond that unites Oblates to Mary.*

This spirit of oblation of our religious, priestly, missionary, and apostolic life to God who is infinite love, in Jesus Christ our Savior, for the most merciful ministry to the poor souls will be achieved through Mary Immaculate, our Mother and Patroness to whom we must have a singular devotion: “*peculiaris devotio*” (art. 221). We are Oblates of Mary Immaculate. This is not just a label. The name defines us just as the name Priests of the Blessed Sacrament indicates a family of priests specially devoted to the worship of the Sacrament of the Eucharist, just as the Fathers of Mary likewise indicates a community of priests dedicated to the cult of Mary. We could multiply the examples and each of you can do the same.

Before explaining further what that entails, we affirm that *we are the Oblates of Mary Immaculate* in the strictest sense of the word. It is through her that we will be Oblates of souls, Oblates of Jesus Christ, Oblates of divine charity.

We can not be true Oblates of Mary Immaculate without putting into our souls all that we have said and especially without living it fully with her, “*Sentire cum Maria*.” It is not a question – if we want to understand our vocation – of having an ordinary devotion to Mary Immaculate. This is about a kind of identification with Mary Immaculate, it is the gift of ourselves to God through her and like her, which goes to the depths of our Christian, religious, missionary, and priestly life. [...]

There is no doubt, however, that the Oblates have had a great devotion to Mary Immaculate since the beginning of the Institute. Article 257, which is rich in meaning and dates from the early days, is there to prove it. Let us quote it first: “...*dulcem Mariam peculiaris prosequen-*



*tur devotionis affected, in ac semper Matrem habebunt*”. Article 258, also very important, goes back to the early days of the Congregation and leaves no doubt about the feelings of our elders: « *Ideo quotidie coronam Virginis recitabunt, et omnem navabunt operam, quo populi Immaculatam et Sanctissimam Deiparam ferventius fiducialiusque colant* ». (Lèò Deschâtelets, *Notre vocation et notre vie d’union intime avec Marie Immaculée*, Circular Letter No. 191, 1951, *Circulaires administratives*, 5, p. 347-349).

*May 3, Saints Phillip and James*

#### THE IDEAL OF MARTYRDOM

*“To imitate the example of the Apostles in their life of dedication and abnegation”. Each feast of the apostles is an opportunity to recall this aspect of St. Eugene’s spirituality.*

I must learn to put up with a little cold, provided it does not harm my health.... And since these occasions of suffering for God in expiation of one’s faults come but rarely, one must make up for them with fasts, bracelets, iron chains and the discipline; all this in a sentiment of the deepest humility, in union with the sufferings, passion and death of Our Lord Jesus Christ.... I will add, as I have done daily so far, with all the fervour I can muster, the request for the grace, so little deserved, of final perseverance. And as the punishment due to my sins is so great and frightening, I will persevere in the most insistent request to satisfy by martyrdom or at least by death in service to my neighbour, the enormous debt I have contracted towards the divine Justice. (Eugene de Mazenod, “Program adopted during my retreat of December 1812 at Aix”, *Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 16)

If one wishes to live the life of J.C. following the advice of the Apostle, one must carry always about oneself the mortification of J.C. and do this not only to dominate the depraved inclinations of corrupt nature by mortifying its members, but also “to fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ”.... One must also, following the example of the saints, impose some bodily mortification voluntarily on

oneself, for "the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent are taking it by force." And also to render oneself more in conformity with J.C., "a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity." (Eugene de Mazenod, "Concerning mortification," in *Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 29)

I will join to the most exact observance of his Law the practice of mortification in such wise that it flows through all my actions, and into every circumstance of my life, reminding me that the whole life of Jesus my model was a perpetual cross and a continual martyrdom.... (Eugene de Mazenod, "Program adopted during my retreat of December 1812 at Aix", *Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 14)

May 4

#### A PASSPORT FOR HEAVEN

*After St. Eugene, who was awaiting the approval of the Rule in Rome, had decided to change the name of the Congregation from the Oblates of Saint Charles to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate of he wrote to Father Tempier:*

Let us renew ourselves especially in devotion to the most holy Virgin and render ourselves worthy to be Oblates of the Immaculate Mary. But this is a passport to heaven! How have we not thought of it sooner? Avow that it will be as glorious as it will be consoling for us to be consecrated to her in a special manner and to bear her name. The Oblates of Mary! This name satisfies the heart and the ear. I must admit to you that I was quite surprised, when it was decided to take the name I had thought should be left aside, at being so impervious, at feeling so little pleasure, I would almost say a kind of repugnance, at bearing the name of a saint [Oblates of St. Charles] who is my particular protector, for whom I have so much devotion. And now I see the reason; we were remiss in regard to our Mother, our Queen, she who protects us and who must obtain for us all graces whereof her divine Son has made her the dispenser. So let us rejoice to bear her name and her livery. (Letter to Fr. Tempier, December 22, 1825, *Oblate Writings*, 6, p. 223-224)

*After the approval he writes again to Tempier and speaks about the name Oblates of Mary Immaculate as a sign of predestination:*

May we understand well what we are! I hope that the Lord will give us this grace, with the assistance and by the protection of our holy Mother, the Immaculate Mary, for whom we must have a great devotion in our Congregation. Does it not seem to you that it is a sign of predestination to bear the name of Oblates of Mary, that is, consecrated to God under the patronage of Mary, a name the Congregation bears as a family name held in common with the most holy and immaculate Mother of God? It is enough to make others jealous; but it is the Church who has given us this beautiful name, we receive it with respect, love and gratitude, proud of our dignity and of the rights that it gives us to the protection of her who is All Powerful in God's presence. (Letter to Fr. Tempier, March 20, 1826, *Oblate Writings*, 7, p. 63)

May 5

#### RESTORE THE GLORY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

*The Oblates took possession of the Marian Shrine N.D. de l'Osier on March 14, 1834. At the end of his first visit which he made in the summer of 1835, Eugene de Mazenod wrote:*

Having come to N.D. de l'Osier to visit the new foundation that Divine Providence has given to our Congregation, our first concern was to thank the Lord for that special favor He deigned to grant us by calling us to this sanctuary to re-establish the cult of the Blessed Virgin and to draw from the bosom of this good Mother the graces that are necessary for the people of our Institute to prepare worthily for the great apostolic ministry to be carried out in these parts.

It did not take us long to realize that there are only the ruins of what, in this holy place, was the devotion to Mary in the past century. How could it be otherwise after a revolution of 40 years and the abandonment of the shrine that followed?

The Blessed Virgin has not ceased to show the effects of her power to those who have invoked her in this period, but unfortunately the purpose of these remarkable favors of the Mother of God was not under-

stood, she who first of all wants the glory of her Divine Son and the conversion of the souls that he has purchased with his precious blood....

The Bishop of Grenoble, certainly convinced of this truth and of the inadequacy of the means he had used to accommodate the clear design of the divine will, eventually decided to call our Congregation – charged particularly by the Church to propagate the cult of Mary and consecrated by a special vocation, to the conversion of souls – to work effectively to restore the devotion of N.D. de l’Osier to its original state and at the same time to use a certain number of its members for the holy ministry of the missions in the diocese.

So the Congregation is at l’Osier in keeping with the spirit that is proper to it to evangelize the most abandoned souls of this vast diocese and to help with all its might to restore the glory of the Blessed Virgin by giving better direction to the devotion of the faithful to this good mother of all Christians, our beloved patroness. (*Acts of Visitation*, N.D. de l’Osier, July 16, 1835, DM IX 4)

May 6

#### FOUNDATION OF THE “CALVARY” HOUSE IN MARSEILLES

*The great mission of Marseilles, preached successfully by the Missionaries of France and the Missionaries of Provence was at the origin of the third foundation of the Missionaries of Provence after Aix and Notre-Dame du Laus. They took charge of the Calvary, May 6, 1821.*

*The fourth General Chapter was held in the convent of the Calvary from July 10th to 13th 1826. It is thus in this house, called “our Sinai” by Father Leo Delpuech (“Missions OMI” 27 [1889], p. 119) that the Rules approved by Rome were promulgated. In 1889, at the invitation of Father Joseph Fabre, Superior General, Fr. Delpuech put up a marble plaque with a long inscription that commemorates the event. For several years, Fathers de Mazenod and Tempier, vicars general, had their rooms in the convent.*

The cross of the Marseilles Mission had been erected on the site of the former collegiate church of the *Accoules* which was destroyed during the Revolution. Since then, many faithful from all parts of the city

would come to the foot of the cross. The grotto which is under the rock forming the hill of Calvary was never empty. The parish priests, when asked by the faithful, would come to say Mass in the chapel of the Holy Sepulcher, but there was no regular service there.

Father de Mazenod could not believe that the archbishop intended to entrust this service to the Missionaries of Provence. If the Missionaries of France were to establish themselves in Marseilles, it seemed natural that this place should be part of their duties. “Surprised by such a quick and unexpected decision, says Father Suzanne, the Founder hesitated, and doubted the message he had received. He was taken to the archbishopric; Brother Suzanne accompanied him. The archbishop pressed Fr. de Mazenod, and begged him, but our Superior continued to answer, “I will obey, if necessary, but it will, I see, be to the detriment of my community.” [...] The archbishop protested and declared that he would never have other missionaries at the Calvary but those who had been constantly sacrificing themselves for the good of his diocese. He appealed to him again and still seeing him hesitate, he came over to Brother Suzanne and taking the sub-deacon’s hands in his own, said: “Come, Father, urge your Superior to take possession of the Calvary.”

Defeated by such entreaties, our Superior said he was ready to obey and embracing him the archbishop said: “Well! Get ready and go today with a letter from Fr. Guigou.” (*Mémoires* of Fr. Suzanne, in Rey, I, p. 266)

May 7

THE DOGMA OF THE IMMACULATE IS “TO BE HELD AND DEFINED”

*February 2, 1849, Pius IX, from Gaeta, addressed an encyclical letter to all the bishops of the world asking them to let him know “as soon as possible” concerning the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary what were, “the devotion and the wishes of the clergy and the faithful and what their opinion was.” A reply was received from 570 bishops: 530 were in favor of proclaiming this dogma; 36 were in favor, but did not consider it appropriate that the Pope proclaim it in those historical junctures; 4, however, were strongly opposed. The answer of the Bishop of Marseilles was swift, positive and enthusiastic.*

Most Holy Father, I can only offer heartfelt thanks to Your Holiness for condescending to associate the entire Episcopate in your pious designs, making it participate for the honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in a solemn judgment that would define her Immaculate Conception as a doctrine of the Church. I rejoice in the Lord for the part that has been reserved for me to personally take part in the decision which is being prepared, and it is with great happiness that I give testimony of the tradition of my church and express my own feeling on the matter which is proposed to me by Your Holiness.... For many centuries, Most Holy Father, the Church of Marseilles, the oldest in all of Gaul, has taken pride in professing the pious belief in the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin. [He lists the testimonies of this faith.]

The clergy of my diocese was always faithfully attached to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary.... As for my personal opinion as a bishop of the Church of God happily called to speak on the question at hand, with the help of the Holy Spirit and the protection of the Mother of the Eternal Light, I say without a doubt that: deeply rooted in the tradition of the Church entrusted to me, in the opinion of the most authoritative theologians and of the most virtuous and the holiest persons of our times and given the theological reasons that – for the honor of the Mother of God and her divine Son – call for the total absence of sin in this most excellent and beloved Mother of God, I say that it is to be held and defined as a dogma of the Catholic faith that the Blessed Virgin Mary was conceived without sin. I express this feeling with a burning desire to see it finally adopted by Your Holiness and taught infallibly to the whole Church of God with the supreme authority granted on the earth by Christ to Peter. (Letter of Bishop de Mazenod to Pius IX, April 28, 1849, *Pareri sulla definizione dogmatica dell’Immacolato Concepimento della B. Vergine Maria, rassegnati alla Santità di Pio IX*, “La Civiltà Cattolica”, 1851. P. I, T. III, p. 17-21)

May 8

#### WE HONOR THE SON IN THE PERSON OF HIS MOTHER

*The pastoral letter of Bishop de Mazenod, written on July 8, 1849, presents to the faithful of Marseilles the encyclical in which Pope Pius*

*IX asks the bishops of the Catholic world whether it is appropriate to define the Immaculate Conception of Mary as a truth of faith. The bishop takes this opportunity to express his personal faith in Mary's Immaculate Conception.*

After what relates directly to God, nothing is more precious for a piety enlightened by the true light than what concerns the honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is all about the relationship of a son to his mother, and what a Mother! The one who gave us the One who is the life and salvation of the world, the one who has begotten all of us spiritually at the foot of the cross through the pains of the passion and death of the Man-God, the blessed fruit of her womb; the one who is rightly called the new Eve and co-Redeemer of mankind.

Her tenderness watches over us; she nourishes our souls with divine graces of which, according to the holy Fathers, she is the distributor; from Heaven she pours them out with both hands over her children after having drawn them from the heart of her Son, our Saviour. Even our temporal existence is in the care of her maternal love and the Angels of which she is the Queen, forever exalted and always obeyed, “are sent from the foot of his throne to lead us in our ways”....

It is the glory of God himself that is of concern in the glory of Mary. All that, on our part, tends to glorify the Virgin Mary goes from her back to God, taking on as it were, in the hands of the most perfect of creatures, the character of the most perfect homage to the Creator. Yes, we therefore glorify God in the masterpiece of his power and of his love; we praise Him because among all of His wonders, which show his infinite greatness, he produced one that alone expresses better than all the others, his adorable perfections. Furthermore, the greatness of the Virgin Mary is in the dignity of being the Mother of God; this is the reason for all the prerogatives with which she is honored and for the superior cult we offer her.

Thus, it is the Son we honor in the person of the Mother. That is why it is impossible to be excessive in our homage to Mary, as long as we consider her a creature, God always being the supreme end of these praises. (*Pastoral Letter*, July 8, 1849)

May 9

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION IN THE TRADITION OF MARSEILLES  
AND THE OBLATES

*In the Pastoral Letter that Bishop de Mazenod wrote to his people on July 8, 1849, he also makes known the letter he wrote to Pope Pius IX on April 26, 1849 regarding the appropriateness of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.*

It is with great joy that I bear witness to the tradition of my Church and give my thoughts on the matter proposed to me by your Holiness.

For many centuries already, Most Holy Father, the Church of Marseilles, the most ancient of the Gauls, has gloried in professing the belief in the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin. Among the many documents that prove this, we note the special breviary of this Church in use before the Council of Trent. This breviary attests, in formal terms, that this Church had this sentiment. [...] Among us it was a general conviction manifested especially at the Provincial Council of Avignon, held in 1457, in which our predecessor Nicolas de Brancas, Bishop of Marseilles, participated. That Council not only promulgated the decree of Bâle, which strikes with anathema those who, in their speeches or controversies, attack the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, but it also ordered all parish priests to make it known to all the peoples entrusted to their care. It turns out that, in our countries, the sentiment of which we speak prevailed so much that the exemption of the Blessed Virgin from original sin was considered beyond doubt as attested by the missal of Arles, which was printed in 1538 [...].

As for my thoughts as a bishop called to speak on this question, I say that, basing myself on the tradition of my Church, on the opinion of the most respectable theologians and on that of the holiest figures of modern times, as well as on the well-known reasons which, for the honor of the Mother of God and of her Divine Son, demand that nothing that is sinful belong to this august mother, I am of the opinion that it must be decided and defined that Mary was conceived free of original sin. [...]



This ardent desire I derive from my own devotion to the Blessed Virgin and also from my attachment to the Society of priests which God has granted me to form and of which I am the Superior General. The Statutes and Rules of this Society were approved, *in forma specifica*, by Pope Leo XII, of holy memory, by apostolic letters of March 21, 1826, and it received, from this great Pope, in the said apostolic letters, the glorious name of Congregation of the Oblates of the Most Holy Virgin Mary conceived without sin. This Congregation, whose approval was confirmed by new apostolic letters of your predecessor Gregory XVI, of happy memory, dated March 20, 1846, has more than 300 members scattered in different houses in France, in England, in America, in Africa and in the island of Ceylon in Asia. I dare say, with express deliberation, the supreme happiness that you would feel if, at last, the decision spoken of were to come to confirm your desires, no less ardent than my own.

\* \* \*

BLESSED GREGORIO ESCOBAR GARCÍA (1912-1936)  
MARTYR OF SPAIN

*He was born on May 9, 1912. He was ordained a priest on June 6, 1936. Events did not allow him to celebrate his first Mass at the Shrine of Our Lady of Le Puy in Estella, his hometown, as he had wished. He stood out as a well-balanced person, confidant and counselor of his companions, affectionate and pacifying. He had only one year left to finish his studies and was 24 years old.*

*In a letter written on March 1, 1936, addressed to his parents nine months before his martyrdom, he says: "I have always been deeply moved by the stories of martyrdom that have always existed in the Church, and always when I read them a secret desire assails me to suffer the same fate as they did. That would be the best priesthood to which all Christians could aspire, to offer each one to God his own body and blood in holocausts for the faith. What a joy it would be to die a martyr!" (Escobar's letter to his family, March 1, 1936, Diocesan Process of beatification, p.860).*

*Brother Juan José Cincunegui, as soon as the war was over, gave the news of the death of Gregorio Escobar to his father in a letter: "I can only give you sad news for your father's heart. [...] Your son Gregorio, on November 28, 36, was taken out of the prison of San Antón, early in the morning, in the company of two parents and 8 students and 3 lay brothers from the house of Pozuelo, to transfer them in the company of 60 other right-wing prisoners to a prison outside Madrid, but that expedition, like many others that had left before and others that left afterwards, did not reach its destination, but was cowardly murdered by the red militiamen on the outskirts of Madrid. [...] I do not want to give you any more displeasure in narrating sad things; we are only left with the joy that both your son and the others who died in his company are martyrs of the new Spain, since the motive for their death, at least in Gregorio, was hatred of the Church and its ministers. I have no doubt that your son was killed by the Reds because he was a priest and a religious, and this is a glory for him and I am sure that, from heaven, he is watching over those of us who here on earth were his friends in sorrows and joys" (Letter from J. J. Cincunegui to Hilario Escobar, 05/04/1939, PD, p. 1518).*

*May 10*

#### ARRIVAL OF THE FIRST OBLATES IN THE BRITISH ISLES

*On May 10, 1841, the first Oblates arrived in the British Isles. In 1837 William Joseph Daly was received into the novitiate in Marseilles. He was the first Irish candidate to join the Oblates. Immediately after his ordination (May 2, 1841) he returned to England. Later, on December 6, 1845, St. Eugene wrote to him:*

Your position, my dear Fr. Daly, is one of much responsibility and nothing less than the confidence I have in you can set my mind at rest. It is essential, my dear son, that you be well united to God because you constantly need to be guided by the light He will wish to grant you, when you lack time and opportunity to make consultations. Hence, my dear friend, you must follow your Rule in both letter and spirit, letting

yourself do nothing other than what you would do under my eyes and immediate direction.

I have been told that you treat Monsieur Power with too much severity. You know how much we need him. Moreover, one obtains more by being pleasant than by excessive sternness....

You are also too little concerned with poverty, in fact so oblivious of it that you spent a guinea to buy a fowl, which would be truly reprehensible.

Avoid with care, my very dear son, all that can hinder the interior life that should inspire you, otherwise you will risk losing the merit and reward of the fine ministry that you fulfil in the name of the family of which you are one of the cherished sons. For the rest, I do not speak thus by way of reproach but as an observation in order that you may be more on your guard in the delicate position in which you find yourself... How thankful we should be to God for the blessings He showers upon our works. But let us render ourselves worthy of them by a great fidelity to our duty. You know that one preaches more by example than by words.... (*Oblate Writings*, 3, p. 18)

May 11

BLESSED VINCENT L'HÉNORET (1921-1961)  
MARTYR IN LAOS

*He entered the novitiate at Pontmain in 1940. Later, at the scholasticate of La Brosse-Montceaux he witnessed the massacre perpetrated by the Nazis that killed five Oblates, two priests, two scholastics and a Brother. Ordained in 1946, he left the following year for the Mission of Laos.*

*He spent the whole time of his first stay in Laos in the area of Pak-sane. A good but somewhat severe pastor, he knew how to make himself loved by the Christians. In November 1957 he had to leave the Mekong valley to go to the district of Xieng-Khouang.*

*Wednesday, May 10, 1961, Vincent asked and obtained a pass to go celebrate the Feast of the Ascension in a mission. Thus, in the morning of Thursday, May 11, he left for Ban-Ban by bicycle. There were still several kilometers to his destination when he was stopped by Pathet*

*Lao soldiers. After showing his travel pass he continued down the road. A witness, who soon after heard some shots, returned to the scene later in the day with some other persons and easily found the place where the body had been summarily buried.*

*Before leaving for the mission, Vincent L'Hénoret wrote in a note to his superiors:*

I've always wanted to go to the foreign missions. I liked the mission of Laos, but now that a difficult mission in Chad is being founded, I would gladly accept to go there, being ready for any sacrifice, including that of my life for the cause of Christ and His holy Mother. But if Christ is calling me elsewhere, I will follow this call, since all souls were saved at the cost of his blood, no matter where they are.

*In a letter written by a catechist to his mother, we read:*

... As for your son, when he came to us, he found it difficult; he was far from well. He taught us many things; he helped us to know God; he made us observe the virtues; he was always there to heal us. He made us avoid sins, he gave us the grace of God. He tried to help us in life. He helped students; some were studying to be priests, some to be catechists. He helped us to find food; he ensured that many were educated...

\* \* \*

BLESSED PASCUAL ALÁEZ MEDINA (1917-1936)  
MARTYR OF SPAIN

*He was born in Villaverde de Arcayos, province and diocese of León, on May 11, 1917. He was a simple, affable person, good with everyone, very obedient and docile to his superiors, a little shy, pious and dreamed of going to the foreign missions.*

*He had barely finished his first course and only six days after professing, with his classmates, the first renewal of religious vows, he was arrested with all the members of the community. Two days later he was on the list of the first seven Oblates and one layman who were taken by night from the convent and killed in the Casa de Campo in Madrid. He was only 19 years old.*

*Pascual, writing to his brother, tells him how they were insulted in the street and threatened when they went for a walk. Father Ignacio Escanciano, who lived with him in the Juniorate, says: “Although the situation in the Basque Country was less virulent than in Madrid, nevertheless, when we went for a walk, for example in Hernani, they threw stones and insulted us, for which they took us for a walk in the mountains. Even as children, one of our topics of conversation was how to escape a possible fire in the Seminary caused by hatred of religion. When we went on vacation, when some people perceived that we were seminarians on the trip, they would make the sign of cutting our throats, sometimes even with a knife in their hands”.*

*May 12*

#### IS IT POSSIBLE TO LOVE JESUS WITHOUT LOVING MARY?

*In the 1853 Directory of Novices inspired by St. Eugene, there is a strong emphasis on a deep devotion to Mary.*

Is it possible to truly love Jesus without loving His Divine Mother? And especially now that devotion to this incomparable Virgin spreads so impressively and produces wonderful fruits of conversion and grace [...], what a shame for us, his sons, his Oblates, if we do not love her with an ardent love, if we do not have a boundless devotion to her! She is our Mother. She is entitled to receive filial tenderness from us. We all owe our vocation to the Congregation to her, we all expect more abundant graces for the future; so we must have unbounded gratitude for her blessings and a corresponding trust in her goodness. She will be our refuge [...], our strength in weakness, our advocate before God [...], our consolation in the anguish of trial [...], the shortest and surest path towards the love of Jesus. Devotion to Mary and especially to Mary Immaculate is also the most powerful way to obtain the conversion of sinners [...]. So many reasons to devote ourselves wholeheartedly to the devotion of our Good Mother! We will do everything to give her signs of our love, either in exercises of piety or in zeal for the imitation of her virtues. We will seek to please her in everything. When you love, there are a thousand ways of showing your affection. [...]

After the devotion to the sacred person of the Savior, the novices of the society must direct all their love towards his Blessed Mother, the glorious and Immaculate Virgin Mary. There is no question here of an ordinary devotion, such as all Christians profess, it is not even that more special devotion by which those among the clergy who are more faithful to holiness honor her; the devotion we should have for holy Mary is very particular, and should not be found anywhere else in such a high degree than among us. We are not only the children of Mary as are all Christians and especially the ministers of the Church, but we are her children in a more special way. It is Jesus Christ who gave us his Mother through the person of his Vicar on earth, we bear her name and we left everything to belong to her, to have the happiness of calling ourselves her children. What a grace, what a blessing! How we must esteem her, and what sacrifices must we make in comparison to what we got in return: to be the children of Mary, to belong to her beloved family, walking under her banner and under what title: the most glorious, that of her Immaculate Conception! Will we ever understand enough the grace God gave us in calling us to such a vocation? [...]

Oh, novices of the Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary. Ah! If you knew what God has done for you by placing you in the family of his beloved Divine Mother! Whatever your affection, your gratitude and devotion to Mary, it will never equal the greatness of her love for you. You will never understand everything she does for you and all that you owe her because of it.

*May 13, Our Lady of Fatima*

#### DEVOTION TO MARY AND TO THE EUCHARIST

*At the end of his life, Bishop de Mazenod succeeded in establishing “perpetual solemn” adoration of the Eucharist in his diocese. In his Pastoral Letter of December 21, 1849, with which he instituted the adoration, he speaks of the relationship between worship of the Eucharist and devotion to Mary.*

The power of intercession and the maternal love of Mary are celebrated everywhere, and nowadays devotion to her has developed in an

admirable manner; it is as great as it was in the times of greater faith and we bless the Lord. These many tributes and the honoring of the Mother of God, mark a time of renewal in faith itself, and from Mary they rise up to her divine Son when she is so beautifully honored because of her position as Mother of Jesus Christ. Mary's name is invoked with great confidence so that she ask her divine Son, who is thereby recognized as the author of all graces. We cannot do too much in honor of the Virgin Mary, as long as this devotion is understood and practiced in this limited sense of rendering what is due to a creature, so great and so high she may be.

We should take care, however, not to attach to simple images of the Mother of God, a reverence of which the exterior signs might appear to overshadow those that the very presence of the person of Jesus Christ demands. We must instead see that the worship of our faith and our love, which must surround the adorable Eucharist, be as much as possible, always greater than that which we usually feel and do to honor Mary Immaculate.

*May 14, St. Mathias, Apostle*

#### FOR THE FEAST OF SAINT MATHIAS

*In one of the instructions offered to his fellow seminarians at Saint Sulpice in Paris, Saint Eugene points to the example of the apostle Mathias.*

Let us adore Our Lord himself who chooses his disciples, instructs them in the divine precepts, establishes them as the salt of the earth, gives them the power to forgive sins, and invests them with his Holy Spirit.

Let us rejoice on this day dedicated by the Church, in honor of St. Mathias, for the happiness we have in being called to the priesthood. Let's congratulate the great Apostle for having been called by Jesus Christ himself, in the words of the Holy Fathers, to be one of the 72 disciples, companions of his work, and witnesses of his wonders. Let us congratulate ourselves....

In imitation of St Mathias and the other Apostles who asked insistently that God make known his Divine Will, we will go to him with confidence and using the same words that merited being answered we will say to him: Lord, you who know our heart, you see our talents... let us know if we are fit for your service.

Just as St Mathias did not miss a word that came from the mouth of Our Divine Savior, he did not let even one of his actions escape him, and as he kept the precious memory of all that he had seen his Divine Master do, so as to imitate him in everything that human strength would permit, so must we be careful and examine with interior recollection all the good that is around us in order to faithfully imitate the examples given us.... (Eugene de Mazenod, *Sujets de méditations et instructions*, 1808-1811, DM III, 5)

May 15

#### A SPECIAL DEVOTION TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

*The Directory for Novices and Scholastics, composed between the years 1831 to 1835, under inspiration of Eugene de Mazenod and approved by him, invites the Oblates in first formation to a special “devotion” to the Holy Spirit.*

With reference to the adorable Persons of the Holy Trinity, they (the Novices) will profess a special cult for the Holy Spirit. This is an endeared devotion, and rightly so, for those who strive for an interior life. How could one enter the path of following God, how could one penetrate the secrets of spiritual life, if not initiated to it by the Divine Spirit whose operation is the sanctification of souls (the Spirit) who is not only the source of the graces but Grace itself. It is but through his enlightenment that man can be illumined on the truths of faith. It is but through the fire of his love that concupiscence can be quenched. Above all when one wishes to progress in the interior life, which is our sole purpose, he needs that particular assistance from the Holy Spirit since this life is the perfect advent of his Reign in one's soul. Purity of heart, the spirit of prayer, fidelity to grace, are the fruits of the Holy Spirit.



(*Des dévotions propres aux membres de la Société d'après l'ancien directoire des noviciats et des scolasticats*, "Études oblates", 16 [1957], p. 266)

May 16

## THE JOY OF GIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

*The mission of "giving the Spirit" to the faithful in the sacrament of Confirmation was dear to the heart of Bishop St. Eugene. He writes in an 1844 Pastoral Letter: "I consider it a duty to go and give the Holy Spirit to those who have neglected to receive the sacrament of Confirmation." He reserved time on Mondays for Confirmations in his private chapel, but in fact they called on him to confer the sacrament almost every day.*

[...] What happiness I would feel to be able to give the Holy Spirit to so many poor souls who have the duty and the need to receive him. (Eugene de Mazenod to Father Martin, January 11, 1844, *Oblate Writings*, 10, p. 51)

What need for tongues of fire to see, in some way, the presence of the Holy Spirit? On these occasions, his presence is perceptible to me and I am penetrated with it to the point of not being able to contain my emotion. I need to force myself to not cry with joy, and, in spite of my efforts, very often involuntary tears betray the feeling with which I am animated and which is overabundant in every sense of the term! (Eugene de Mazenod, *Diary*, February 18, 1844, *Oblate Writings*, 21, p. 139 [French edition])

It is the grace that God gives me when he calls me to give the Holy Spirit. I feel like a miracle worker who by virtue of divine omnipotence, does as many miracles as there are young confirmation candidates. The concentration and fervor are thus sustained during long hours of this entrancing ceremony of general Confirmations. It then renewed the same day, for three hours, for 900 girls confirmed in the afternoon. A thousands of thanks to God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, the author

of all these wonders, and to the Holy Spirit who gives itself in this was to souls for their greatest sanctification. (Eugene de Mazenod, Diary, February 27, 1844, *Oblate Writings*, 22, p. 146-147 [French edition])

May 17

#### THE MISSIONARY ASSOCIATION OF MARY IMMACULATE

*In 1929, Mgr. Dontenwill wrote a circular letter to the entire Congregation entitled The Association of Mary Immaculate. It invited the Provincials to appoint directors of the Association. The circular produced a real expansion of the Association throughout the Congregation. Rather than a single common association throughout the Oblate world, it was a federation of associations that, despite having the same purpose, used the means best suited to local people and situations.*

The Association of Mary Immaculate is like an extension of our Congregation into the ranks of the faithful. It wants to bring together with us all who befriend our undertakings, our missions especially. Its members intend to work, with the means at their disposal, to support us and to help us in our missionary apostolate. Under the protection of Mary Immaculate, the Mother of Mercy, they become apostolic auxiliaries to the Missionary Oblates; they are, to some degree, part of our religious family, sharing its joys and sorrows, its battles and struggles, rejoicing in our successes, making our Congregation ever more known, winning new friends for it, propagating its publications, recruiting vocations for it and supporting its apostolate with their alms. In return, we grant them a share in our prayers and good works, in the sacrifices and merits of our missionaries; we pray in a special way for them and make our juniorists as well as the faithful of our old and new Christian territories pray for them. [...]

Through the Association, we group together across the world people who are devoted to us, look upon our religious family as their own, take to heart its interests and lead more and more vocations to it. (A. Dontenwill, *Circular Letter* No. 141, June 7, 1929, *Circulaires administratives*, 4, p. 151-152, 157).

*Father Léo Deschâtelets, newly elected Superior General, issued a circular letter, on January 25, 1948, on the Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate to fulfill the mandate received from the Chapter. It called for uniformity hitherto non-existent and for structures that were lacking in many parts of the Congregation. The circular summarily sketched the history of the Association, and expressed his wishes regarding it. He established the precise title making it compulsory to add the adjective missionary.*

We would like to see an immense army of lay people lined up about us on the great battle field of the missions where we are striving to carry aloft the banner of Christian Faith and Charity. There are the relatives and other young folk, truly Christian, and taking special interest in our Juniorists, Novices and Scholastics as if they were their own children or brothers. Let the battle cry of this giant army of Christian Charity be the challenging phrase of the great Pope of the Missions: “All believers in behalf of all the unbelievers”. And to this we add that other phrase, taken from our Holy Rule: “We must spare no effort to extend the Savior’s empire”. [...]

The training of the Associates to a truly Christian way of life, is what we consider to be the first and most important purpose of the Association. [...] When we consider that our Associates are, in some manner, a part of our religious family, then we realize that it is our duty to work seriously at their sanctification and to develop in them a real missionary spirit. [...]

It is altogether foreign to our mind to consider the material aid that we receive from the Association as its main purpose. The greatest help that our Associates can ever give is and always will be that of prayer. Their prayers will be all the more fruitful if animated by an earnest and deep piety and are accompanied by a filial devotion to the Blessed Virgin. We should urge our Associates to an interior life, but, always in conformity with the duties of their state in life. [...] Our Immaculate Mother, Queen of the Missions, exemplar of all Oblates, will be the model that we will hold before the eyes of those who are cooperating

with us in the work of saving souls. [...] (*Circular Letter* No. 182, January 25, 1948, *Circulaires administratives*, 5, p. 208-218)

W. H. Woestman, *Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate*, DOV, p. 600-601.

May 18

#### OBLATES AND LAY PEOPLE, A MUTUAL GIFT

*During the MAMI pilgrimage to Lourdes (May 21, 1985), the Superior General, Fr. Fernand Jetté, addressed the following reflection to the participants on the mutual relationship between the Oblates and lay people:*

Our lay associates are our brothers and sisters who support us and help us in our missionary activity. They do it with prayer, dedication to our works, financial aid, and by an interest for Oblate vocations. [...]

But there is another, even more important support that they offer us, one that is much more interior, more spiritual [...]: their faith in the Congregation and their regard for it. Their faith in the Congregation is a stimulus for many Oblates and somehow comes to confirm our personal faith; their regard for the Congregation, a concern often more objective, more free from the minutiae and the pettiness of everyday domestic life, helps to purify our view and make it more capable of admiration, of a healthy admiration for what is admirable in us. We need lay people to live healthily!

These friends and lay associates expect a lot from us, especially on the plane of spiritual help and growth in the interior life. Are we responding to their expectations? Very often, I think, we forget this duty. We are content with some prayers and express our gratitude to them. [...]

The MAMI international pilgrimage to Lourdes is an opportunity to examine ourselves on our responsibility to our lay cooperators and to review our attitude in the light of Articles 27 and 28 of our Rules: "Some lay people feel called to active participation in the mission, ministries and community life of the Oblates. Each Province, in agreement

with the General Administration, will determine the rules of their association to the Congregation” (R 27). “Our communities will have at heart to work with the provincial directors of the “Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate” to ensure and animate groups of lay people who wish to participate in the spirituality and apostolate of the Oblates.” (R 28)

May 19

#### COLLABORATION OF OBLATES AND LAY ASSOCIATES

*The Superior General, Fr. Marcello Zago, in continuity with his predecessors, has promoted with great conviction the process of collaboration with the lay associates.*

Many lay associates collaborate with the Oblates in many ways, for example in the ordinary pastoral care of the parish, in some special works of hospitality or renewal, in administrative or domestic services, in extraordinary forms such as popular missions or even in social services. Most of them do this work as volunteers, while others are employed and paid.

What constitutes the lay associate is not the participation in work of the Oblates, but participation in the Oblate charism. Both aspects can be combined, but not necessarily. Participation in the charism cannot be imposed and it is not automatic: it is a response to a vocation. Certainly today, where many people are involved in the institutional work of the Institute (a school, a retreat house, assistance center), it is normal that the Oblates propose the missionary vision of the work and also the Oblate charism. But participation in the charism cannot be imposed. It must be a response to a vocation that comes from the Spirit.

Lay associates who have their own profession can participate in some special Oblate missionary activities, such as popular missions or cooperation in the Third World. [...] This collaboration of the laity can permit them to experience the very heart of the Oblate mission. Others are involved in the work of foreign missions, especially in the field of social works and for more or less prolonged periods. [...] Still, the personal and normal contribution of lay associates is in the ordinary life,

as we have noted above. Collaboration is then in terms of sharing the missionary vision and concrete experiences.

Together we can better understand the situations and needs and we can also better evaluate the most appropriate paths. Together we can also deepen the motivation and increase their zeal. The evangelization of our time cannot be accomplished solely by chosen groups of religious. It must be done together with the laity. I would say that the laity can reach better and more efficiently those who keep their distance and non-Christians. They understand them better and can use a more understandable language.

For the Oblates, promoting lay associates means promoting the evangelizing mission desired by St. Eugene, and in an integral way as demanded by the Church today. Together, Oblates and associates can be renewed in their zeal, their creativity and their effectiveness. This synergy will also renew the spirituality of all because the protagonist of all evangelization is the Holy Spirit, with whom it is important to stay in harmony to collaborate in his work. (M. Zago, *Le role des Laics Associés au charisme oblat dans l'évangélisation*, « Vie Oblate Life » 57 [1998], p. 376-377)

May 20

CARLO DOMENICO ALBINI (1790-1839)  
APOSTLE OF CORSICA

*He was 24 when, in July 1824 during a retreat for former prisoners and misfits, he met Eugene de Mazenod and Father Marius Suzanne, who had been called to give the retreat exercises. Struck by their apostolic zeal, the missionary ideal that animated them and their fraternal relations, he decided to become part of the fledgling congregation. He was soon appointed professor at the seminary of the Oblates in Aix. In February 1825, he took care of the Latin translation of parts of the Constitutions and Rules that were to be submitted for papal approval. It was he who persuaded the Founder to go to Rome to obtain official recognition of the Congregation.*

*Father Albinì preached many missions, taught moral theology at the major seminary of Marseilles that was entrusted to the Oblates and*

was responsible for the spiritual assistance of the Work for Italians in Marseilles. In 1835 he arrived in Corsica, the first Oblate mission outside the continent, to be a formator and professor at the Ajaccio seminary. As a missionary living in the Vico convent, he preached missions in the island with great success. The Founder regarded him as an example for all Oblates because of his apostolic zeal and religious life. They were already then beginning to consider him a saint.

Complete perfection and holiness means to enter into all of God's views and to humbly adore his designs, to want only what He wants, to want everything He wants and how He wants it. [...]

Want to win over the most barbarous, the most jaundiced, and the most imperious man in the world? Let him always see in your manners and your attitude a constant care to show interest in him, to honor him; let him know that you never speak ill of him; let him find you always ready to excuse and cover his weaknesses. I dare say you would in no time certainly inspire him with esteem, friendship, humanity towards you.... (D. Albin, *Écrits spirituels*, 5-Pensées diverses, A.E.a 17)

Zeal is nothing but a prompt and active will to honor God seeking His glory in the conversion of souls. The Blessed Liguori said that a priest never damns himself alone, nor can he save himself alone; he must bring other souls along with him to eternal happiness or damnation, even if he has not the care of souls.... They must continue the work of redemption, as long as there will be souls to win. To free a man from prison, death, serious illness, is a glory that deserves the praise of men. What will delivering souls from eternal death, from the prison of hell, from spiritual disease be!

How is it that we have no zeal for souls? It is because of our little faith. It ignores the price of a soul.... Zeal being only active charity it must have the same qualities to be pleasing to God and profitable to souls. It must be pure and disinterested.... Always appreciate your vocation. Become ever more worthy of it through study and holiness. The more one is holy, the more one does good for souls. Working on one's own sanctification.... (D. Albin, *Écrits spirituels*, 23-Zèle, A.E.c 4)

The precept of brotherly love is called new, *Mandatum novum*, but it is at once old and new. It is old in the matter and substance of the precept; but it is new as regards the motive that leads us to love our brothers, to love them for God. One could say that it is new in its model which is to love as Christ loved us; it is new in its object that extends not only – contrary to what the Pharisees imagined – to our parents, our friends, or those of our nation, but generally to all men for whom Jesus Christ took the place. In olden times we never saw a God made man give himself up to death for men and who taught us to give our own life for our brothers. (D. Albini, *Écrits spirituels*, 49-Charité fraternelle (A.E.d 38)

G. Drago, *L'Apostolo della Corsica, P. Carlo Domenico Albini, o.m.i.*, Roma 1942; L. Delarue, *Prêtre rien que ça. Charles Dominique Albini, o.m.i. (1790-1839)*, Paris, 1870 ; Y. Beaudoin, *Charles Dominique Albini. Biographie. Lettres*, Missionarii OMI, Roma 2014.

*May 21, St. Eugene de Mazenod*

SAINT EUGENE DE MAZENOD (1782-1861)  
THE FOUNDER

*May 21, 1861, St. Eugene de Mazenod's Dies Natalis and his liturgical feast. It should be recalled that on May 21, 1929 the diocesan process for his beatification was closed.*

[Fr. Tempier] announced to the revered sick man [Eugene de Mazenod] that all hope was lost, that the medicines were powerless, and that he should offer to the Lord the sacrifice of his life and prepare for death.... Immediately, the Bishop joined his hands, offered to God, with the greatest faith and the most perfect generosity, both the sacrifice of his life and the sacrifice of everything he was leaving on the earth. He did not hesitate a bit, and from that moment, with an unbridled joy, he wanted only to think of death and speak of death, and he renewed incessantly his act of submission to the divine will.... “I want only one thing, that the holy will of God be done.” [...] And he immediately took his cross in one hand and his rosary in the other, and as he had said, he did



not want to relinquish for even a moment during thirty hours, the cross and the rosary. [...]

One of us recited aloud the usual formula of oblation, the Bishop listened, followed along, and repeated with ineffable happiness those words with which he had consecrated himself to the Lord, and that all his children had pronounced consecrating themselves in turn to the Congregation of which he was the Father and Founder. [...]

Bishop, said one of us, please bless all your Oblates. “Oh! Yes!” He exclaimed. And his failing hands rose with love, an ineffable look upward to gather from heaven the most precious blessing, he lowered his hands to take the Oblate cross, and with this august emblem, so meaningful to us, he blessed all his children with the Crucifix making the sign of the Cross to the various points of the earth.

Bishop, asked one of us, give us a few words we can communicate to all our brothers. They will make them happy! “Tell them that I die happy... that I die happy that the good Lord has deigned to choose me to found in the Church the Congregation of the Oblates.” Bishop, please tell us the last desire of your heart. “Among yourselves practice charity ... charity ... charity ... and outside, zeal for the salvation of souls.” [...]

In heaven and on earth you will always be our Father and our Beloved Father, is it not true, Bishop? “Oh! Yes!” he cried out with an expression that can not be described. [...]

During his last night and during the last day, he kept saying to the people around him: “If I doze off, and I am worse, wake me, please; I want to die knowing that I die.” [...] Oh! How I would like to see myself die, so as to better accept the will of God!” [...]

We recited the *Salve Regina*, which our beloved father understood and followed. At the words: *Nobis post hoc exilium ostende*, he opened his eyes a little; to each of the invocations: *O clemens*, *O Pia*, he made a slight movement. At the third: *O Dulcis Virgo Maria*, he breathed his last. His beautiful soul was before God. (J. Fabre, *Circular Letter* No. 9, May 26, 1861, *Circulaires administratives*, 1, p. 8-13)

May 22

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

*The week from May 21, the feast of St. Eugene, to May 29, the feast of Blessed Joseph Gérard, is traditionally dedicated to prayer for Oblate vocations.*

Christ is first of all the one who calls and summons us, who calls us together, who takes the initiative. This is so because he it is who continues to carry out God's mission, he it is who saves and draws everyone to the Father through his Spirit. "Christ is still calling us today to follow him and to bear witness to his life and mission. Hence, we feel compelled to emphasize the present reality of his call, his invitation to follow him, and the urgent need of being credible in the service of his mission." (*Witnessing as Apostolic Community*, 27) This renewed calling of Christ is at the root of our commitment to formation at all its stages (cf. ib. 26, 32, 37) as well as to our duty and hope in striving for vocations. "The vocations ministry is not optional: 'Jesus never ceases to call people to follow him and to proclaim the Kingdom' (C 52). While we share with every Christian the same baptismal vocation, we are also convinced that God calls us to the specific vocation that is ours as sons of Eugene de Mazenod" (ib. 28). There is continuity between our fidelity to respond to our specific call and the discovery of new vocations. [...]

A community where charity reigns is a sign of the new life brought by Christ. Such a witness is true because it is lived by normal persons, united not by flesh and blood, psychological or ideological affinities, but by faith and love of Christ. It is the sign of the world instituted by Christ in an egotistical and divided world – a still greater sign when lived with perseverance in changing circumstances and not just from the inspiration of passing generosity.

Communal life becomes the motive of credibility in our ministry; it is an invitation to reconciliation, to the overcoming of egoism, to solidarity and justice. It normally gives rise to conversions and vocations because it allows the Lord to be active in us and around us. (M. Zago, *In the Footsteps of St. Eugene. Letters and texts on formation*, General House, Rome 1997, p. 80, 106)

THE FOUNDER'S TESTAMENT

Until the end, Eugene de Mazenod was fully a man, a virile and strong person, but also a person transformed by grace, and who fully accepted his condition of creature. One is reminded of Jesus in the Gospel; my life, no one takes it from me; it is I who give it, and I do so freely. I want only one thing: the perfect fulfillment of God's will.

Eugene de Mazenod was a man of God's will. He was also a man of Jesus Christ, a man of the Church, a man of the Virgin Mary. He wanted to die with the cross in his hand, praying to the Virgin, and with the blessing of the Pope, and carrying in his heart the Oblates of the entire earth.

He dies happy, beaming, as one who has fully completed the work that the Lord has given him to do. He is aware that he could not have done this work alone. He is grateful to God for the companions that God has given him, and also for the Sisters of the Holy Family of Bordeaux that the Lord has joined to his family. These brothers and sisters, he loves them deeply. He has a very vivid awareness of his paternity. He is the Father and will remain so, even after death.

He recommended fraternal ties between the two families; it will be a source of strength and joy for the one and the other.

As for the future of the Oblates, he sees it resting on two bases, two basic attitudes: love among us and, outside, zeal for the salvation of souls.

In both cases, it is the love that flows from ourselves and that we give to others. This is a characteristic of the Founder and is also the fruit of his long experience.

The Congregation will be strong to the extent that its members will love each other, to the extent that they agree to share, to support one another, to help each other and to correct each other, to the extent that they really constitute one body and soul in the implementation of their spiritual and missionary ideal.

In addition, the Congregation will be strong and will grow to the extent that its members, sacrificing every personal ambition, all self-seeking, have but one concern: the glory of God, the service of the

Church and the salvation of souls. That’s how Father de Mazenod wanted his first companions to be in 1815, and it is also how he wanted his disciples to be at the time of death. “Among you charity... charity... charity... and outside, zeal for the salvation of souls!” (F. Jetté, Homily in the chapel of the General House, October 19, 1983, “OMI Documentation”, 131/83, p. 3)

*May 24*

#### EUGENE DE MAZENOD IN THE WORDS OF RECENT POPES

*John XXIII:* This noble and zealous bishop deserved to be placed among the noteworthy figures of the missionary revival movement of modern times, on a par with those priests and prelates who heard the heartbeat of the universal Church beating in their chest. The Institute which he founded in 1826 is now a sturdy tree whose branches stretch over two continents, adapting to the harsh climate of the Arctic, like that of the torrid Equator. (*May 21, 1961*)

*Paul VI:* Be very proud of him, exult with joy! Eugene de Mazenod had a passionate love of Jesus Christ, and was devoted without reservation to the Church! [...] This Pastor and Founder, an authentic witness of the Holy Spirit, launches a fundamental call to all the baptized and to all of today’s apostles: let yourselves be filled by the fire of Pentecost and you will have missionary enthusiasm. (*October 19, 1975*)

*John Paul II:* Eugene de Mazenod was one of those apostles who prepared the modern times, our times. Proclaiming Christ for him meant becoming the fully apostolic man which every age needs, filled with that fervor and missionary zeal that gradually configured him to the risen Christ. He led the faithful to accept Christ with an ever more generous faith, so that they could live fully their vocation as children of God. His influence is not limited to the times in which he lived, but continues even in our time. For the good accomplished by virtue of the Holy Spirit does not perish, but endures in every “now” of history. Thanks be to God! (*December 3, 1995*)

*St. John Paul II's greetings to the Oblates:* I encourage you to persevere in a renewed fraternal union, according to the will of the holy Founder, who thought of the Institute as a family, whose members form one heart and one soul. (September 24, 2004)

*Francis:* The Oblates of Mary Immaculate were born from an experience of mercy which the young Eugène had experienced on a Good Friday before Jesus crucified. May Mercy always be the heart of your mission, of your commitment to evangelize the world today. On the day of his canonization, St John Paul II called Fr de Mazenod a “man of Advent”, docile to the Holy Spirit in reading the signs of the times and in assisting the work of God in the history of the Church. These characteristics are present in you, his sons. May you also be “men of Advent”, able to recognize the signs of the new times and to guide our brothers along the way that God opens up in the Church and in the world. (October 7, 2016)

*May 25, St Madeleine-Sophie Barat*

RENAUD BOUFFARD (1931-1971)  
ASSASSINATED IN HAITI

*Born in Augusta, Maine (USA), he entered the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in 1955. He was ordained a priest in 1961 and sent to Haiti two years later. In 1968 he was named parish priest of St. Anne in Chardonnières, diocese of Les Cayes, where he was working to build a drinking water system. One Sunday, May 23, 1971 during the homily he announced to the parish that the funds for the project had been granted. Three men of his parish thought that Fr. Bouffard would have the money in his house. The night of May 25, 1971, two burglars entered his bedroom on the second floor by an open window. The third one was holding the ladder. He was killed in his bed with a machete.*

*Here is the letter addressed on behalf of the Haitian people to the Superior General announcing the murder of Fr. Renaud:*

Reverend Father Superior,

For thirty years your generous Congregation of OMI has worked in the part of “the vineyard of the Lord”, that is the soil of Haiti.

For thirty years, sacrifices, various religious, social, and community activities, have transformed our world.

For thirty years, with dedication you have done so much good for our families, providing us with the benefits of religion, the light of the education and the benefits of multiple social works.

For thirty years, your Missionaries crisscrossed our plains and our mountains, creating schools, clinics, and building churches.

And behold, today in the person of a vile assassin, we have to offer you in return the tragic sacrifice of one of your best and young priests, Reverend Father Renaud Bouffard, whose generosity was proverbial, and whose dedication and affability so remarkable.

The people, still anguished, shocked, humiliated to the dust by this savage act, know not how to show its grief to you. We tried to do so with the thousands of people of all ranks and all social conditions that accompanied the funeral procession of the victim, by the thousands of hearts that groaned and cried with you for this disastrous loss, to mark its indignation and condemnation of this despicable murder.

We hope that in the persons of the undersigned, who speak for the people, that you will kindly receive our total disavowal of the murder on the night of Monday, May 24, 1971, and accept the expression of their respectful homage and most heartfelt condolences.

To all this we add the unfailing gratitude that the people in the south of the country owe you for all your past favors.

Claude Sicard, Edmond D. Pierre, Emmanuel Villarson.

\* \* \*

#### SAINT MADELEINE-SOPHIE BARAT

*Liturgical memorial. A contemporary of Saint Eugene, Saint Madeleine-Sophie Barat (1779-1865) is the founder of the Dames du Sacré-Coeur. Eugene met Madeleine-Sophie several times and visited them in Amiens, Paris, Switzerland, Rome, and Marseilles. He celebrated his first Masses, soon after his ordination to the priesthood, in their chapel in Amiens and two of his nieces became Dames du Sacré-Coeur nuns.*

*Mgr. de Mazenod et sainte Madeleine-Sophie Barat*, Missions, 69 (1935), p. 635-650 ; Y. Beaudoin, *Saint Eugène de Mazenod et quelques contemporains béatifiés ou canonisés*, « Vie Oblate Life » 67 (2008), p. 340-344.

*May 26, Saint Philip Neri*

#### VISIT TO ST. PHILIP NERI'S ROOMS

*From the beginning of the project of foundation, St. Eugene had in mind the experience of St. Philip Neri of whom he often spoke during his years in the seminary in Paris. In a letter dated October 9, 1815 he wrote to Fr. Tempier: "We will live together in one house, that I have bought, under a Rule we shall adopt with common accord and for which we will draw the elements from the statutes of St. Ignatius, of St. Charles for his Oblates, of St. Philip Neri, of St. Vincent de Paul and of the Blessed Liguori. [...] For the rest, we will not be bound by vows. But I hope that it will be the same with us as with the disciples of St. Philip Neri who, free as we shall remain, would die before thinking of leaving a congregation for which they have the same affection as for their mother." Later he will invite Tempier to "Read again the rule of St. Philip of Neri" (December 15, 1816) Before being a patron of the Congregation he was already patron of the Youth Association of Aix, as Eugene wrote to his friend Forbin Janson, who was visiting Rome, asking him to procure a relic of the saint (June 20, 1814). His name is invoked in the Litany of the Congregation.*

*After one of his visits to St. Philip Neri's rooms in Rome, St. Eugene wrote:*

I had wanted for a long time to celebrate the holy sacrifice in the room occupied by Saint Philip Neri for more than thirty years and to use the same chalice as he did. The other day I went to investigate the situation so as not to be inconveniently disappointed. They gladly promised me that, any day that would suit me, they would be happy to allow me to satisfy all my devotion. I went there this morning and they immediately opened the chapel and prepared the precious chalice. The altar is in the exact small room that the saint lived in, the very same one

in which he was favoured by so many heavenly visions, where he was visited by Saint Charles Borromeo, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, and Saint Felix of Cantalice. That room was the only one in the whole house not damaged by fire, since the Lord did not allow a sanctuary so dear to the piety of the faithful to be taken from them, who come from many different countries of the world to seek good counsel. (*Roman Diary*, April 17, 1826, *Oblate Writings*, 17, p. 140)

Not content with saying holy mass with the chalice of Saint Philip Neri in the room he occupied at *San Girolamo della Carita* and on the altar where his body rests, I had the devotion to say it also in the chapel adjoining the room he used to occupy, and which is the same chapel in which he used to spend so much time celebrating the sacred mysteries. [...] In the entrance room, you can see in glass cabinets the confessional of ordinary wood, and a grill with small holes, the pulpit from which he instructed people, the bed, the little stove to warm himself, shoes, etc. After that I visited the house which is really beautiful, the library that they have entirely preserved. (*Roman Diary*, April 27, 1826, *Oblate Writings*, 17, p. 145-146)

May 27

#### SAINT EUGENE'S HEART

*The main relic that Oblates have of their founder is his heart. Divided into small fragments, it is present on all continents in a similar reliquary on which are written the words he spoke at the moment of his Easter; a synthesis of his life and teaching: "Among you, charity... charity... charity... and outside, zeal for the salvation of souls". The way in which the relic has been preserved seems to say that at the center of Saint Eugene's missionary charism is his heart, from which everything began, and which has sustained and continues to sustain everything....*

Because God predestined me to be the father of a large family in his Church, he gave me a heart of such a quality that it is capable of enfolding all my children. (Eugene de Mazenod, Letter to Fr. Ch. Baret, January 4, 1856, *Oblate Writings*, 12, p. 1)



What I find reassuring is that I am certain God is the chief bond of that union, since what consoles me the most in my friendships is seeing my friends virtuous, as my great joy is to see them do some fine thing, and also that the mere thought that they could be untrue to themselves and stray the least bit from the good road they are following, would deeply wound me. In that same love it is true I am happy too to see them succeed in their endeavours, earning the esteem and praise of worthy men, etc.

I should add that most of them owe their success to my efforts, and their love of virtue to my solicitude. But nevertheless, I believe my fault is that of a father who loves his children too much, all things considered, since for the youngest of my friends, I think that is the kind of love I bear towards them. It would without a doubt be more perfect to love absolutely no one but God; but to reach that state, I believe I would have to love no longer among men. (Retreat, May 1818, *Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 148)

*Fr. Robert Cooke (1821-1882) reports that the Founder once said to him:*

God gives the founders of religious orders the special gifts that are necessary for the special work entrusted to them. St. Ignatius, St. Philip, Blessed Alphonse de Liguori each had a gift especially appropriate to their vocation. For me, my son, although unworthy to compare myself to these great servants of God, I feel that the divine Goodness has endowed me with the gift of a true mother's love for her children.

*P. Joseph Scannell, here reports the episode, and concludes: "But in this so tender love he did not permit any weakness in his relations with his spiritual sons. What he wanted was only to form truly apostolic men, true missionaries of the poor." (Positio super virtutibus betificationis et canonizationis Servi Dei Caroli Josephi Eugenii de Mazenod, vol. II, p. 1038).*

A. Mitri, *Les reliques du coeur du bienheureux Eugène de Mazenod*, "Études oblates" 44 (1985), p. 201-218; É. Lamirande, *Aspects du coeur de Mgr de Mazenod*, "Études oblates" 13 (1954), p. 261-286.

*May 27, 1809, Saint Eugene received the Minor Orders in Paris at the Church of San Sulpice from Cardinal Fesch, Archbishop of Paris.*

*May 28*

# SAINT EUGENE'S PATERNITY

My dear son, it does not matter that you are at the end of the world, for you are always present to my heart, which feeds itself on the love that I feel for you. Believe that this is the feeling that is uppermost in my soul.... You could never love me with one hundredth of the love with which I love you. God, who destined me to be the father of a large family, has made me a sharer in the immensity of his love for men. (Eugene de Mazenod, Letter to Fr. Faraut, May 1, 1852, *Oblate Writings*, 2, p. 40-41)

I have seen many religious Orders. I am in very intimate relations with those that are most regular. Well, apart from their virtues I also give them credit for a great *esprit de corps*; however, this more than paternal love that the head has for the members of the family, this cordial affinity of the members for their head which establishes between them a relationship springing from the heart and which forms true family ties between us - father to son, son to father - this, I have not come across anywhere else. I have always thanked God for it as a particular gift which he has deigned to grant me; for it is the temper of heart that he has given me, this expansive love which is my own gift and which pours itself out on each one of them without taking anything from the others, just like, I make bold to say, God's love for men. I am saying that it is this sentiment, which I know comes from Him who is the source of all charity, which has evoked in the hearts of my children this reciprocity of love which forms the distinctive character of our beloved family. May this help us mutually to appreciate the beauty of our vocation and may it all be attributed to God for his greater glory. This is the most ardent wish of my heart. (Eugene de Mazenod, Letter to Fr. Mouchette, December 2, 1854, *Oblate Writings*, 11, p. 253-254)

I love my sons immeasurably more than any human person could love them. That is a gift that I have received from God, for which I do not cease to thank him, because it flows from one of his most beautiful attributes and because I have reason to believe that he may perhaps not have granted it to anyone else in the same proportion as he has to me. That is no doubt because of the position that he has deigned to give me in his Church. I am certain that other fathers of many families, quite certainly more holy than I, have not, however, received this gift to the same degree. (Eugene de Mazenod, Letter to Fr. Mouchette, April 24, 1855, *Oblate Writings*, 11, p. 266)

I have entered into my sixty-ninth year. Were I to have to die today, the reason for my greatest consolation would be to leave behind me in the Church of God a family so numerous and so devoted to the Church and the salvation of souls. (Eugene de Mazenod, Letter to Fr. Ricard, October 29, 1850, *Oblate Writings*, 1, p. 244-245)

May 29

BLESSED JOSEPH GÉRARD (1831-1914)  
APOSTLE OF LESOTHO

*A meeting with the Missionaries of Mary Immaculate kindled in him the desire to go to the foreign missions and for this purpose he entered the novitiate at Notre Dame de l'Osier. After his novitiate (1852), he was ordained deacon by Eugene de Mazenod. He arrived in the Vicariate Apostolic of Natal (South Africa) on February 19, 1853 and was ordained a priest. After some ministry among the Zulus, he turned to the Basotho, thus becoming the apostle of Lesotho. To those who questioned him about the secret of his apostolic success, he replied: "Beyond all the secret methods to touch and transform hearts there is Love. One must love, love in spite of everything and always." On May 22, he celebrated Mass for the last time, and May 29, 1914, at the age of 84 he gave up his soul to God. John Paul II, on a visit to Maseru, beatified him on September 15, 1988.*

*Here are a few of his thoughts:*

In the confessional, avoid reproaches. At the start, listen with kindness, patience, show your sorrow, and send them away gently. [...] Not to hesitate or evade when someone asks me to go to confession. Not to ask who wants me, since everyone has the right to ask me. The good Lord is with me, Mary the refuge of sinners is with me. The angel and patron of this person are saints of the good Lord. But the Lord is a good father. He is the one who sent them to me. Let's always receive them well. Would you like to go to confession? Yes, well, that's good, you are doing something good. I will strive to do everything to help you. Go, my child, to the chapel for a little while to prepare. I will follow you there. Do not fail to greet them, touch their hand, calling them by name.... (Annual retreat ending on February 17, 1905, *Oblate Writings*, II, 4, p. 252-253)

There is another form of preaching for a good priest: the apostolate of conversation. This foot apostolate, *sermo pedestris*, is carried out in the streets, the fields, the family home, or at the bedside of a sick person. How many souls are brought back especially when the heart helps the word! (Annual retreat, summer 1886, *Oblate Writings*, II, 4, p. 228).

You catch more flies with an ounce of honey than with a barrel of vinegar. To convert someone, you must first of all win his heart, make yourself loved. Among the natives nothing can be done if one does not become loveable. Win the heart to yourself, and you will gain the whole person. (Annual retreat, November 26, 1882, *Oblate Writings*, II, 4, p. 217)

I am very near to completing my career; I do very little work. It consists in visiting homes of old men and women who can no longer come to the Mission, so that they can make their Easter duty and to prepare them for the proximate departure for heaven. In their home I also give instructions to old pagan men and women who are far away and want to make peace with the good Lord. Just recently, it was the turn for an old man of 70 or 80 years who made his first communion. After having fought against grace for a long time, he accepted a medal of Saint Benedict and was converted. We often use this method which God

crowns with success. (Letter to Bishop Dontenwill, Roma, Basutoland, July 2, 1912, *ibid.*, p. 171)

I have no more interest in this world; I have only one desire, that of loving and promoting love for the Sacred Heart. (Letter to Cassien Augier, Superior General, January 8, 1906, *ibid.*, p. 156) How good it is to be in the Heart of Jesus, to live there and how sweet it will be to die there.... (Notes for a homily on devotion to the Sacred Heart, May 6, 1904, *ibid.*, p. 249) I must, I tell myself, give myself completely to loving our good Master, his Sacred Heart which is so good to me, to make him loved, to live in him, for him. Like him. (The end of the retreat, February 14 and 15, 1906, *ibid.*, p. 253) I have a great desire to end my life in a holy way, to do all of my actions well in their own time, one after the other, with the best intention, to glorify the good Lord in all of them. (Retreat, February 18, 1907, *ibid.*, p. 257)

A. Roche, *Clartés australes, Joseph Gérard, o.m.i., "le prêtre bien-aimé des Basotho"*, éd. Du Chalet, Lyon 1951, 396 p.; Y. Beaudoin, *Blessed Joseph Gérard, o.m.i., Apostle to the Basotho (1831-1814), Oblate Writings*, II, 3, Rome 1988, 158 p.

May 30

#### SAINT EUGENE: THE LOVE OF A MOTHER

You are aware, my very dear son, that my big failing is to love with a real passion the children God in his goodness has given me. No mother's love comes close to it. Perfection would lie in being indifferent to the greater or lesser extent that this maternal affection were reciprocated. That is where I fall down. (Eugene de Mazenod, Letter to Fr. C. Baret, January 17, 1851, *Oblate Writings*, 11, p. 30)

It is not possible to give you an idea of how much this heart loves you. I would like to be able to put what I feel into words. God, who gave it to me, understands. So let us return to him and merge all our sentiments with his. (Letter to Fr. Guinet, September 7, 1852, *Oblate Writings*, 11, p. 100)

I do not know how my heart is equal to the affection which it nourishes for you all. It is a prodigy which is something of an attribute of God. [...] No, there is not on this earth a creature to whom God has accorded the favour of loving so tenderly, so strongly, so constantly so great a number of persons. Here it is not simply a question of charity; no, it is a maternal sentiment which refers to each of you, without prejudice for the others. No one among you could be loved more than I love him. I love each one fully as if he were the only beloved and I experience this really exquisite feeling for each one. It is wonderful! (Letter to Fr. Dassy, January 10, 1852, *Oblate Writings*, 11, p. 69-70)

I wish I had four hands so that I could write at the same time to all my dear Fathers to whom I would be glad to give a sign of my fatherly love, at least now and again. They know how much I love them and that they are always present to my memory as they live in my heart, which age will never cause to grow cold. (To the Oblates in the Diocese of Saint Boniface, May 26, 1854, *Oblate Writings*, 2, p. 75)

My dearly loved son, I cannot resist my need to tell you in writing at least once the tender paternal affection which I express orally each time that I have the happiness of seeing you.

Often I have told the good Lord that, since he has given me a mother's heart and sons who merit my love under so many titles, he must allow me to love them immeasurably. This I do in good conscience. It seems to me, dearly loved son, that the more I love someone like yourself, the more I love God who is the source and bond of our mutual affection. This sentiment is a permanent feature in my soul: I bear it with me wherever I may be.... (Letter to Fr. Mouchette, March 22, 1857, *Oblate Writings*, 12, p. 48-49)

One heart is enough for me, my dear Fr. Aubert, to love all the children whom God has given me, but I would need ten hands if I were to tell them all so. (Letter to Fr. Aubert, April 20, 1858, *Oblate Writings*, 2, p. 176)

May 31, Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

THE GLORY OF PROVIDING SERVICE AT A MARIAN SHRINE

*The Oblates' second house is a Marian shrine: Our Lady of Laus (1818). In the Acts of Visitation in 1835, Eugene de Mazenod expresses the joy of seeing the devotion to Mary flourish, in keeping with the vocation of the Oblate Missionaries.*

One can not but be filled with joy when considering the increase of the piety and devotion of the people towards the Blessed Virgin ever since our Congregation has the glory of serving in this shrine. Everyone is struck by it. If necessary one could write here the testimony of the parish priest of Chorges who has always lived in Laus, even before our coming, and many other people who observe this fact every day. All rightly attribute it to the care that the Congregation has always had in accomplishing its mission in this place of blessing.

Hence a growing influx of pilgrims who flock to the feet of our Good Mother, sure to meet on the steps of the earthly throne of the Queen of Heaven the zealous ministers of her divine son, commissioned especially to reconcile sinners upon whom this Mother of mercy pleads with her powerful protection for the gift of forgiveness and peace. Hence the many conversions; a renewal of fervor in many pious souls drawn to the shrine by the good scent of Mary's perfume, by the splendor of the mighty works that she continues to do, and it must be said, by the edification they receive at seeing a regular community....

Is it not a wonderful sight? When you consider that the Lord gives our Congregation the means of carrying out in one place precisely all the purposes of the Institute – because it is from here that our missionaries go out to evangelize the neighboring populations as well those that are far away, and that this center, this home, is precisely one of the most famous shrines of our Holy Mother and patroness, – is this not something to fill us with joy and happiness; or rather perhaps something to make us humble before God for our impotence to recognize such a gift, such a wonderful protection?" (Eugene de Mazenod, Proceedings of the *Act of Visitation of the house of N.D. du Laus*, October 18, 1835, DM IX 4)





# June

**T***raditionally the month of June is dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. So we will meditate on this mystery, the expression of Christ's love. Other aspects of Oblate spirituality on which we will focus this month are oblation, and service to the bishops and the Pope.*

*June 1*

## DEVOTION TO THE SACRED HEART

*St. Eugene's devotion to the Sacred Heart is evident in the years after his return from exile. In 1808 he became part of the circle of friends who Fr. Magi, a former Jesuit, had gathered in Marseilles around the statue of the Sacred Heart. There he met Julie de Glandevès, to whom he confided his desire to enter the seminary and with whom he kept up a correspondence showing their common love of the Sacred Heart and their desire to spread the devotion to it.*

*After returning to Aix as a priest, St. Eugene founded the Confraternity of the Sacred Heart at the Church of the Mission.*

*December 23, 1807 he wrote to his friend Emmanuel Gaultier de Claubry, who was stationed in Modena, Italy:*

How I wish I were in a position to talk more clearly with you! You would be a help to me not only by your prayers, but also by your example, and at your side I would be more courageous in the battle and more assured of victory. But since such a union is unfortunately impossible, let us make this separation more endurable by a more frequent correspondence: let us fix a spiritual rendezvous in the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ every Sunday at 10:30 a.m., an hour at which the holy sac-

rifice is solemnly celebrated in every Church. There we will pray at the same hour for our mutual needs, and through our union, we will so to speak compel the tender heart of our Redeemer to apply in our regard in a special way the merits of his Passion and Death. (*Oblate Writings*, 14, p. 42.)

*He often spoke of the Heart of Jesus when writing to his mother:*

[Remember] that in honouring the Sacred Heart of Jesus one is drawing on God’s love at the wellspring, and that in paying homage to Mary’s you are reminding her of all the tenderness she showed for us on Calvary, when her divine Son bound us to her to be her children.... (End of April of the same year, 1809, accompanying the letter with images of the Sacred Hearts, *Oblate Writings*, 14, p. 121-122)

The feast of the Sacred Heart is the feast of Christ’s love for us. It is therefore necessary to love others with the power of the love of Christ (May 1, 1811)

I must confess that I feel a sense of confidence that astounds me; as it does not rest on my own strength but is based solely on the merits and mercy of Our Saviour, nothing can shake it. (May 30, 1809, *Oblate Writings*, 14, p. 126.)

Let us take a look now and again at our crucifix; we will find in our divine Model’s wounds the answer to all our miserable excuses. It is in this faithful mirror that we will discern what he will tolerate and what he forbids. Let us open our hearts to his, listen to his voice, let’s not stupefy ourselves and then we’ll see if all the petty reasoning of the world’s followers doesn’t collapse and dissolve before a single one of the rays of light that emanate from Our Lord when we have recourse to him in silence and meditation. (St. Eugene to his sister, February 9, 1811, *Oblate Writings*, 14, p. 176)

R. Motte, *Sacred Heart* in the DOV, 811-821; B. Dullier, *Saint Eugène de Mazenod et le Sacré-Cœur*, “Vie Oblate Life” 66 (2007), p. 43-77.

CONFORMITY TO THE REDEEMER

One has only to read the Preface, among other passages of the Rule, to be convinced how this obsession to be a worthy worker in the divine work spurs the Oblate towards full conformity with the Redeemer who loves and evangelizes the people, pleading with loud cries for his brothers and “offering the Holy Victim for them” (Jn 17:19).

And it is likewise through the apostolate, that is to say by the passionate gift of his whole being to the cause of God, the Church, and souls, that he wants to achieve the royal command in which lies all Perfection.

Hence the characteristic of both the supreme requirement for the gift of self, expressed by the very name “Oblate”, and of the broad freedom as regards any particular form of a mathematical asceticism.

Hence also the special expression even of his attachment to Christ: it is a personal and direct tribute, an absolute commitment to the beloved Master, the laborious Savior, the King who must reign and yet deigns to need his missionary. The enthusiasm with which he answers the call and enters the Cause totally, selflessly, but assured that He, the incomparable Friend, will look after him: *Scio cui crediti* – I know Him in whom I have believed (2 Tim 1:12). (Y. Guéguen, *Missionnaire Oblat de Marie Immaculée*, Éditions des Études oblates, [Ottawa], 1947, p. 93)

VITAL GRANDIN (1829-1902)

MISSIONARY BISHOP AT THE NORTH POLE

*On June 3, 1902, Bishop Vital Grandin died at the age of 73. His famous words: “More than for my head, they made me bishop for my legs”; “In these Nordic lands, more than the miter on one’s head, you have to have snowshoes and walk, walk, walk ...”*

*As a child in mid-nineteenth century France, he prayed the rosary, read the lives of saints and gazed entranced at the beauty of nature*

while grazing the livestock. Attracted by the missions, at the age of 22 he went to Paris to enter the seminary of the Foreign Missions. Not finding him suitable – among other things he had a slight speech impediment – they recommended that he go home. The Oblates welcomed him! In 1854, soon after his ordination, he left for the missions of northern Canada, where he worked in the diocese of St. Boniface, which at the time was the size of Europe but with only 12 priests. Five years later he was consecrated bishop by St. Eugene. The Canadian bishops had singled him out to Pope Pius IX as “the worthiest among the worthy.” He faced long and exhausting trips amid the snow and ice to proclaim the Gospel.

He never felt up to his mission: sickly, shy, touchy, very sensitive, inadequate cultural preparation; and then the impossible climate, and extreme poverty. In all this his trust in God, his heroic tenacity would shine brightly. It was no coincidence that he chose as his episcopal motto *Infirma mundi elegit Deus*: God chose what is weak.

Among the thousands of stories that still pass from mouth to mouth about him, the interview with Pius IX must be seen in the context of the times in which it was unthinkable that an oil lamp did not burn beside the tabernacle. The bishop explained to the Pope that in the frigid north the missionaries could not afford such luxury.

- I cannot allow you to keep the Blessed Sacrament without a lamp except in the case of persecution, the Pope replied.

- Most Holy Father, we are not persecuted; but we have to face the cold, hunger, poverty and many other sufferings. If you take away the Lord, what will we do? With tears in his eyes he continued to tell the Pope about the terrible living conditions the missionaries had to endure, the difficulties of travel, the dangers of loneliness.

Pius IX was listening intently and moved. When dismissing him he said:

- You need to have the Lord near. In your life of sacrifice and deprivation you have the merit of martyrdom without having the glory. The next day the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda summoned him and said to him: I do not know what you said to the Pope but you missionaries get everything you want. He has allowed you to keep the Blessed Sacrament without the lamp.

E. Breton, *Vital Grandin, La merveilleuse aventure de "L'évêque sauvage", des Prairies du Grand Nord*, Librairie Arthème Fayard, Paris et Montréal, 1960; F. J. Dolphin, *Indian Bishop of the West*, Novalis, Ottawa, 1986.

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JEAN JOSEPH HIPPOLYTE COURTÈS (1798-1863)  
SUPERIOR OF THE AIX COMMUNITY

*June 3, 1863 Fr. Hippolyte Courtès died in Aix. He was superior of the Aix community from 1823 until his death. St. Eugene wrote to him:*

My dear son, why do you consider yourself to be merely an ordinary member of the Congreg[atio]n? In my opinion, you are one of its pivotal points, you form part of the structure's foundations, you are identified and united with the Head, and so you must expect to experience all the vicissitudes, to withstand all the shocks, to fight offensively and defensively according to the Institute's need. This is a kind of solidarity which you and an infinitely small number of others share with me. (March 5, 1837, *Oblate Writings*, 9, p. 17-18)

M. L'Hermite, *Le R.P. Courtès - sa vie, ses pensées*, Aix 1868.

*June 4*

IDENTITY OF THE LAY ASSOCIATES, IMPASSIONED FOR JESUS CHRIST

*The first international congress of lay associates was held in Aix-en-Provence from May 18 to 21, 1996. It was attended by 32 lay people and 11 Oblates. The laity came from 13 countries, representing each of the Oblate regions: 11 from Europe, 8 from Canada, 5 from the United States, 4 from Latin America, 2 from Asia-Oceania and 2 from Africa-Madagascar. A final document was drafted and voted on: "Impassioned for Christ, the Church and the Mission." The first part of the document treats of the identity of the lay associate. The text reads:*

In response to a call from Christ, Lay Associates live their baptism, enlightened as they are by the charism of Eugene de Mazenod. Animated by a family spirit, they share among themselves and with Oblates the same spirituality and missionary outlook.

Lay Associates are *impassioned for Jesus Christ*. They are disciples of his in the footsteps of the Apostles. They give living witness to Christ the Saviour in the midst of the world. They deepen their relationship with Christ through their frequent contact with the Word of God, meditation, prayer and liturgy. The Eucharist and the Gospel are well-spring and center of their whole life. Their model is Mary who gives Christ to the world.

Lay Associates are *impassioned for Mission*. Impassioned for humanity, they have faith in the dignity of every person before God. They see the reality of the world through the eyes of Christ the Saviour and Evangelizer. Fully involved in secular realities, they make the family one of the priorities of their mission. They live this mission with daring, initiative, creativity and perseverance. They give value to proximity, to attention for and listening to persons. They reach out to them. They make a privileged option for the poor with many faces. They name, denounce and fight injustices, all the while making certain to take an active part in the history of their people.

Like the Founder, they love the Church, the *Body of Christ*, the People of God - sign and instrument of Jesus Christ in today's world and its new calls. They wish to build as Church, to answer to the challenges of today's world and to new calls.

Lay Associates have a *living link with the Oblates*, normally with a community. This link may vary in form according to situations, but it is essential.

Oblates and Lay Associates acknowledge their need for each other. There is a living relationship of reciprocity in openness, trust and respect for every person's vocation. All deepen Eugene de Mazenod's charism according to their own specific vocation and enrich others with their discoveries and experiences. Oblates and Lay Associates live and complement one another in mutual growth.

Lay Associates and Oblates come together to renew their lives and their commitments in the world - in the light of the Word of God and of

the Founder's charism. The identity of Associates, however, is realized as well through their associating among themselves.

To be Associates supposes a simple *lifestyle*, marked by togetherness, characterized by charity, fraternity and openness to others. They are persons of prayer. Conscious of their poverty before God and before others, they live in solidarity with the people of their area.

Various modes of formal or informal *commitment* are possible, according to Regions and the will of the Lay Associates themselves. (Cf. M. Zago, *Laity*, DOV, p. 510-511)

June 5

#### THE CONGREGATION IS BORN OF THE DIVINE HEART

Surely the vital center of the Oblate is the eagerly contemplated, admired, and loved person of Jesus Christ. On each page of the Rules, as in St. Paul, this name, this ideal, this leader appears. It is for Him and for His Kingdom that the Oblate gives himself; it is on him that he fixes his gaze, in the heart to heart of daily meditation; it is by looking at Him that he hopes to fill himself with His attitudes, thoughts and ambitions worthy of his apostolate. With his eyes pausing by preference on the Master's kindness and love, his devotion is directed naturally to the Heart of Jesus. This is a very traditional form of our piety, and we can say that the Congregation is "born of the Divine Heart," so intense, unanimous, and remarkable for the time was the cult and love of the Father and the first disciples. (Y. Guéguen, *Missionnaire Oblat de Marie Immaculée*, Éditions des Études oblates, [Ottawa], 1947, p. 144)

The Oblates love Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, our Savior. To love Jesus is to love love itself. It's to love God's love for humanity.... The Oblate loves Jesus so much that he becomes the *per Ipsum, cum Ipso et in Ipso* of his daily Mass. And this love asks the Oblate to devote himself entirely to the service of Jesus in a true spirit of adoration and in atonement for the sins of the world.... (L. Deschâtelets, *Oblate spirituality*, "Études oblates" 8 [1949], p. 158)

## WHO IS CHRIST FOR THE OBLATE?

Christ interests us probably by the mysteries of his being human and divine, his divinity, his humanity, his role as Savior, his priesthood, his kingship, his teaching, his mercy, etc. If there is a one angle, however, which does not exclude any other mystery, but contains them all, it is the role of Savior, Redeemer, of which we are collaborators, because of our special vocation. We are called to spread to everyone, but especially to the poor, the good news of salvation he brings us on earth and to be agents of his mercy to sinners that we bring back to Him through preaching. So we must cultivate in ourselves feelings of the deepest veneration, the most devoted love, and therefore, we must walk in his footsteps, imitating in all things his virtues and examples. (J. Pétrin, *Qui est le Christ pour l'Oblat de Maria Immaculée*, "Études oblates" 18 [1959], p. 162)

First of all, the Oblate is a consecrated person. This sums up the thought of Bishop De Mazenod. The Oblate is bound to God, to Christ, to Jesus, to the Son of God. The Word made flesh is central for the life of the Oblate who is committed, in a way, to live Jesus in everything and in every way. This, for me, is essential. Therein lies the grace of the Oblate. He must be the prisoner of the love of Christ, he must be seized, seized by Christ, just like St. Paul. For me to live, he must say, it is Christ. If you understand this, you understand what an Oblate is. The Oblate loves Christ, lets himself be filled with Him, this is his special grace, this is part of his charisma. If I do not have this deep in my heart, if this love of Christ does not fill my whole person, I am not an Oblate like the Founder wanted and like our living tradition has integrated it. (L. Deschâtelets, to the novices at Marino, Italy, March 15, 1973)



June 6

FRANÇOIS BOUSSO (1881-1944)  
MARTYRED BY THE NAZIS

*After entering the Oblates at the beginning of the century, he went to the Far North as a missionary. He returned to France in 1923 for health reasons and served as parish priest in the diocese of Bayeux. During the war, he was parish priest near Caen and helped the Resistance network of Cahors-Asturias placing a transmitter and messages in the church steeple or in the harmonium. A betrayal caused his arrest. He was shot with his companions, June 6, 1944.*

All for God, all for his people. There he is in the middle of the Indian tribes scattered over the vast expanses of Slave Lake. To be closer to them, he learns English, and adopts their language; he goes to meet them despite the distances, despite the cold. Fearlessness, because nothing stops him, he feels no cold in his eyes nor in his heart; fearlessness, yes, that is part and parcel of his missionary approach.

But doing so much, giving so much and in such circumstances, the man burns out. He must absolutely be repatriated. He will not return to his beloved Indians.

A country pastor: he wrote in the parish bulletin in 1935: "I must admit that I do not like to be seen as a hero. I've never been one and I am but a poor servant of God. I try to be a good servant of souls."

A resistance pastor: it is through his legendary charity that the Father joined the resistance. Many young people who are opposed to forced labor come from the cities in particular, seeking to hide themselves. The Father, a chatterer as much as he his charitable, does not hesitate. He knows his people, he knows well the hospitality of the farms, and he was quick to find them a place and thus resolve their dangerous situation. (P. Emile Vallée, Homily at the memorial Mass, June 4, 1994)

G. Fournier, *Si près de la liberté... En mémoire de l'abbé Bousso et de ses compagnons de Résistance exécutés à Caen le 6 juin 1944*, Caen, 1995.

June 7

## THE PROCESSION OF THE SACRED HEART

*Taking up the tradition established by his predecessor Mgr. De Bel-sunce, St. Eugene had restored in Marseilles the procession of the Sacred Heart which had been banned by the French Revolution. It was for him a true feast each time, one that gave him great joy. In 1856 he wrote:*

Our great Feast of the Sacred Heart this year was spoiled by pouring rain which began the day before and gave little hope of ending.

The pontifical office took place in spite of that but since it continued to rain heavily after lunch, it was uncertain if the procession could be held. Without doubt there was a great number of good souls who were praying that the victory march which we wished to give to our divine Saviour would not be nullified by these adverse circumstances. As pastor, it was my duty, for my part, not to forget to beg the divine Master to use all his power in these conditions. At the *Memento* of the Mass I was inspired to pray trustingly and to promise to offer the Holy Sacrifice on the following day in thanksgiving for this favour which I hoped to receive from his mercy. It was this trust which sustained me and which convinced me to decide, while everybody still remained in a state of uncertainty, that the procession would take place if the rain stopped. In fact, it ceased raining at about three o'clock. The weather was still threatening and there were clouds all around the horizon. No matter! Counting on God's protection, I persisted.

The procession took place and the clouds remained suspended above our heads, respecting the honour we were paying to the Master who commands the elements. I continued thanking the Lord throughout the procession and invoking his all-powerful might to the glory of his holy name, the edification and the protection of the numerous faithful who had come together to honour him. It would be impossible to describe the beauty of that gathering which filled the whole length of the Cours. The procession was concluded there after I had pronounced the Act of Amendment in a very loud voice and the blessing which I gave to more than one hundred thousand souls gathered in this vast Cours and

in the surrounding streets. How can we not acknowledge the power of Our Lord Jesus Christ on this occasion? The rain stopped only to give time for the triumphal procession to take place. Not a drop fell during the whole period which lasted not less than four hours. When the Lord had returned to his temple and when everybody had gone home, the rain began to fall again with even greater intensity and it was such that the procession would have had to be abandoned if it had begun half an hour earlier. (Diary, May 30, 1856, *Oblate Writings*, 22, p. 71-72)

June 8

#### A SPECIAL DEVOTION TO THE SACRED HEART

*The General Chapter of 1873 decreed the consecration of the entire Congregation to the Sacred Heart. It was done for the first time on August 8, during the closing of the Chapter. The Directory of Novices and Scholastics of 1876 (p. 153) presents it as a “special” devotion in the Congregation:*

This devotion must be a special devotion for all Oblates, especially since the consecration of the entire Congregation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was made at the 1873 General Chapter.

The Heart of Jesus is the tabernacle of his divinity, the source of his life, the focus of his love, the channel of his graces, the instrument of his mercies. It should therefore be the subject of a devotion very dear to the heart of a missionary, especially as our Lord has committed himself to provide souls devoted to his divine Heart the grace to convert the greatest sinners and make their apostolic work bear abundant fruit.

June 9

#### CHRIST IS THE GREAT OBLATE

The supreme norm of religious life is not an abstract doctrine, it is a person, Jesus Christ, who is brought to life now. We have to make our own, on a human scale, the actions and attitudes of the God-Man. But it pleased God to assign to each religious family the imitation of a particu-

lar aspect of the life of Jesus, the observance of a particular virtue, so that while practicing all of them, it is distinguished by the eminent exercise of one or the other, which becomes the dominant trait of its spiritual physiognomy. Now, when God gives a name, he at the same time assigns a mission, a task to carry out, a program to follow. Likewise, the Church, God's representative, by awarding us the title of Oblate, so dear to our hearts, seems to define as our first goal to honor, reproduce, revive the offering of Christ, especially to practice the virtues involved in the offering of Christ: his ardent love of God and souls, zeal, self-sacrifice, obedience, and humility.

Christ is the great Oblate. The Letter to the Hebrews tells us that the first act of Jesus upon entering this world was an act of oblation. And this initial oblation continued without interruption for 33 years until the solemn oblation of the Cross. This oblation of every minute was in fact consummated on Calvary, because that is where God accepted forever the oblation of his Son.

Christ is Mary's Oblate, and this way of speaking comes from a strict theological rigor. In the Incarnation, he offers himself in Mary. Not content with being the altar of this first oblation, in the words of Mr. Olier, Mary joins actively and freely in offering the one whom God gave her for the salvation of the world. At the Presentation in the Temple, it is through the hands of Mary that Jesus offers himself to God the Father. God thus receives Jesus from Mary. All his life will be so; it will be so at his death. Mary is forever associated with the oblation of Jesus and that to a degree and in a way that it is exclusively hers: she offers Jesus and this treasure to God for the salvation of humanity. Who could argue that it is a pious exaggeration to call Jesus an Oblate of Mary? (*Pour une spiritualité oblate. Compte rendu des réponses à l'enquête sur la spiritualité oblate*, "Études oblates" 10 [1951], p. 99-100)

June 10

## NO LIMIT TO OUR HOLINESS

Oblate priests and religious; there is no limit to our personal holiness: *usque ad apicem perfectionis*! There are also no limits to our zeal *usque ad internecionem*! ... To be a missionary in the spirit of Father de

Mazenod, means one has understood the *vae mihi si non evangelizavero* and the *superimpendar* of Saint Paul. One certainly cannot be one only half, but fully: *Ut sint toti verbo et exemplo* (*Preface*).

Therefore, does not our title of *Oblates* seem truly justified? Is not this priestly, religious and missionary life a total giving of ourselves, a thorough commitment, an oblation without limits? ... What really constitutes us in our vocation, in our mission, is *a greater degree of commitment to the service of God and souls*, a passionate giving of self in the service of God, his glory, his love and his infinite mercy ... *an unlimited oblation of ourselves*, which means that people cannot define us other than by saying: “These are Oblates par excellence.” [...]

In contemplating the great figure of Bishop de Mazenod, reading his letters, or meditating on the text of our Rules, does it not seem that that is what engraves the Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate permanently in the Church’s history? Our most characteristic spirit, we like to repeat, is that spirit of oblation without reserve that is reflected in our name and is undoubtedly the spirit and the letter of our Constitutions....

Such an *oblation*, such an ardent and absolute commitment to the service of divine love, the Church and the poor souls can only be born, sustained and intensified in us, by a deep union with Jesus our Savior and Redeemer, personified Love and Mercy, but also in union with Mary Immaculate, our Mother: *in Matrem semper habebunt*, and our Queen “*Regina Congregationis nostrae*.” (L. Deschâtelets, *Circular Letter* No. 191, 15 August, 1951, *Circulaires administratives*, 5, p. 24-28).

June 11

#### OBLATUS EST QUIA IPSE VOLUIT

*During the novitiate, the future Fr. Joseph Gérard meditating on “Oblate”, the name that would characterize him, wrote the following in his notes:*

There, it seems, is a name given us by heaven. This name touched me and struck me with an inexpressible attraction. In fact, it is the essential name of Our Lord Jesus Christ: *Oblatus est quia ipse voluit* (Is.

53:7). From eternity Our Lord Jesus Christ has continually been in a state of sacrifice and immolation for us, and on our altars he leads a life of total immolation and love; ceaselessly he offers himself as a victim to the heavenly Father to give him thanks, to adore his divine Majesty, to restrain his avenging arm and to gain graces for us....

The Oblate of Mary Immaculate should always keep this beautiful name before his eyes, should always be in the state of a victim who only awaits the knife of the one who offers the sacrifice, and that for his own sins and those of the people he is evangelizing....

Someday I will have the joy of being an Oblate, through the grace of God and my good Mother, the Blessed Virgin. So! Oblate means a man who is immolated, a man offered as a victim to Our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, for me to grasp the full meaning of this beautiful name which Our Lord Jesus Christ bears essentially, I must offer myself as a victim to the Heart of Jesus, continually and totally, for my sins and for those of others. Ah! What glory, what happiness: to be like Our Lord Jesus Christ, Our Lord Jesus Christ crucified. My God, since the world persecutes you, despises you, tramples you underfoot, grant that the world may also persecute me, despise me, and reduce me to powder so I can imitate you in everything, and that I may truly be an Oblate, your companion and disciple....

The virtue which should typify the Oblate of Mary Immaculate is the spirit of sacrifice. As his name indicates, he is a victim in the good Lord's hands, presented by the purest hands of our good Mother. Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist is his model. Thus, the Oblate should be like a small host in the priest's hands. Ah! Great God! What a spirit of sacrifice! You, Great Lord, my savior, to be nothing more than a little bread! What humility! You, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, you don't even have the aspect of a man any more, of an animal! Ah! Will I complain, when everyone crushes me under foot? What obedience, to leave heaven at the command of a bad priest, what mortification! (Blessed J. Gérard, *Oblate Writings*, II, 4, p. 189-191).

June 12

BLESSED JÓZEF CEBULA (1902-1941)  
MARTYR AT MAUTHAUSEN

*Father Józef Cebula is the first Oblate to be recognized as a martyr by the Church. He was beatified on June 13, 1999 by John Paul II along with 107 companions, victims like him of the Nazi fury.*

*Born into a family of Polish origin on March 23, 1902 in Malnia, a small village in Upper Silesia, he decided to become an Oblate during a pilgrimage to the Marian shrine of Piekary.*

*Ordained a priest on June 5, 1927, his main ministry was in formation. When the Nazis invaded Poland, he continued his ministry in spite of the severe restrictions, until he was imprisoned in Mauthausen. May 9, 1941, after shooting him they dragged him, still alive, to the crematorium.*

During the days of his house arrest, Father Cebula's life was difficult. It became even more difficult after the deportation of the priests to the concentration camps. With two Oblate brothers, he occupied one room and in their company endured their bad lot. What precautions did he not have to take, what care did he not have to take to avoid putting himself or the others in jeopardy when he fulfilled his priestly ministry! During the day, he worked as a simple laborer; during the night he celebrated Mass; in secrecy and in disguise, he brought consolation to the dying, blessed marriages and baptized the newly born. In February of 1941, they categorically forbade him to do any priestly ministry whatever. In spite of that he celebrated the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass every day at midnight in the outbuildings of the farm or often even in the cellar, attended by only one brother.

He had a presentiment that the time he had to bring Jesus down to the martyred land of Kujawy would not last long. April 2, after celebrating Mass at midnight he told the brother who had always remained faithful to him: "Brother, today I have celebrated my offering to God for the last time. I advise you to confess your sins to me for the last time."

Everything happened as he had foretold. During the noon meal, the police burst in and took Father Cebula away to the camp of Inowrolaw. There, he found other priests and underwent severe torture at the same time as Bishop Kozal, future martyr of Dachau. They were separated at Poznah and, April 7, he arrived at the concentration camp of Mau-thausen. (From the account of Father Jan Nawarat, OMI, in J. Pielorz, *Le bienheureux Józef Cebula o.m.i., Oblate Writings*, II, 6, p. 185)

*Letter of Father Cebula to his family, Friday April 15, 1938. His father, Adrian, was seriously ill and Father Cebula urges his family to do the will of God.*

Dear sister and very dear Wilhelm,

The Easter celebrations are approaching and wishes of “Happy Easter” are being exchanged. For you, what are these celebrations? It is a difficult thing to rejoice when our father is terminally ill. During Holy Week, the Church reminds us that Our Lord also had to suffer. How painful it was for his mother to see him suffer! And yet all that came to an end. Our sorrows also are short-lived. The important thing is to make sure we benefit from them. We have to submit to the will of God and have the conviction that it is God who allows both sickness and death. He is Lord and he does what he wants and in the way he wants.

One day, our Lord said: “What you have done to the least of these my brothers, you have done to me.” The longer a sick person remains abed, the more he has need of appropriate care. But those who take care of him gain all the more merit; they will enjoy a greater reward in heaven and the blessings of God already here on earth.... I wish you many graces and blessings from the risen Christ. I send you heartfelt greetings, Józef. (In J. Pielorz, *Le bienheureux Józef Cebula o.m.i.*, p. 157)

*June 13*

## 124 POLISH OBLATE “MARTYRS”

*Like so many other religious congregations in Poland, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate suffered heavy losses during World War II. On August 31, 1939, just before the German invasion, the Oblate Province of*



*Poland had 104 priests, 101 scholastics and 81 lay brothers, a total of 286 Oblates. During the war, 124 of them were imprisoned, deported to concentration camps, shot, killed or murdered, victims of bombings or simply of the limitations of medicines or food. Of these 124 "martyrs", 83 survived and 41 died for their faith and homeland.*

*On June 13, 1999, in Warsaw, Pope John Paul II beatified 108 Polish martyrs of Nazism, including the Oblate, Joseph Cebula. In his homily the Pope said:*

Today we are celebrating the victory of those who, in our time, gave their lives for Christ, in order to possess life forever in his glory. This victory has a special character, since it was shared by clergy and laity alike, by both young people and old, by people from different classes and states. [...] There are diocesan and religious priests who died because they chose not to abandon their ministry and because they continued to serve their fellow prisoners who were sick with typhus; some were tortured to death because they defended Jews. In the group of Blessed there are religious brothers and sisters who persevered in the service of charity and in offering their torments for their neighbour. Among the blessed martyrs there are also lay people. [...] These blessed martyrs are today inscribed in the history of holiness of the People of God on pilgrimage for over a thousand years in the land of Poland.

If we rejoice today for the beatification of one hundred and eight martyrs, clergy and lay people, we do so above all because they bear witness to the victory of Christ, the gift which restores hope. As we carry out this solemn act, there is in a way rekindled in us the certainty that, independently of the circumstances, we can achieve complete victory in all things through the One who has loved us (cf. *Rom 8:37*). The blessed martyrs cry out to our hearts: Believe in God who is love! Believe in him in good times and bad! Awaken hope! May it produce in you the fruit of fidelity to God in every trial!

J. Pielorz, *Martyrologe des Oblats polonais 1939-1945*, Poznań 2005.

*During the period he was studying at the College of Nobles in Turin, Saint Eugene received the sacrament of Confirmation from Cardinal Costa, archbishop of the city, in the chapel of the archbishop, together with other school companions on June 13, 1792, Feast of the Holy Trinity.*

*June 14*

#### I OFFER YOU THE MARTYRDOM OF MY LIFE

*In the notebook of his retreat resolutions, Fr. Ovide Charlebois, speaks of the highest ideal of his life: martyrdom.*

I want nothing as much as the moment I leave this earth. However, I do not ask you, my God, to shorten my days; all I ask of you is to accept every moment of my life like little martyrdoms, so that if I am not worthy to shed my blood for you, at least my whole life becomes a continuous martyrdom! Yes, my God, today I want to start living as a martyr.

In this way I offer you the martyrdom of my life, O Jesus, and I sign it with my blood, so that you will not refuse me.

I want not only my physical miseries to contribute to my martyrdom, but above all my moral miseries: temptations, dryness, distractions in prayer, pride... etc. So I want this to be the main act of the day, to start living as a martyr. O Sacred Heart, teach me how to live this way since your whole life has been a continuous martyrdom. (June 1888, in M. Lajeunesse, *Mgr. Charlebois, dévot du Sacré-Cœur*, "Études oblates" 2 [1943], p. 153)

June 15

## THE LIVING IMAGE OF JESUS CHRIST

*In the first of the three volumes of meditations for the Oblates, Fr. Prosper Boisramé (1831-1903) raises burning questions about how we live our vocation.*

The Oblate must be a living image of Jesus Christ, a willing victim immolating himself for the honor and glory of his divine Father.

Do you immolate yourself with Jesus on the tree of the cross, on the altar of sacrifice? Have you generously bound yourself by the vows of religion of which the nails with which Christ was nailed to the cross are the symbol? Are you still a faithful observer of these solemn oaths?

Jesus suffered on the cross. What are your sufferings compared to his? Do you bear them with patience, gentleness, joy and constancy?

Do you not forget that if salvation came through the wounds of the Saviour, your physical or mental suffering, if you endure them as a genuine follower of Jesus Christ, will be magnificently rewarded in the next life; “For our present troubles are small and won’t last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever,” (2 Cor 4:17). (P. Boisramé, *Méditations pour tous les jours de l’année à l’usage des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Tours, 1887, I, p. 513)

June 16

## THE SHRINE OF MONTMARTRE

*Bishop Guibert, who became archbishop of Paris in 1871, made his own the government’s initiative to erect a shrine to the Sacred Heart, on the hill of Montmartre, and on June 16, 1875 he laid the foundation stone. The following year he called the Oblates to direct the shrine. This fact significantly influenced the devotion to the Sacred Heart throughout the Congregation. Here are some noteworthy excerpts.*

The entire plan of Providence is summed up in the great mystery of the Incarnation, “God so loved the world, says the apostle John, that he gave his only Son” (John, 3, 14). God’s love for the world, manifested in the Incarnation of the Word, is the explanation of all that was accomplished in the history of mankind. (J.-H. Guibert, *Pastoral Letter*, January 29, 1878)

If the Heart of the Redeemer is par excellence the throne of mercy, it is when we feel more our weakness that we must turn more fervently to this source of graces. Devotion to the Sacred Heart seems to have been reserved for our time as a supreme resource against the evils that afflict the Church and all Christian souls. [...] Is not the devotion to the Sacred Heart, which is the consolation of the universal Church, a special honor and joy for the Church of Paris? Is it not in this capital that a magnificent temple will be erected with the participation of all the faithful of France, a temple that will be simultaneously a tribute to the Heart of Jesus and the sign of protection that we expect? (J.-H. Guibert, *Pastoral Letter*, May 23, 1875)

The Heart of Jesus is a peaceful meeting place, where we invite all our brothers to come seek the truth in love with us (Eph. IV, 15). What we ask of this adorable Heart, is the conversion of France, not the conversion to these or those opinions, but its conversion, rather, its return to the Christian faith, the eternal hope, to the love of God, who embraces and understands the love of men. (J.-H. Guibert, *Pastoral Letter*, May 30, 1875)

\* \* \*

*June 16, 1810, Eugene de Mazenod was ordained deacon by Cardinal Fesch, who had promoted him to the Minor Orders on June 27, 1809.*

June 17

LEARN FROM ME WHO AM MEEK AND HUMBLE OF HEART

*The first superior of the Oblate community of Montmartre was Fr. Rey, assisted by Fr. Alfredus J.B. Yenveux (1843-1903), who became the apostle of the Sacred Heart. Among his many works Fr. Yenveux wrote a 4 volume work: Le Règne du Cœur de Jésus ou la doctrine complète de la B. Marie-Marguerite sur la dévotion au Sacré-Cœur. It was soon translated into several languages, including Italian. Commenting on the words of Jesus: "Learn from me who am meek and humble of heart," he wrote:*

There are two questions. Why does our Divine Saviour, who practiced all the virtues, speak only of his gentleness and humility, and why does he present these two virtues as coming from His Heart? He speaks of virtues of the heart to teach us that the new law is a law of love, the virtues must come from the heart. If he mentions only his gentleness and humility it is that these are two virtues which may be considered as universal, in the sense that they must accompany the acts of all the other virtues.

St. Francis de Sales, speaking of gentleness, says that after millers have crushed the grain under the millstone of their mill, they pass it through a sieve or fine mesh to separate what they call the flower of the flour from the coarser flour. Thus, Our Lord wants us to pass the wheat of our charity through the sieve of our heart, in order to separate any and all alloy or mixture, so that only the flower of charity called gentleness of heart remains.

When our Lord says: Learn from me for I am gentle of Heart, this means: Learn to have a heart like mine, full of love for God and his holy will, a good and charitable heart for one's neighbor, a peaceful heart for yourself.

Humility of heart is the inseparable companion of gentleness. The perfectly gentle soul is necessarily humble, because all sense of superiority hurts those who are its object. It also lowers itself not only before God, but before any creature for God's sake. And what is wonderful is that it takes pleasure in this. The soul likes to recognize itself and be

regarded as nothing. Its heart revels in the last place, saying, ‘This is mine’, like the poor man who prefers the cottage where he was born to the golden palace of the rich. That is why this virtue is called humility of heart. (In E. Thiriet, *Un apôtre du Sacré-Cœur. Le père Yenveux, Oblat de Marie Immaculée*, Paris, 1904, p. 257-259).

June 18

## THE SCAPULAR OF THE SACRED HEART

*At the request of Fr. J.-B. Lemius, superior of the Montmartre chaplains, and Fr. Cassien Augier, Superior General, Pope Leo XIII entrusted the Oblates with the mission of spreading a “symbol of redeeming love”, the scapular of the Sacred Heart (April 4, 1900; May 19, 1900). The Superior General, C. Augier, writes:*

This officially makes us the apostles of the Sacred Heart, the heralds of his love, along with the love and mercy of Mary. [...] It is a particularly fruitful mission for ourselves and the Congregation, and for the souls to whom we are sent, since it gives us a special right to the countless graces promised by Our Lord to those who work to make the Sacred Heart known and loved. [...] Finally, it is a mission admirably consistent with the spirit of our Congregation; it explains and crowns a whole series of facts that we do not hesitate to call providential. It is not from today, in fact, that the tree blessed by the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was planted in our religious family. It was there from the beginning; it would be more accurate to say that the Congregation was founded and planted in the divine Heart. [...]

The spirit of the Father has been passed on to the children as a precious heritage, and we can say that with the cult of Mary, whose name we bear and whose many shrines we serve, nothing was dearer to the piety of the sons of Bishop de Mazenod than the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This love has only increased since the day the confidence of the venerable Cardinal Archbishop of Paris, Mgr Guibert, called us to be the guardians of the most beautiful shrine that thanksgiving, repentance and love have erected to the adorable Heart of Jesus. With Montmartre our mission as apostles of the Sacred Heart became clearer and

public. With the Scapular of the Sacred Heart, it was consecrated by the Church itself; it becomes official. By entrusting the new Scapular to us, Leo XIII formally invests us with the special task of preaching the devotion to the Sacred Heart, of which this Scapular is a symbol. [...]

You will be the apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Not content to study it and to love it yourself, you will make it known and loved around you. You will speak of it to the faithful, especially to the priests, who, in turn, spread over their flock the light and flames they will have received from you. You will show them the unique place that, according to the designs of God, devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus must now occupy in the Church. (*Circular Letter* No. 73, August 27, 1900, *Circulaires administratives*, 2, p. 437-440)

R. Arbour, *Notre scapulaire du Sacré-Cœur*, “Études oblates” 6 (1947), p. 117-127.

June 19

#### OUR CONSECRATION

*St. Eugene replied to the young Charles Baret, who had written to him just after his vows:*

Now you are consecrated to God for life and beyond by your oblation; and I must add in all humility but with great consolation, that thereby I have become your father. I do not know you personally; but since the affection that unites me with my children is essentially supernatural, it is enough for me to know that the *Saviour Jesus Christ*, our common Master, has received your vows, *has adopted you and has marked you with the seal* that makes us what we are, so that we are united in the most intimate bonds of charity and that I am bound to you forever as you are to me....

You consecrated yourself to God, to his Church, to the Congregation. Refer to Him for everything else. He will know how to inspire in those who are in charge that which is right....

Accustom yourself, my dear son, to have confidence in the Lord, without reservation whatsoever. We must become entirely generous to-

ward our Father who is so good and, at the same time, both so great and so powerful. There must be no reservations in the gift of ourselves to him. He knows your needs; he knows the lawful desires of your heart: that's all that is needed. Rightfully he wants us to consider ourselves so honored, so happy to be admitted into the secrecy of his privileged disciples, that in exchange and in gratitude we give ourselves to him without reserve and without conditions....

You consecrated yourself to God, to his Church, to the Congregation. Refer to Him for everything else. He will know how to inspire in those who are in charge that which is right.... (St. Eugene to Bro. Baret, August 18, 1843, *Oblate Writings*, 10, p. 27)

June 20

ALEXIS REYNARD (1828-1875)  
MARTYR IN CANADA

*Bro. Alexis Reynard, missionary in the Canadian North from France, was shot about June 20, 1875, near Rivière-des-Maisons, while protecting a girl from an attack by an Iroquois. Following native custom, parts of the victim's body were consumed by the aggressor. In a letter to St. Eugene, Bishop Grandin wrote: "Brother Alexis is a real angel of peace, gentleness and purity! You would not believe how he humbles me and edifies me! [...] He works hard from morning to night, and that with all kinds of people [...]. He is continually united to God. Whenever he has a moment, he will spend it before the Blessed Sacrament. It was there that he literally was happy to be [...]. (Bishop Grandin to Bishop De Mazenod, June 22, 1861)*

I would like to tell you how much joy the beautiful Christmas celebrations gave us. The church, the lighting, the singing, the piety of the faithful, everything was uplifting. The memory of the Child Jesus can not but arouse an indescribable joy. Oh! Above all, us, the poor Brothers, we are happy! Taken from among simple people, like the fortunate shepherds, we were called first to get close to his crib, to commit ourselves to follow him until the age of 30. We can do no better than to see ourselves as the favorites. In fact, he deigned to leave his thirty years



as a model, while it leaving only three for those who seem to be placed at a higher level.

If your Excellency thinks I can be of some use, leave me here, move me to another place, dispose of me according to the power that the Savior gave you. His constant attention towards me makes me that in his infinite goodness he will support my weak courage. Ah! Bishop, how happy is the one who has nothing to reproach himself! (Fr. Alexis to Bishop Alexandre Taché, December 27, 1860, in A. Philppot, *Le frère Alexis Reynard, o.m.i.*, N.-D. de Bon Secours, 1931, p. 61)

Dear Brother, if I must say so, I'm happy here in these woods: nothing prevents me from working well for heaven.... Oh! How good it is to pray to our Divine Jesus and our good Mother deep in the woods, especially in times of trouble ... (Bro. Reynard to Bro. Fournier, December 5, 1864, in Philppot, p. 114)

I have the joy to tell you that God deigns to give me peace. In my heart I have a sense of real rest when I apply myself to look closely at how God manifests himself to me in my holy profession: not to love all of the vicissitudes and unpleasantness that the contradictions of our vocation offer us, would perhaps ignore this side of God, who is united with me this way, and to offend him in that respect. (Bro. Reynard to Fr. Fabre, November 24, 1864)

Sometimes, I think to myself how happy I am when I see the different desires leaving me alone; I feel that God is happy, if I do well his Will; so I say, what could trouble me? All that did not satisfy me in the past seems now in my mind and in my heart that it could not be better in our Holy Congregation. (Bro. Reynard to Fr. Fabre, December 10, 1864)

## MEETING OF BISHOP BOURGET AND BISHOP DE MAZENOD

*On June 20, 1841, Mgr. Ignace Bourget, Bishop of Montreal, who was passing through Marseilles, asked Saint Eugene to send missionaries to his diocese. On July 15 and 16, St. Eugene noted in his diary:*

The Bishop of Montreal in Canada, passing through Marseilles a few months ago on his way to Rome, talked to me about the needs of his diocese. He insisted that I give him at least four missionaries from our Congregation, whom he would charge with evangelizing his people and if need be they could extend their zeal to the savages that live in these regions....

My desire was to consult all the members of the Congregation and to reply to the Bishop of Montreal only after having their consent. It was a faraway mission. It would take dedication to undertake it. I could confide it only to men of good will and dedication. I had to be sure of their agreement. This is what I have done....

Our missionaries would be responsible to give missions in various parishes of his diocese and could also evangelize the savages when one of them would have learned the language of these people. What a beautiful mission lies before us. I saw with consolation that those of our people to whom I have spoken have welcomed the idea with enthusiasm. I await the expression of the same feelings from all the others. (*Oblate Writings*, 20, p. 210-211)

*Only a few of the answers to Eugene's call remain. They give testimony of how true and deep the community response of "Ecce ego, mitte me" was. Fr. Dassy, for example, wrote: "Say but a word and France for me will be in Canada." Fr. Bermond: "Not only am I ready to cross the sea, but I strongly desire this grace. I was delirious with joy upon hearing that such a favorable opportunity had arisen for our institute to go far away to evangelize the poor. Finally, the day for which I so longed for has arrived! I have not forgotten the grace of my oblation when, prostrate before the altar steps, I asked the Lord tearfully, to die among non-Christians. I do not remember to have offered the Holy Sacrifice*

even once without praying for these brothers and begging of God the grace to go to them. I hope that this constant prayer has been heard by heaven and that you will not want to discard the one that I now address to you. Ever since I have been your son, I have repeated a thousand times that I was hoping to set out one day across the ocean to bring the fire of the Gospel. Now more than ever I have this sweet confidence.”

*St. Eugene, commenting on such a unanimous and positive response to his request, writes in his diary:*

It will be a beautiful page in our history. The spirit of this little known Congregation and the dedication of its members will be visible. I defy the most regular Orders that enjoy the highest esteem in the Church to provide a better example. Let them read the letters [he lists all those who responded to him] and they will see that the spirit of God animates these souls, that they understand the duties of their holy state, that zeal for the salvation of others, devotion to the Church and love for the Congregation are the common prerogative of our dear family. (July 24, 1841, *Oblate Writings*, 20, p. 215)

*June 21, St. Aloysius Gonzaga*

#### IN ST. ALOYSIUS' ROOM

*St. Aloysius Gonzaga appears often in the writings of St. Eugene. While he was in Palermo, Don Bartolo Zinelli wrote to remind him of the devotion “of the six Sundays of St. Aloysius Gonzaga” (20.5.1797, in A. Rey, I, p. 38), a practice that he had certainly taught him in Venice. In the last months in Palermo, Eugene wrote to his father asking him to send a biography of St. Aloysius Gonzaga (Letter to His Father, May 2-3, 1802). He entered the seminary and on the back cover of his first notebook he wrote: “Under the auspices of... Saints Joseph, Charles, Eugene and Aloysius Gonzaga.... May [they], and especially the Immaculate Mother, help me on the difficult path of studies” Even in his retreat notes in May 1811 we find: “I’ll turn also to my good Guardian Angel, to St. Joseph, St. Charles, St. Eugene, to St. Aloysius Gonzaga.” These, together with Mary Immaculate and other saints, will be the patrons of the Aix Youth Association. Writing to his friend Forbin-Janson,*

who was in Rome, he says: “Please be so kind as to get me a genuine relic of St. Philip Neri, who is one of the patrons of my little congregation, and one of St. Aloysius Gonzaga.”

In his travels to Rome he visited the room where the saint had lived. So in his *Diary of June 21, 1837*: “Festival of San Luigi Gonzaga. I said Holy Mass in the college church at the saint’s altar.” On February 17, 1826:

Before going to see Bishop Gamberini of Orvieto who had given me an appointment for this morning, I went to the Roman College to say mass in the room where Saint Aloysius Gonzaga used to live. It is on the third floor of the house and overlooks the courtyard. It seems that it was transformed into a chapel at the time of the saint’s beatification. The same door and window are still there; but now people go in through a different door, since the old one is condemned, even though it is still there and in good condition, except slightly worm-eaten as are the window shutters. It is a large room; it looks as if two scholastics used to live in it. It is tapestried in crimson damask, with golden borders. There is a wooden altar; below the altar is the casket wherein the saint’s body lay for fifty years. Hanging from the walls, you can see several paintings depicting events in the saint’s life and his holy death.... The room that you see today is not the one in which the saint died; I believe the infirmary was situated where the present church is, which was not yet built at that time. (*Oblate Writings*, 17, p. 103)

June 21

PIET JACOB SHAW (1925-1984)

VICAR APOSTOLIC OF PILCOMAYO, PARAGUAY

On June 21, 1984 Bishop Piet Jacob Shaw died in a car accident. He was born September 6, 1925 in Wilrijk, Belgium. A year after his ordination (1951), he left for Paraguay where he worked as an itinerant missionary in the Chaco. In 1981 he was appointed Vicar Apostolic of Pilcomayo. The Oblates of Paraguay would like to open his cause of beatification. On the day of his consecration, Bishop Shaw explained the meaning of his episcopal motto: “That all may be one.”

If we look around the world, if we read the newspapers, we see that disunity continues, we see wars, revolutions, fights everywhere, injustice. We find all that in this world, but Jesus came for change, to build a beautiful united world again; and that is why he died on the cross. Christians must continue this mission through unity. Above all differences, we must seek unity, as Jesus told us at the Last Supper, and grow in union and in love. Let us not wait to see what the other does, let each of us try to have more unity, more brotherhood with our neighbors, with people with whom we live; then we can go out to change the world, to make a beautiful world, united, as God created it in the beginning. That is why we gather for Eucharist, the sacrament of unity, of love, in which Jesus comes to us.

Sometimes unity is hard, but it is possible. We have many examples among the saints... and the great example of the Virgin. All of us here in Paraguay have a devotion to the Virgin; she was privileged to be without sin. We can follow her example and that of the saints who have gone before us. Now as you leave to go home, ask God for the grace to always be united, and that that union grow with our prayers. (*Con un llamado a la unidad fué ordenado Mons. Shaw, "Sendero", May 8-22, 1981, p. 6*)

June 22

ALEXANDRE TACHÉ (1823-1894)

FOUNDER OF THE CHURCH IN THE CANADIAN NORTHWEST

*On June 22, 1894, Alexandre Taché, Archbishop of Saint-Boniface died at Saint Boniface. On December 3, 1841, feast of St. Francis Xavier, at the Cathedral of Montréal, he met the first six Oblates who had just arrived in Canada. Three years later he entered the novitiate. The following year, still a deacon, he left to found the mission of the Rivière-Rouge, where he arrived after a 62-day canoe trip. Soon after, he was ordained a priest. In 1851 he was consecrated bishop by St. Eugene for the new Diocese of the Northwest, based in Saint-Boniface.*

It would be good here to describe what our winter trips are like here. Usually we get up long before dawn. After fulfilling their duties

as a Christian, everyone makes sure to have a hearty breakfast (at least when the provisions are not lacking). This is necessary, because it will be necessary to walk all day without stopping or, at most, only taking one meal. [...]

After breakfast, everyone folds his blankets, ties them to his sleigh, puts on his snowshoes, takes a complacent and regretful look at the good home to which he has so many obligations and that he will often need, and starts out again. We walk all day without stopping. Other times, when the travelers or less brave or less strong, they stop around noon to take some food and relax.

In the evening, one has to prepare a place for the night. This is called making the camp. [...] Everyone sits next to the fire, to satisfy the most pressing need, that of warming those members numb with cold; we rub our chin, cheeks, nose, to restore circulation; then, when the lips have resumed their normal flexibility, we share our adventures and impressions of the day. [...]

However, like a gold lamp hanging in the blue sky, the moon came to mingle its tender and soft light to the brilliant bursts of the glowing fire. This dual light is projected through the trees of the forest, that draws on the snow like dying shadows. The stars, so beautiful, so bright in our icy regions, seem to compete in the vault of heaven, as they are so numerous and brilliant. In a lower region, the indefinable phenomenon of aurora catches one's attention almost every night: fiery streaks, sprays of light crisscross the atmosphere in all directions and execute their joyous dances to the sound of music all their own. The savages believe these northern lights are the dances of the souls of the dead, whose sibilant voices cause the noise that often accompanies this phenomenon. It is difficult, Monsignor, to imagine the spectacle of the view of the sky in the northern regions, especially in winter. Allow me to say that your beautiful Marseilles cannot give you an idea of it. [...]

Last fall, even a big party of Cris surprised fourteen Blackfoot whom they massacred.

Besides the Cris of whom I have spoken, the Sarcee, Kainai Nation, Blackfeet, Assiniboine, and Chippewa, are also inhabitants of the plain (within my diocese). They do not know how to bless the holy name of God, and are not yet affiliated to the great Christian family.

What a vast field! What an abundant harvest! ... It is true that it seems far from ripe, but the dew of heavenly graces is so rich and powerful, the rays of the Sun of Justice are so invigorating that they can ripen it before the time foreseen by the calculations of human wisdom.

What is lacking above all are priests. Young Oblates, my brothers and my friends, I pray you to turn and look that way. By dedicating yourselves to God, renouncing all the pleasures of the earth, you took these beautiful words as a motto: "*Evangelizare pauperibus misit me Deus.*" May your zeal come here and allow me to say with holy joy, "*Pauperes evangelizantur*". To reward your generosity, I cannot promise you wealth nor pleasure, nor honors. I know your generous heart despises them. I can not even ensure that you will always taste the joys that sometimes accompany the exercise of the sacred ministry. The one that is entrusted to us here is a work of dedication and sacrifice. God alone will be your reward, as he alone is the reason of your work. One is always quite happy to find only Him when we seek only Him. (Alexandre Taché to St. Eugene July, 7, 1854, in E. Lapointe, *Alexandre Antonin Taché...*, Roma 2006, p. 181-186)

Many things have happened, much has changed around me, but one thing has remained unchangeable in my heart, it is my attachment to my Congregation. God heard my sighs at a time when I suffered a lot; I asked him to endure everything, but not to undergo the ordeal of losing my affection for my religious family. I have suffered many things, but I always had the same filial affection for my mother. (Alexandre Taché to Father Fabre, November 22, 1878)

P. Benoît, *Vie de M<sup>sr</sup> Taché*. Montréal, 1904, 2 vol.

June 23

## OBLATES, THE BISHOPS' MEN

We consider the bishops as our fathers, from the moment they adopt us; their dioceses become our family and I can assure you that these adopted children can compete with anyone in terms of affection

and dedication. So we have the consolation of seeing our bishops give us constantly clear signs of a touching fondness.

We are the bishop's men; we are available at any time of day or night. We must live habitually under his influence. (Eugene to Don Teston, Vicar General, Grenoble, June 17, 1828, in Yenveux, III, p. 139)

You will find in them [the Oblates] respect, obedience and devotion beyond compare. They will depend on you as if you were their bishop, they will love you as their father, their confidence and their gratitude are yours in advance as something due to their protector and their guide.

They will do anything to accommodate your views and to please you because they are trained to be subject to the bishops that the Institute prescribes them to honor in a very special way not *ad oculum servientes* but *propter conscientiam* (Eph 6: 6). So, they are your men. Although the internal life of their community is to be governed by the Rule, even in this will they do your will because you do not ask better than to see them live in a perfect regularity, according to what the Church has prescribed for them by approving the Constitutions. (St. Eugene to Mgr. Bruillard, Bishop of Grenoble, October 18, 1834, Rambert, I, p. 653)

É. Lamirande, *Les Oblats, hommes des évêques, d'après Mgr de Mazenod*, “Études oblates” 16 (1957), p. 302-320.

June 24

#### ST. EUGENE BECOMES A SENATOR OF THE EMPIRE

*On the occasion of a trip to Paris for the baptism of the Prince Imperial, St. Eugene, without expecting it, was appointed a senator. He writes in his diary on June 24, 1856:*

On returning to the house I found a letter from the Minister of State informing me that, by a decree of this day, the Emperor had raised me to the dignity of senator. I am all the more beholden to him since I have done nothing to attract his attention. I had even planned to leave without requesting a special audience. He has taken account of my position in the Church and in the State rather than any personal qualities which



only the overindulgent opinion of my friends would be able to acknowledge. (*Oblate Writings*, 22, p. 75)

*The nuncio in Paris, Mgr. C. Sacconi, notified Card. G. Antonelli, Secretary of State:*

H.M. the Emperor, in order to give the French episcopate, a testimony of his sovereign satisfaction for the care shown by the prelates in responding to the invitation to travel to Paris to attend the solemn ceremony of the *Prince Imperial's* baptism has raised to the dignity of Senator, the Dean of the said respectable body, Monsignor de Mazenod, Bishop of Marseilles. In this way the Emperor has also provided the worthy prelate with the most abundant resources, where in a vast city, like Marseilles through which many pass, he can better exercise hospitality towards his colleagues and charity towards the poor. (Original in Italian, in *Inquisitio Historica*, Rome 1968, p. 170)

June 25

#### THE BISHOPS' MOST DEDICATED PRIESTS

The Oblates of Mary Immaculate are eminently men of the bishops, founded only to be instruments in their hands of their own ministry for the sanctification of their flocks. The bishops have no priests more submissive, more devoted than them. So, Monseigneur, if I am to tell you my whole mind with the frankness that is well suited to a bishop, I think you were well inspired to settle the Oblates in your diocese in order to confide to them the missions and other works of zeal embraced by their Institute. I dare to vouchsafe for their devotedness and their constant cooperation in all kinds of good works that your pastoral solicitude will prompt them to undertake. (St. Eugene to Mgr Phelan, Co-adjutor Bishop of Kingston, *Oblate Writings*, 1, p. 101)

The spirit that I gave them and that they have learned perfectly, is to consider themselves as the Bishop's men, to show an attachment and inviolable submission to him, to promote respect for his character and his authority everywhere and by all, not to do anything without his con-

sent, to be, in short, as children with their father. (St. Eugene in Mgr. Menjaud, Bishop of Nancy, June 14, 1847, Yenveux, III, p. 143)

Our missionaries are the top rated priests by the Bishops and their only ambition is to be able to shoulder part of the burden that weighs on their Prelates.... I hope that Monseigneur will be persuaded that this is a constitutive principle in the Congregation. (St. Eugene to Fr. Bellanger in Blida, November 10, 1849, Yenveux, III, p. 143)

*June 26*

#### AT THE SERVICE OF THE BISHOPS

Our Oblates were founded especially for the service of the bishops through preaching for the conversion of souls, especially the most abandoned souls.... Our work is all for the service of the bishops in the Church of God. (St. Eugene to Mgr. Gignoux, Bishop of Beauvais, October 18, 1853, Yenveux, III, p. 140)

My biggest concern was constantly to inspire them with the greatest devotion and filial affection for the prelates who would call them to work in their dioceses. [...] My teaching was always the same. Only discretely, when it was possible, have I inserted myself into the relationships between the bishops and the members of my congregation, that God has inspired me to found solely for the service of the bishops at a time when they had a great need of cooperators in their dioceses deprived of resources. [...] Our Oblates are essentially men of the Bishops, they are filled only with their spirit and see them as their fathers; they ensure that their sacred authority prevails in all things, and they call to order those who, by excess or lack of principles, do not acknowledge the respect or obedience due to them. (St. Eugene to Mgr. Sergent, Bishop of Quimper, October 25, 1857)

June 27

### LEO XIII TO THE OBLATES

*During the General Chapter of 1879 a message of tribute, signed by all the Chapter, and accompanied by a letter of Cardinal Joseph-Hippolyte Guibert was sent to Pope Leo XIII. The Pope replied with the following letter:*

Your letter, dear Son, did not give us less joy than that of the General Chapter of the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate [...].

We greatly rejoiced in such a union of minds with Us and the presentation of the Acts of this Chapter. And with reason. If it is for you a joy to see this once so fragile and small Congregation to which you belonged and where you worked before elevation to high dignity, now become a large tree that spreads its branches and bears fruit all over the world and even to the extreme frigid regions, We also could not but feel a very sweet consolation in seeing the good it has done for an innumerable multitude of the faithful and infidels, bringing to the nations the name of Jesus Christ and expanding his reign, especially at this moment when criminal societies wage an implacable war against him. And it must be added that even greater successes are foreseen for this Congregation. Indeed, modesty and humility, zeal for the glory of God, charity, that all the members of this family form one body, which no discord divides, the attention to perfecting more and more its means of action, the unity with the Chair of St. Peter, the adherence to its teachings, and even the progress and spread of this Society, all this surely proves that it is pleasing to God and called to greater works.

Convey our congratulations therefore to the Superior General and to all the members of the Congregation, and, on our behalf, urge them to keep carefully and to rekindle that spirit which until now supported them and made them grow, and also, full of confidence in the protection of the Immaculate Virgin, to which they dedicated themselves, may they continue with ardor in the works they have undertaken. (“Missions OMI” 17 [1879], p. 504-505)

Y. Filippini, “Hommes du pape”. Une “note” actuelle de notre service missionnaire, “Études oblates” 29 (1970), p. 161-176; F.-X., Cianiulli, *Mgr de Mazenod et le pape. Sentiments romains du Fondateur*, “Études oblates” 15 (1956), p. 204-220.

June 28

### LEO XIII: I KNEW BISHOP DE MAZENOD

*May 5, 1887, the General Chapter of the Oblates was received in audience by Pope Leo XIII.*

Leo XIII, a white vision, is sitting in his chair, serious yet smiling. His air of goodness reassures us; we form a ring around him like children huddle close to their old father and the meeting begins. [...]

*Leo XIII:* I met Bishop de Mazenod. In 1843, as nuncio in Belgium, I stopped at Marseilles. Immediately after the sea trip, I went to the bishop's house to visit with the bishop. He came to me in turn; showed me the site of his future cathedral and explained his plans; then he brought me to Notre Dame de la Garde. That memory has remained alive in my memory. [...] With all my heart I bless your faraway missions. I know you do a lot of good everywhere.

*The Superior General:* We have with us some young people who attend classes at the Gregorian University.

*Leo XIII:* And they are remarkable, I know. Continue to send young people, choosing those with special skills for study. I have called good professors to teach there. [...] Receive this apostolic blessing.

The Pope pronounced the formula, then, dismissing us, said, “Let us always do much good, and always have a lot of courage.” (“Missions OMI” 25 [1887], p. 113-115)

June 29, *Saints Peter and Paul*

### ON THE TOMBS OF THE APOSTLES

*December 21, 1825, while he was in Rome, St. Eugene celebrated Mass in the Vatican grottoes.*

I had chosen this anniversary day of my priesthood to go and offer the holy sacrifice on the Confession of Saint Peter. [...] A person cannot descend into the crypt without feeling emotions of respect and devotion. I said the mass of Saint Thomas over the bodies of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, one of which rests under this altar, near those of the holy Roman pontiffs from the first centuries of the Church. My mass must have been long since I wanted to console myself in recalling to mind individually, at the memento, all those whose salvation is especially dear to me. It was an act of communion rendered very fitting by the place and the occasion. (Diary, *Oblate Writings*, 17, p. 57)

*On November 29<sup>th</sup> of the same year he visited the Catacombs of Saint Callistus, where the Apostles Peter and Paul had been buried:*

We went down into the catacombs, seized with reverent fear at the sight of those underground caves where so many martyrs lived and were buried after their death. They estimate that there were a hundred and seventy thousand, among whom were eighteen sovereign Pontiffs. The bodies of Saints Peter and Paul were laid here for some time. You can see the altar on which the sovereign Pontiffs used to celebrate Mass and another one somewhat further on in the catacombs where Saint Philip Neri used to spend nights in prayer. We recognized the spot where Saint Cecilia's body had been and the one which Pope Saint Maxim had occupied. (Diary, *Oblate Writings*, 17, p. 32)

*St. Paul in particular is considered by St. Eugene as the apostle par excellence and the model of the relationship that each Oblate should have with Christ and Christ crucified. He often refers to his letters with which he was very familiar. October 31, 1817, after meeting with the new Archbishop of Aix, who had made his own the criticism of the parish priests against the nascent community, he cites the second letter to Timothy seven times when writing to Tempier:*

It is God for whom we suffer; we shall not let ourselves be disheartened: (2 Tm 1:12) The demon would triumph were we to fail since souls redeemed by our Lord would be abandoned. So let us continue to strive like good soldiers of Jesus Christ (2 Tm 3) What does it matter after all if some individuals may have revolted against us? Saint Paul the Apostle was treated worse than us for not only was he abandoned by Demas, but he met an Alexander who did him much evil and all those

who were in Asia went away and left him (2 Tm 4, 10, 14; 1, 15). And when he had to defend his case before the Emperor, no one stood by him; they all abandoned him (2 Tm 4:15). Nonetheless he did not lose courage and with the powerful help of God he accomplished his allotted mission and was delivered from the jaws of the lion (2 Tm 4:17). It would indeed be foolish for anyone to desire to do good but not experience opposition (2 Tm 3:12) Saint Paul was subjected to it everywhere but nevertheless was helped through it by the Lord. Let us be firm in our confidence that it will be the same for us: “persecutiones, passionis: qualia mihi facta sunt Antiochiae, Iconii et Lystris; quales persecutiones sustinui, et ex omnibus eripuit me Dominus.” (2 Tm 3:11) (*Oblate Writings*, 6, p. 43-44)

Y. Beaudoin, *Saint Eugène et saint Paul*, “Vie Oblate Life” 67 (2009), p. 277-287.

\* \* \*

#### ANNOUNCING HIS DECISION TO BECOME A PRIEST

*June 29, 1808, Saint Eugene told his mother of his decision to become a priest*, “a project that certainly comes from God, as it has passed all the tests required of any inspiration that seems unusual, and it has been sanctioned by all the persons who hold his place in my regard.” *God is asking him* “to devote myself especially to his service and try to reawaken the faith that is becoming extinct amongst the poor; in a word, that I make myself available to carry out any orders he may wish to give me for his glory and the salvation of souls he has redeemed by his precious blood.” (St. Eugene to his mother, June 29, 1808, *Oblate Writings*, 14, p. 55-56)

June 30

PIUS X: GREAT AFFECTION FOR YOUR CONGREGATION

*Addressing the members of the General Chapter, received in audience on October 10, 1908, Pius X expressed his great affection for the Congregation:*

I thank you for the feelings of affection and devotion that, on behalf of the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, you have offered me. I thank the Congregation especially for the joy that the excellent works that the same Congregation does in the missions gives me. May God be gracious and grant you every blessing and happiness and comfort in your apostolate and through the mutual charity among you, so that this same Congregation may always work for the good of the Church and the salvation of souls.

I must confess that I have a great affection for your Congregation and thank you for the unanimous vote by which you have elected as Superior General a man dear to my heart. I pray that, under his leadership and government, God will grant you his abundant blessings.

When you return from this meeting to your religious houses, you will bring to all (the members) of the Congregation my blessing and my greeting full of affection, adding that the Pope blesses them, and relies on their prayers.

I carry you all in my heart as beloved sons, and with great affection, I impart my Apostolic Blessing. (“Missions OMI” 46 [1908], p. 428)





# July

**A**ccording to tradition, the month of July is dedicated to the Most Precious Blood of Christ. For St. Eugene it is the price of redemption, which gives birth to the Church and gives dignity to every Christian. The Preface to the Rule begins with the famous words: “The Church, that glorious inheritance purchased by Christ at the cost of his own blood....”

*This month we continue to meditate on “The Oblates as the Pope’s men” and the words of the Popes addressed to the Oblates. The particular topics of spirituality will be: The glory of God and obedience.*

*July 1*

## REDEMPTION THROUGH THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

Jesus Christ was to associate the children of men to himself mystically to form with them a single whole, however, leaving intact the personality of all who are united to him. And as there is only one person in Jesus Christ, all Christians were to form one body with him of which he would be the head and they the members.

This union between the children of men and Jesus Christ was brought about on Calvary, while the divine blood flowed for their redemption, and grace was merited for them by the passion and death of the Savior. It is by grace that we are united with the adorable Mediator and through Him to the Father; grace is the bond that binds us to him and makes us participants of his merits, as if we had died with him and that his blood had mingled with ours, giving it the value and virtue that are essentially inherent in the sacrifice of the Man-God....

The Church is the price of the blood of Jesus Christ and the object of the infinite love that he brought to us; he loved her more than his life,

and because of him she is dear to God the Father, who already from all eternity had loved her to “give her to his only Son, *sic Deus dilexit mundum ut Filium suum unigenitum daret*” (Jn. 3:15). [...]

They are the children of God, “heirs” of his eternal Kingdom and “joint heirs with Jesus Christ” (Rom 8:17); they are all brothers in the most perfect way, because they are all of the same blood and that blood is that of a God. This adorable blood in which they were regenerated flows, so to speak, in their souls; it even fills them, really becoming “their drink,” at the same time as “the body of Christ is truly their food” (Jn 6:56) in Holy Communion. There are between them a communion of spiritual goods and a holy solidarity of merits, which, however, does not cause any loss of the rights one has acquired. “The Bride” of Jesus Christ, “within the house of God is like a vine laden with fruit and her sons are around the table as the young plants of the olive tree” (Ps 127:3-4) around the shaft from which they draw their growth.

Indeed, it is even written that Jesus Christ “acquired this people which is the Church, through his blood, *Ecclesiam Dei quam acquisivit sanguine suo* » (Acts 20:28). (Eugene de Mazenod, *Pastoral Letter*, February 16, 1860).

E. Lamirande, *Le sang du Sauveur. Un thème central de la doctrine spirituelle de Mgr de Mazenod*, « Études oblates » 18 (1959), p. 363-381.

July 2

#### OBLATE MARTYRS OF THE PHILIPPINES

*On July 2, 1942, Japanese soldiers beheaded Fathers Paul Bernard Drone (1913-1942), Michael Braun (1914-1942), and Brother Edward C. McMahon (1916-1942), three Americans. The following letter was sent by Fr. Cranon, M.S.C. to Fr. C. Van Berke in November 1946:*

On July 2, 1942, the following were killed at Menado, Celebes, in a place called Sario: Edward McMahon, Michael Braun, and Paul Drone.

These were Missionaries of Mindanao who probably fled in a bar-  
ca. They were accompanied by other American officers and Filipino  
soldiers and landed on one of the islands north of Menado and there  
they were betrayed by the natives and given up to the Japs.

We were in Menado at that time in our concentration camp and we  
heard there that Americans (some of them priests) had been captured  
and put into prison. Through the good offices of a good native Catho-  
lic policeman we received a bit of paper where they had written their  
names, nothing else.

These men were beheaded on July 2, 1942 at 7 p.m., the Japs us-  
ing the front lights of an auto to light the scene while they were at their  
hangman's work.

We heard about it in the same evening. Those Missionaries were all  
young men; we were told that they carried a little cross on their neck.

Last month exhumations had been ordered. Hundreds of people  
had been beheaded by the Japs. So the authorities are trying to find out  
who were the killed ones. As soon as the diggers find another grave,  
the authorities of Menado come down to assist the exhumation of the  
bones. Mostly such a grave is full of all kinds of bones with here and  
there a skull of someone all messed up. One cannot tell which belongs  
to which. [...]

We suppose that that those were the mortal remains of the Mis-  
sionaries of Mindanao, because it was right on the spot where they had  
been beheaded.

*July 3*

#### IDENTIFICATION WITH CHRIST

*The old Directory of Novices, from the Founder's time, expresses  
St. Eugene's thinking on the devotion to the Blood of Christ, which finds  
its fulfillment in the Eucharistic celebration.*

One of the most certain characteristics of true piety, is a great at-  
traction for our Lord Jesus Christ, a burning desire to increase his love  
in us by all means that religion gives us, and especially by the commu-  
nion of his body and adorable blood. This attraction to the person of

the Divine Savior, this intense desire to know and love him is always greater in the young people who come to us, one of the unequivocal signs of their vocation, because it belongs essentially to the spirit of our Society. It is on this principle that our rules want the members of the Society who are not yet priests to frequently draw from this source of Divine Love and to be in a state to receive Holy Communion three times a week. [...]

Who more than a child of our Society must be united with Jesus Christ because of the sublime vocation to which he is called and which requires him to be another Jesus Christ himself. Now it is in Holy Communion especially that the faithful and loving soul finds a vivid and abundant light that illuminates it, that it receives the heavenly food that fortifies it in a wonderful way and is transformed by the love in Jesus Christ, with whom it is somehow identified. (“Études oblates” 16 [1957], p. 205-206)

*July 4*

#### UNITED IN THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

As long as there are men on earth we are all the children of the Father who is in heaven and neighbor to each other.... It is not just the blood of a human fraternity that we have in common, but the blood of our Redeemer, which we all share by the same grace and the same sacraments. Let us teach those who are unaware of it that in all parts of the world the Catholic Church forms a single indivisible body of which Christ is the head and we are the members; teach them that none of them can suffer without us recognizing Jesus Christ himself in his suffering members, without anyone among those who are imbued with his spirit being able to say with St. Paul: “*Who of you is weak and I am not weak?*” (2 Cor. 11:29) (Eugene de Mazenod, *Pastoral Letter*, February 24, 1847.)

Since the Church forms one body, of which Jesus Christ is the head, those who do not receive life from this head are dead limbs; they no longer belong to the body through the bonds of divine love, the blood of Jesus Christ no longer circulates, so to speak, in their veins and their

brethren, to whom this blood is communicated with all its power in Holy Communion, are no longer as it were their brothers, because they no longer share the same blood. (Eugene de Mazenod, *Pastoral Letter*, December 21, 1859).

July 5

BLESSED JOSEPH BOISSEL (1909-1969)  
MARTYR IN LAOS

*He was ordained in 1937 in La Brosse-Montceaux, France. He was 28. He arrived in Laos the following year. He settled in the Xieng Khouang region that was beginning to develop. Later, he moved to Nong Het, an advanced station near the border with Vietnam, which he had to leave because of the war. It would never be reopened. In March 1945, he was taken prisoner by the Japanese and moved to Vinh with Bishop Mazoyer. He returned to Laos in 1946. He went back to Xieng Khouang and for several years was responsible for the formation of the catechumens and neophytes of Ban Pha. He next went to the Paksane missionary district, where he remained until the last day. At first he was in charge of Nong Veng, a rice paddy village, and later from 1963, he was responsible for the famous Lak-Si, four kilometers from Paksane. He also looked after the refugee villages of Thai Deng and Khmu, to which he travelled by jeep, even though he had vision problems, having completely lost the use of one eye. In those years, it was risky to travel on the roads. Saturday, July 5, at 4.30 a.m., he set out accompanied by two young Missionnaires Oblates [a Secular Institute of women]. He was ambushed. The priest was killed, while the Oblates, who were wounded, were marked physically and psychologically for the rest of their lives by the traumatic event.*

*A colleague wrote this a few days later:*

Father Boissel, you are with us [...]. This violent death impresses us, a death in the breach, in full apostolic mission, a death that had touched you many times, a beautiful missionary's death. But we must recognize that your whole life has surprised us: the life of an apostle with a burning heart, a life of sacrifice, consumed, a man of God, to

whom nothing mattered except proclaiming Jesus Christ to the poor. A life well lived, so rich in adventures, truly fruitful, with a heart so young that we did not notice the white hair and we hoped to always have you with us....

*July 6*

# SOULS REDEEMED BY THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

What he wants of me is that I renounce a world where it is almost impossible to find salvation, such is the power of apostasy there; that I devote myself especially to his service and try to reawaken the faith that is becoming extinct amongst the poor; in a word, that I make myself available to carry out any orders he may wish to give me for his glory and the salvation of souls he has redeemed by his precious blood. (Eugene de Mazenod, Letter to his mother, June 29, 1808, *Oblate Writings*, 14, p. 56)

It is impossible for the Church to find a better way [than the liturgy] to help us enter into the mysterious unity that exists in Christ, between man and God, by which, on the one hand, our Savior took upon Himself our sins, and satisfied the divine justice for us, and secondly, by which we can take up his cross and make ours his merits. The Church shows us constantly in Jesus Christ that it is we ourselves who are the man of sin, torn by the blows, covered with opprobrium... the man, “Ecce Homo”; the identification is made striking for all. She takes us to Calvary, makes us embrace the cross on which hangs the world’s salvation, she attaches us to the cross, our only hope.... The blood of Jesus Christ flowed over them to regenerate them, yet forgetful of the immense benefit, they let this adorable blood flow again from the heart that has so loved them, without even wanting to collect a few drops or mingling a few tears with it! And they do not come to surround the God dying for their salvation with their love and their sorrow! (Eugene de Mazenod *Pastoral Letter*, 1846)

*On July 6, 1823, Eugene was appointed Vicar General of the Diocese of Marseilles.*

*July 7*

PIUS XI: BE FAITHFUL TO IMPLEMENTING THE PREFACE OF THE RULE

*Address of Pope Pius XI to the Oblates, during the audience of February 21, 1926, on the occasion of the first centenary of the Constitutions and Rules. The pope refers to the efforts of the Oblates in setting up the Missionary Exposition that he wanted for the 1925 Holy Year.*

Welcome to you, Oblates of Mary Immaculate! [...] You have every reason to rejoice in celebrating such a memory. You have every reason to invite the common father to participate with you in this celebration. It is our pleasure to express our approval and our affectionate gratitude to you on this occasion.

Our joy to be with you on this memorable occasion is even greater as we recall the sweet and joyful recognition for you and for us, that you are carrying out Our recent (March 19, 1924) recommendation to you to always re-immersing yourselves in the fresh waters of your first source or, rather, to warm yourselves in the flame of your first home – in your origins, so to speak.

In fact, is not our recommendation itself a recognition that your Congregation remains fully faithful to the examples and the sublime teachings of your Father, your Founder.

And we remember that beautiful – We were about to say magnificent – “litany” your Founder inserted in the Preface of the Constitutions: “They must work unremittingly to become humble, meek, obedient, lovers of poverty and penance, mortified, free from inordinate attachment to the world or to family, men filled with zeal, ready to sacrifice goods, talents, ease, self, even their life, for the love of Jesus Christ, the service of the Church, and the sanctification of their brethren. And thus, filled with unbounded confidence in God, they are ready to enter the combat, to fight, even unto death, for the greater glory of his most holy and sublime Name.”

And we see that you are really faithful in realizing the beautiful Preface of this Rule. This finding emerges, clear and triumphant, from what we have seen – we can say with our own eyes – when visiting the Exhibition, your missionary exhibition, either in the frigid Arctic regions, in southern Africa, and finally in India. Our Father’s heart rejoices and thanks God for such good, brave, and generous sons, who know so well how to serve, as your venerated Founder wished, both the Holy Church and souls. (“Missions OMI” 60 [1926] 91-92)

*July 8*

BENEDICT XV: ALWAYS UNITED WITH THE ROMAN PONTIFF

*December 23, 1915, Pope Benedict XV addressed the following letter to the Superior General, Bishop Augustine Dontenwill, on the occasion of the first centenary of the founding of the Congregation:*

Venerable Brother, greetings and apostolic benediction.

We received with joy your letter with the good news that the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, over which you skillfully preside, will soon celebrate the first century of its foundation.

Gladly and gratefully we share in your joy. We know very well that, over the last hundred years, your Institute has accomplished many great works for the good of the Church, not only in the geographical boundaries of the province where it was born, but also beyond its borders, so much so that it might well be said that by divine design, the whole world has been entrusted to it as a province to cultivate. This seems to show how God chose to acknowledge and reward your work and your commitment. We note in fact that you have always radiated those virtues that your esteemed Founder and Legislator, of blessed memory, took care to instill in you from the beginning, such as an ardent devotion to the Blessed Virgin, a profound reverence for the Apostolic See, and as a flower of all virtue, the fraternal charity whereby you love each other and you strive for the salvation of souls.

Nor should it be forgotten, but rather recognized to your credit, that in many regions you work successfully to bring the pagans to the Chris-



tian civilization, as well as educating young people in literature and teaching the sacred disciplines, even in the higher grades.

Our predecessors have had the opportunity to praise all these works; Now we want to associate ourselves, wholeheartedly, to these praises, and so as a prominent sign of our benevolence, we appoint you, Venerable Brother, Archbishop Assistant to our throne. With this gesture of distinction we want to honor the whole Institute, which you govern. (A. Dontenwill, *Circular Letter* No. 114, January 13, 1916, *Circulaires administratives*, 3, p. 294-295)

\* \* \*

HIPPOLYTE GUIBERT (1802-1886)  
CARDINAL OF PARIS

*July 8, 1886, Cardinal Hippolyte Guibert, omi, Archbishop of Paris, died.*

*In a letter to the superiors gathered in retreat at Auton he wrote:*

“How could I ever forget that if in my life there has been anything good and useful to the Church, I owe it to what I have learned from the holy Founder of the Congregation and to the examples of the beloved brothers among whom I have been able to live for fifteen years. You know that when I was appointed bishop, the separation was accomplished without my will [...] I would have gladly kept my humble place among you. But this separation was only external, my heart and my affections have remained with you” (October 14, 1876, “Missions OMI” 14 [1876], p. 364).

*August 13, 1877, to the Fathers gathered at Notre Dame du Laus for the retreat:*

“I hold the most beautiful memories of the years I spent in our Congregation... [...] I owe everything to it. It is what has made me what I am. [...] She formed me, she is my mother.” (“Missions OMI” 15 [1877], p. 555).

*Finally, speaking at the 1879 General Chapter:*

“I want to die as a cardinal.... I want to die as a bishop because I possess the character, but I want above all to die as an Oblate.” (“Missions OMI” 17 [1879], p. 283-311).

Y. Beaudoin, *Le Cardinal Joseph Hippolyte Guibert, Oblat de Marie Immaculée (1802-1886), Ecrits Oblats*, II, 7, Rome 2006.

July 9

#### PIUS XI TO THE OBLATE GENERAL CHAPTER

*On September 14, 1932, Pope Pius XI received the members of the General Chapter in the Consistory Hall. After the address of greeting by the new Superior General, Fr. Théodore Labouré, the Pope addressed his allocution to those present:*

It is always with pleasure and great joy, as you well know, especially after having briefly greeted each and every one, that we welcome here the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and, in them, the whole family, the whole big family.

It would be nice to have them all here physically. But you represent them perfectly: no more qualified to represent the whole family than the General Staff of your glorious troops; nothing more qualified than your presence, dear sons and brothers in the Episcopate. [...]

Congratulations for what you have already done in Chapter [...]. You cannot wish for anything better than this harmony, this brotherhood, without rivalry, this spirit of unity, the most effective tool for the true good, the first condition of all prosperity in your works.

We paternally congratulate you, dear sons, after reading this message, a true hymn of gratitude to Divine Providence for all it has done for you. We note with pleasure the prosperity of your young Congregation [...].

We have seen once again how faithful you are to the beautiful, glorious and holy specialty by which you devote every effort, talent and your life to the most abandoned souls in the most difficult missions, a glorious specialty, which makes of the Eskimos, Hottentots, and Bushmen, true children of the family. Beautiful and noble mission, which as-

tures you in a unique, and incomparable way, the blessing of God and all the abundance of the missionary spirit. And you prove it in fact: this spirit is the soul of your institute.

Remember what we recommended to you and to all Orders and Congregations: to pay attention above all to the quality of the novices and the new candidates. We believe that you have been faithful to this charge. God has also blessed you with numbers, according to His own words: "Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you." It can be said, and all superiors should repeat it often: "Seek ye first the quality, the quantity will come automatically – if I may put it that way. Providence will take care of it." It is not for us to think about the numbers, because we are not the ones who give the vocation. Here is the entire theology of vocation: it comes from God, it is God who gives it.

We just have to help it, make it grow, and you did it... and you propose to continue doing so, cultivating always better the vocations which God sends you.

Here is the guarantee, the promise of your future prosperity. The more difficult your task, the greater the future, the greater the commitment to training the young religious the more the missionaries will be adapted to their noble apostolate. ("Missions OMI" 66 [1932], p. 674-676)

July 10

ANTHONY KOWALCZYK, OBLATE BROTHER (1866-1947)  
MODEL OF OBEDIENCE AND HUMILITY

*July 10, 1947, the Servant of God Anthony Kowalczyk died. He was 81 years old. The sixth of twelve children, he was born June 4, 1866 in Dzierzanow, Poznan. He worked in the metallurgical factories of the industrial cities of northern Germany, where he was welcomed by the Prummenbaum family who introduced him to the Oblates. He made his novitiate in Holland. Shortly after, he was sent to the Canadian Northwest. At Lac-la-Biche, he worked in a boys' school, where an accident at the sawmill caused the amputation of his right forearm. He was transferred to the seminary in Edmonton where he remained until*

*his death. A seminary student has recorded a few sentences that Brother Anthony would repeat: “I not educated.... I poor.... I blacksmith of my soul.... I coadjutor Brother.... I always say yes.... I listen to superior.... I pray to the Blessed Virgin.... I love the good Lord.... I help the good Lord.... I happy.” He was an Oblate Brother, who is remembered by the Oblates as a model of obedience and humility.*

*Br. Amadeus Nadeau gave the following testimony about him:*

One cannot think about the Servant of God without thinking of the Madonna. He had a special trusting and filial devotion to Mary. He was really the son of the Holy Virgin. This was demonstrated in a thousand ways, by raising funds to build a grotto, lighting candles every day in her honor, praying to her before every important commitment, invoking her in time of difficulties, encouraging others to pray the Hail Mary as a greeting, and as an expression of gratitude. When they said “Thank you,” he replied, “With a thank you, you are no richer, better to say a Hail Mary.”

He received many graces with his Hail Mary’s.

He loved the Madonna from his childhood. The environment itself led him to this devotion, since the parish church where he was baptized and made his First Communion was the Marian shrine of Our Lady of Consolation. He visited her before going to Renania to devote himself to the Virgin and before entering the novitiate.

He was very zealous in spreading the devotion to Mary. He advised everyone to repeat the Hail Mary often at work and in time of difficulties.

He once said to Maurice Blackburn, who helped him to cultivate the garden: “For each seed, say a Hail Mary.”

If someone told him of some problems, he would say: “How? Did you not tell Our Lady? She would answer you immediately.”

He often promised to say 1000 Ave Maria’s for a favor. [...]

With his Ave’s he obtained many special graces: healings, important favors, freedom from war, from death in the event of serious accidents, conversions and vocations, etc. (Testimony of Fr. Amadeus Nadeau, in *Positio super vita et virtutibus*, II, Rome 1993, p. 31)

P.E. Breton, *Forgeron de Dieu*, Edmonton, 1953 (English translation, Edmonton, 1960; Polish, 1961); *Positio super introductione causae*, Romae 1977; F. Trusso, *I fioretti di fratel Antonio*, Roma, 1966.

*July 11, St. Benedict of Norcia*

#### REVIVE “THE PIETY AND FERVOR” OF THE ANCIENT ORDERS

*The feast of St. Benedict reminds us of the second aim that St. Eugene proposed when he founded the Missionaries of Provence: to compensate for the religious Orders suppressed by the French Revolution. Although this aim has become outdated, the need expressed by it remains. The Founder often repeated it: revive “the piety and fervor” of the ancient Orders. In the Rule of 1825 we read:*

The end of this association is to make up for, insofar as possible, the marvelous institutions that have disappeared since the French Revolution, and which have left a terrible absence that the Church realizes more each day.

The missionaries will try to bring back to life in their own lives the piety and fervor of these holy religious orders destroyed in France by the Revolution; they will strive to replace the virtues as well as the ministries, and the most holy customs of the regular life which were kept by them, such as the practice of the evangelical counsels, love of solitude, contempt for worldly honors, withdrawal from frivolities, abhorrence of riches, practice of mortification, the public recitation of the divine office in common, attendance on the dying, the care of prisoners, and above all the missions. (*The Rule of Saint Eugene de Mazenod*, Woestman, ed., p. 19)

*Meditating on this text during his October 3, 1831 retreat, St. Eugene noted:*

Run through all the religious Orders that the Revolution destroyed in France. Remember the various ministries they exercised, virtues they practiced, some in the secrecy of God’s house, in contemplation and prayer, in service of neighbor through every work of the most sustained

zeal, and draw your own conclusions from this article 3 and its unfolding of such an important second end of our institute.

*The Rule continues:*

Since the end of the Institute is not only to give missions, but also to replace, insofar as our weak means permit, the religious orders and to repair the evils that have crept in among the clergy, all should be persuaded that it is easier to achieve this end by example than by words. Hence, we must convince ourselves that it is indispensable that we should practice all the virtues, and not be unacquainted with any of them. (*The Rule of Saint Eugene de Mazenod*, Woestman, ed., p. 32)

E. Lamirande, *Les Oblats et la suppléance des anciens ordres d'après Mgr de Mazenod*, "Études oblats" 16 (1960), p. 185-195.

July 12

PIUS XII: THE OBLATES' ABUNDANT HARVEST

*May 7, 1949, Pius XII met with the members of the General Chapter on the occasion of the election of Father Léo Deschâtelets as Superior General. In his letter to the entire Congregation he writes:*

The Holy Father spoke to each person in his own language, except of course in Sinhala, spoken by His Exc. Mgr. Cooray. In talking to each one he mentioned this or that detail, or recalled a particular memory. We were surprised to hear him speak with such ease in Italian, Spanish, English, French, German and Polish. Then, he turned to the circle of the capitulants, who drew closer. We wanted to come closer, but we did not dare: there were instructions! The Pope looked so tired, he was so pale in his white cassock; his voice was so low that even those close to him could hardly hear him. He spoke rapidly, sometimes interjecting a quick question that could only be understood by those near him: "With all my heart I bless the work of your General Chapter. Thank you from my heart for the good you do in the missions and I bless all your works. I had deep sorrow at the death of Cardinal Villeneuve for whom I had an exceptional affection. For me he was a very dear friend and his

death caused me great pain. I bless all your crosses, the crucifixes you wear [...]. And I bless you and all your works.”

A few days later we received His Holiness’ response to our filial homage from the Secretariat of State. It reads:

At the time of the election, you felt the need to first of all reaffirm the filial attachment of the sons of Bishop de Mazenod to the common Father of the faithful and renew your intention to continue, in all climates, to devote yourselves to the ministries entrusted to you, in particular in the missions considered the most difficult. It is a great consolation for the heart of His Holiness, among the serious concerns of the present time, to see brave missionaries working to expand the kingdom of God, with no other purpose than to procure his glory and that of his Holy Mother and to commit themselves to the sanctification and salvation of many souls.

The spirit that fills you is, in his eyes, the surest guarantor of an abundant harvest that, under your leadership, the Oblates will continue to have in the Church of God. Whether they are engaged in teaching, Catholic Action or in any other task entrusted to them by the hierarchy, it will always be with an essentially apostolic and missionary spirit that they will fulfill their duties, without ever losing sight of the ideal of their sublime vocation. (L. Deschâtelets, *Circular Letter* No. 181, November 1, 1947, *Circulaire administrative*, 5, p. 134)

G. Marchand, *Le pape Pie XII et les Oblats*, “Études oblates” 18 (1959), p. 85-99.

*July 13*

#### CONCLUSION OF THE FIRST GENERAL CHAPTER AFTER THE APPROVAL OF THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

*The 4th General Chapter ended on July 13, 1826. It was the first time, after the approval of the Congregation, that all the Oblates gathered to celebrate their birth in the Church.*

*The Mass of the Holy Spirit was celebrated before the Blessed Sacrament exposed. At the end, we read in the Acts of the General Chapter; the Founder “gave a very touching speech to make us feel the joy of our*

vocation. It was like the voice of the Lord exposed on the altar; who was calling us again." Then all the Congregation renewed their vows.

*"The presence of the Lord in the family gathered for such a big occasion, the profound recollection of all, the sublime motive that brought us together, gave the ceremony a celestial beauty. All were deeply moved and God himself was at that time."*

*Then they met in the chapter room. Again, the Founder took the floor to emphasize the importance of the day, which marked a new beginning for the Congregation, a life in the Church:*

It is the happy beginning of a new era for the Society. God has approved the projects that we had created for His glory, and blessed the bonds that unite us. From now on we will fight the enemies of heaven under a banner that will be unique and that the Church has given us. The glorious name of the Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary shines on this banner. This name has become ours because we are consecrated to the Blessed Virgin. We are most especially her children and her protection for us, so evident thus far, will be even greater in the future if we show ourselves worthy of such a Mother." (Acts of the General Chapter, July 10 to 13, 1826, « Écrits du Fondateur », 4, p. 226-227)

*July 14*

## THE GLORY OF GOD

*The mention of the glory of God is the first in the trilogy that constantly recurs in the writings of the Founder and the tradition of the Congregation: "for the glory of God, the good of the Church and the salvation of souls."*

My dear friend, read this letter at the foot of your crucifix with a mind to heed only God and what is demanded in the interests of his glory and of the salvation of souls from a priest like yourself... It is not so easy to come across men who are dedicated and wish to devote themselves to the glory of God and the salvation of souls. (St. Eugene to Fr. Tempier, October 9, 1815, *Oblate Writings*, 6, p. 6-7).



Do all the good that is incumbent upon you, but do it only for the glory of God. (St. Eugene to Fr. Tempier, December 18, 1825, *Oblate Writings*, 6, p. 213)

I have done all I ought to, God will do the rest. We live only for him; we seek only the glory of his holy name and the salvation of the souls he has redeemed. When we have employed all the human means in our power, we ought to remain at peace and be worried about nothing. (St. Eugene to Fr. Tempier, June 10, 1826, *Oblate Writings*, 7, p. 113).

We must work, with renewed ardour and still more total devotedness, to bring to God all the glory that stems from our efforts and, to the needy souls of our neighbours, salvation in all possible ways. (St. Eugene to Fr. Tempier, February 18, 1826, *Oblate Writings*, 7, p. 40).

Our Oblates of the Most Holy Mary Immaculate, by the grace of God, are all good and ready to sacrifice their lives for the glory of God and to work for the conversion and sanctification of souls. (Letter to Cardinal Franson, September 25, 1847, *Oblate Writings*, 5, p. 16).

J. Pétrin, *Le souci de la gloire de Dieu dans la spiritualité de l'Oblat*, "Études oblates" 16 (1857), p. 3-19; R. Motte, *Seeking God's Glory According to Blessed Eugene de Mazenod*, "Vie Oblate Life" 44 (1985), p. 3-10.

July 15

#### TOTAL DEDICATION TO THE GLORY OF GOD

We must admit however that we serve a great master and that one never loses anything on his account.... I wish to abandon myself to Him without ever being anxious about anything, doing everything for his glory and leaving him to care of the rest. It is truly inconceivable how he makes everything accord with his designs by ways we never would have thought of....

But who are we indeed that the good God should listen to our pleas? We are, or we ought to be, holy priests who consider themselves happy

and very happy to devote their fortune, their health, their life in the service and for the glory of our God.

We are put on earth, particularly those of our house, to sanctify ourselves while helping each other by our example, our words and our prayers. Our Lord Jesus Christ has left to us the task of continuing the great work of the redemption of mankind. It is towards this unique end that all our efforts must tend; as long as we will not have spent our whole life and given all our blood to achieve this, we having nothing to say; especially when as yet we have given only a few drops of sweat and a few spells of fatigue. This spirit of being wholly devoted to the glory of God, the service of the Church and the salvation of souls, is the spirit that is proper to our Congregation, a small one, to be sure, but which will always be powerful as long as she is holy. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Tempier, August 22, 1817, *Oblate Writings*, 6, p. 34-35)

Never tire then to urge all your people on to the most sublime virtues of our state. A total abnegation of self, a great humility which, joined to the zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, to a great esteem and entire submissiveness towards our Rules whereby we ought to reach our goal, will truly make us achieve this. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Courtès, May 31, 1826, *Oblate Writings*, 7, p. 109)

*July 16, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel*

OBLATES OF MARY, WHAT A GRACE!

*As stated in a letter to Fr. Tempier dated July 21, 1858, St. Eugene used to gain the indulgence linked to the feast of Our Lady of Carmel. Furthermore, the cradle of the Congregation is a former Carmelite convent and love for Mary has always characterized the Oblates. The ancient Directory of Novices shows what kind of Marian formation was given to the novices in the Founder's time. It is applicable to all Oblates.*

After devotion to the sacred person of the Savior, the novices of the Society, must consecrate all the love they have for his very Holy Mother, the glorious and Immaculate Virgin Mary.

It is not a question here of an ordinary devotion, like the one practiced by all Christians; it is not just that more special devotion with which clergymen, who are more faithful to holiness, honor her; the devotion we should have for Holy Mary is quite singular, and must not be found anywhere else to such a high degree as among us.

It is that we are not only the children of Mary as are Christians and especially the ministers of the Church, but we are her children in a more special way. It is Jesus Christ who gave us his Mother through the person of his Vicar on earth. We bear her name and we have left everything to belong to her, to have the happiness of calling ourselves her children.

What a grace, what a favour! How we should esteem her, and what are all the sacrifices compared to what we got in return: to be children of Mary, to belong to her beloved family, walking under her banner and under what title! The most glorious, that of her Immaculate Conception. Will we ever understand enough the grace that God has given us by calling us to such a vocation? Now if it is true that a servant of Mary cannot perish, and that those living under her influence have nothing to fear, what must those who can truly say they are her favourite children not expect from such a Mother?

Oh, you novices of the Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary. Ah! If you knew what God has done for you by putting you in the beloved family of his Divine Mother. Regardless. Your tenderness, your gratitude and your devotion to Mary, will never equal the greatness of her love for you. You will never understand everything she does for you and all you will owe to her in the future. (*Directory of Notre Dame de l'Osier Novitiate*, cf. "Études oblates" 14 [1955], p. 53).

*July 17*

JOHN XXIII: I LIKE YOUR NAME, OBLATES

*On September 5, 1959, John XXIII received the members of the General Chapter in audience. He spoke to them without notes.*

I'm happy to see you gathered here. I remember the first appearance of your Congregation before me. In the Missionary Exhibition of

1925, I saw the beautiful figure of Mgr. de Mazenod, in the Founders' gallery. [...] And I remember, among the portraits of the various founders of missionary institutes, the very open, friendly and attractive figure of Mgr. de Mazenod.

Later, Providence has allowed me to learn about the extraordinary success of your Congregation, not only for its success everywhere, but especially for the diversity of your ministries.

I'm happy to meet you on the occasion of the 26th General Chapter. Chapter means meeting and union. Not the union of a mass, like a heap of stones; but rather a union of souls, of different and multiple flames that merge into a single flame and a single passion.

You are Oblates of Mary Immaculate. For a century, since 1854, our ancestors have heard proclaimed this privilege of Mary which became a dogmatic truth. What joy we derive from meditation on this truth and privilege, a consequence of the Virgin's motherhood. And this motherhood is also an example for your great missionary expansion. Keep this name, and guard it with honor. Today we cannot invoke the Madonna without adding "Immaculate".

I also like your name, OBLATES. Oblation! I find it in the Pater Noster, which is already a first indication; one who knows how to obey the Lord's Prayer has already a good point of reference. But it is easy to say: "Hallowed be thy name.... Thy kingdom come...." It is when we face *Thy will* that things get complicated and the trouble begins. Therefore, renunciation of our own will. To follow Jesus who came "not to do his own will but that of his Father." Oblation is a special fidelity to the will of the Lord. Obedience is what gives meaning to the life of the priest! [...]

We must let these thoughts penetrate our life; we must be faithful to these instructions. Sometimes we doubt: "Is this the life.... Or shall I seek another...." Well, no. There are four things: "your own, rather than the will of another... that the will of God may be fully accomplished." It forces us to give up many things that look good, but it leads to peace and to success, and even surprises. God answers with consolations, success and even a few surprises. There are no surprises in the fulfillment of God's will, as it has happened to someone.... Pray for him to succeed. That is oblation. It is a program of Christian priestly, and missionary life, and leads us to the gate of heaven.

Let us continue to be faithful to these instructions. Sometimes you might doubt whether it would be better or wiser to do otherwise. No, no, no. These four points correspond to our duty. Other things are of secondary, ternary, quaternary order. It is God that leads us to success.

What else can I say to you who come from so many places, representing 7,000 religious around the world, including 4,000 Oblate priests. It is quite extraordinary and worthy of the blessings of God, worthy of success. (L. Deschâtelets, *Circular Letter* No. 209, October 26, 1959, *Circulaires administratives*, 6, p. 6-8)

*July 18*

#### JOHN PAUL II: AN APOSTOLATE THAT GIVES GLORY TO GOD

*Pope John Paul II addressed the following words to the members of the General Chapter during the audience of December 5, 1980:*

A mere glance at your large family fills my soul with admiration: you are missionaries of the Lord and Oblates of the Madonna. In the name of Christ Jesus and the Blessed Virgin you dedicate yourself to the work of evangelization among those who still do not know Christ, so as to lead various populations to an open and generous acceptance of the Gospel. Furthermore, you work at training those called to the priesthood and in the education of youth. An apostolate, therefore, varied and not always easy that gives glory to God through the offering of your heart and all your activities to the Mother of God. The Chapter Assembly is concerned in these days with the renewal and growth called for by the Second Vatican Council and the wishes of all the members of the institute.

In this perspective, it is necessary that each one carry-on with an attitude of faith and humble openness to the examples and teachings of the Divine Master. This involves a commitment to be ever more priestly and religious souls in a life dedicated to the generous exercise of justice, love and peace among men, favoring the humble, the poor, and the suffering. The Second Vatican Council reminds us of this: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, espe-

cially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ." (*GS*, 1)

The more you are able to concretely show justice and charity in the exercise of the priestly ministry and community life, the greater the credibility of the priests and missionaries among the People of God and the brothers to be evangelized.

And again, in proportion to the evangelical character of religious life, of the fraternity that distinguishes it, and of the cohesion of the institute which is its safeguard, the greater will be the impact of the apostolic action on the people and places where it announces the Gospel.

All this demands an intense prayer and deep interior life so that you can continue, even in the occupations of the apostolate, the conversation with the Heavenly Father from whom one asks and receives the liberating power, which enables us to overcome anything in us that might hinder the mission to our neighbour, and give value to the preaching and evangelical witness.

In you, dear sons, this ongoing encounter with God is facilitated even more by the example and powerful intercession of the Blessed Virgin to whom you are consecrated. The Madonna, animated by the Holy Spirit and by a faith without bounds, has lived deeply the truth that God is with us, and that all human existence and activities have their beginning and their end in God.

*July 19*

#### THE GLORY OF GOD, A DAILY OCCUPATION

You gave me intelligence, will, memory a heart, eyes, hands, in a word all my bodily senses, all my soul's faculties, you gave me all these things for yourself, to use them for your glory, for your unique, your greater glory.

My God, ... henceforth and for my whole life, you, you alone will be the sole object to which will tend all my affections and my every action. To please you, act for your glory, will be my daily task, the task of every moment of my life. I wish to live only for you, I wish to love you alone and all else in you and through you. I despise riches, I trample honours under foot; you are my all, replacing all else. My God, my love

and my all. (Eugene de Mazenod, Notes of the retreat made in Amiens, December 1811, in preparation for ordination to the priesthood, *Oblate Writings*, 14, p. 217)

*Among the many trials that Eugene de Mazenod had to endure, we can recall the long ordeal from 1832 to 1837. After his consecration as Bishop of Icosia, he was stripped of his citizenship by the French government and silenced by the authority of Rome. Despite the deep pain that this caused him, he wrote to Mgr. Frezza, Secretary of the Congregation for Ecclesiastical Affairs:*

It is a fine compensation for my sufferings to see God glorified in this way, so many souls converted.... Provided God be exalted, what does it matter if one remains humiliated, overlooked, abandoned by nearly everyone? .... Ever since I came into the world, God has led me by the hand; he has had me accomplish so many things for his glory, that I had reason to fear pride if men had perceived them and shown gratitude towards me; it is better for me that they be unjust and ungrateful; in this way God will be my sole reward, as he is already my sole strength, my only hope. (April 27, 1835, *Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 223-224)

July 20

#### JOHN PAUL II: AT NOTRE-DAME DU CAP

*On pilgrimage to the shrine of Notre-Dame du Cap (Canada), September 10, 1984, John Paul II addressed the following words to the Oblates:*

I also congratulate and encourage the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate who for 82 years have served this shrine. I mentioned this morning, my dear Oblate friends, the beautiful work of evangelization that your colleagues have done and continue to do throughout Northern Canada and in many other regions, especially in the service of Native Americans. But in a sense, the ministry at Our Lady of Cap-de-la-Madeleine is also missionary. It promotes a renewal of God's people. And it is in the line of your Marian spirituality that you have helped to establish and spread in Canada.

*Some years later, during the Sunday Angelus, November 13, 1988, the Pope told the story of the presence and work of the Oblates at the shrine:*

In 1902 the shrine was entrusted to the care of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, who carry on with great zeal a wide and varied pastoral work, assisted by many lay people and organizations and welfare and charitable movements. From 1954 to 1964 they helped in the construction of a basilica, alongside the earlier church, so now this Marian center has two churches in the middle of pleasant gardens as well as appropriate hospitality facilities, that meet the needs of those, wearied by misfortunes and darkness, who seek to find light and refreshment for the spirit at the feet of their common Mother.

The shrine aims to be mainly a center of evangelization and Marian devotion. Therefore, the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is given an important place. There is catechetical and theological formation. Liturgical and para-liturgical gatherings of various kinds are organized, depending on the possibility or interest of the pilgrims.

The climax of the shrine's Marian events is reached on the Solemnity of the Assumption, which is carefully prepared by a novena, during which, for three hours a day, thousands of pilgrims pray, sing, listen to word of God and take part in the Eucharistic celebration.

There is no doubt that the Notre-Dame du Cap Shrine is the largest pilgrimage center dedicated to the Virgin Mary in North America and that the Marian prayer of the rosary has always been popular there.

*July 21*

#### ENAMORED OF THE GLORY OF GOD

Never seeking their own interest but only what pertains to the glory of God and the service of the Church. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Honorat, March 26, 1842, *Oblate Writings*, 1, p. 19)

Please God that at Aix they will know how to profit from the gifts of God. For that the missionaries must be forgetful of themselves, and have nothing in view save the greater glory of God and the salvation of



these poor souls who have not had any help since the mission. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Tempier, April 9, 1826, *Oblate Writings*, 7, p. 80)

The life of Mgr. De Mazenod was always very active, very penitent and very united to the Heart of Jesus. We do not believe that the Church, through the centuries, has counted many souls more mortified, more interior, and more enamored of the glory of God. (E. Baffie, *Esprit et vertus du missionnaire des pauvres J. Eugène de Mazenod...*, Paris-Lyon 1894, p. VII)

Do not neglect anything in order to glorify God, and to save souls; by doing so we will be worthy sons of our Father, so full of love for God and for souls. (J. Fabre, *Circular Letter* No. 40, December 8, 1886, *Circulaires administratives*, 2, p. 7)

All of our fathers are doing well; procuring the glory of God and everything leads us to believe that the Lord will crown our efforts more and more. (Bishop Vital Grandin to St. Eugene, June 1, 1860, "Missions OMI" 1 (1866), p. 53)

*July 22, St. Mary Magdalene, "Apostle of the Apostles"*

#### JOHN PAUL II: AN EVANGELICAL MISSIONARY ADVENTURE

*During the audience of October 2, 1986, John Paul II invited the members of the General Chapter to continue in the missionary spirit of the Founder and of the Congregation.*

I noticed a notable convergence of the various regions of the Congregation towards a community missionary work more clearly dedicated to the poor, even to sacrificing more personal commitments. This first convergence reveals another, namely the accentuation or even the resumption of a genuine, transparent, fraternal, joyful, open community life, which is therefore generating fervor for your religious and apostolic life.

For one hundred and sixty years, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate have written a wonderful chapter in the missionary history of the con-

temporary Church, from the Great North to the Equator. Allow me to cite as examples the great figure of Bishop Vital Grandin for the past, and the courageous President of the Episcopal Conference of South Africa, Bishop Hurley, for the present. I thank God to hear that, today, a large number of Oblates, eager to bring along all their brothers, want to embrace the ideal that led their Blessed Founder into an evangelical missionary adventure, the stupendous development of which he did not dare to imagine, considering the thousand obstacles in his way.

Sons of Eugene de Mazenod, whose zeal for the proclamation of the Gospel has been compared to the mistral wind, heirs of a nearly two centuries old lineage of Oblates filled with passion for Jesus Christ, let yourselves be drawn more than ever to the huge masses and the poor regions of the Third World, as well as to this Fourth World of the West, which is stagnating in misery and often in the ignorance of God.

\* \* \*

#### MARY MAGDALENE, THE SAINT OF PROVENCE

*According to tradition, Mary Magdalene, her brother Lazarus and her sister Martha, after leaving their homeland to escape persecution, found refuge in Provence. In the thirteenth century, a large basilica was built on the site of previous places of worship at St. Maximin, the cave where Mary Magdalene remained in penance for thirty years. It continued to be a place of pilgrimage until the French Revolution, when the cult diminished. Eugene did much to bring it back into vogue. He wrote to the Bishop of Fréjus, the diocese where the shrine was located: “Is this not the right time to revive the devotion of the faithful towards our patron saints? It is time to put an end to this dormant piety and to revive a cult so dear to our fathers.”*

*The church in which St. Eugene was baptized was dedicated to St. Mary Magdalene. Demolished at the time of the Revolution, the title passed to the present church, which was particularly dear to the Oblates because the Founder’s preaching began there; the baptismal font of the ancient church is also preserved here.*

July 23

JOHN PAUL II: A SIGN OF THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE CHURCH

*During an audience on September 24, 1998, John Paul II addressed the following words to the members of the General Chapter:*

I am pleased to welcome you at the end of your 33rd General Chapter, whose central theme was *evangelization of the poor on the threshold of the third millennium*....

With you all, I give thanks to the Lord for the work accomplished by the Oblates. Your presence on every continent, and particularly in distant lands, brings you into contact with men and women of different cultures and traditions; this is the sign of the Church's universality and of her concern for all peoples. To stay close to people, particularly the poor whose numbers continue to increase, you have wished to reorganize your presence in the various Provinces by sending new communities to Asia, Latin America, Africa, as well as to the great Canadian North. You are also concerned with new areas of mission, especially the communications media and confident dialogue with the people of today, in order to establish an ever more fraternal society and an era of justice and peace. You are making courageous efforts to meet new, urgent pastoral, apostolic and missionary needs, and to undertake the necessary inculturation, a patient process which, while requiring you to listen to people, "must in no way compromise the distinctiveness and integrity of the Christian faith" (*Redemptoris missio*, No. 52). The Church appreciates your willingness and concern to answer the Lord's call wherever you are sent and to put yourselves at the service of the local Churches, despite your limited means and the decreasing number of those belonging to your institute. I am sure that the missionary zeal of your General Assembly will bear many fruits and give new strength to your institute.

As you know, proclaiming the Gospel requires you to draw strength, courage and hope from a life of prayer, especially from mental prayer by which God communicates many spiritual graces, from the *Liturgy of the Hours*, the prayer which gives each person a share in the praise of the universal Church and thus in her mission, as well as from medita-

tion on the Scripture and from the Eucharist, in which Christ teaches his disciples and gives himself as food for their apostolic journey. Daily discipline, the offering of oneself to God, and community life are authentic proofs of intense love and are the first way to proclaim the Gospel. This is how to imitate Christ, enabling you to say: “Come and see” (Jn 1:39) and to open people’s hearts to receiving the word of God. Indeed, the Lord’s faithful will be recognized by their contemporaries by their love for one another and will reveal the face of the Risen One (1 Jn 4:11). In today’s world more than ever, priests and religious must live in close union with their Teacher, striving to become saints, as your Rule requires, so that you will be docile to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and respond better to the world’s call. The life of prayer does not turn people away: on the contrary, it helps them to perceive more deeply their essential needs which only Christ can reveal to us, he who became man to reunite his brethren and to save all humanity.

Like many institutes, you wish to involve lay people in your activities and your spirituality. This generous collaboration is very valuable to the mission and gives each person the opportunity to develop his spiritual life according to the original intention of Eugene de Mazenod, who was “marked by a heroic degree of faith, hope and apostolic charity”, as I recalled at his canonization. Continue to rely on his spirituality and missionary zeal to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth!

You are asking yourselves about your institute’s decreasing numbers. This is a source of suffering and a trial which must in no way weaken the missionary zeal of the Oblates. On the contrary, may it be an opportunity to redouble your efforts to offer your ideal to young people on every continent, many of whom are generous and long to serve Christ and his Church!

\* \* \*

BLESSED CLEMENTE RODRÍGUEZ TEJERINA (1918-1936)  
MARTYR OF SPAIN

*He was born on July 23, 1918, in Santa Olaja de la Varga (León). There were twelve brothers, six of whom were consecrated: two Capu-*

*chins, two Sisters of the Holy Family and two Oblates. When he was only 11 years old, he left home to begin his journey with the Oblates in the Juniorate of Urnieta. His relatives describe him as a humble, obedient, helpful, kind and conciliatory child, to which his companions add that he was sociable, a good companion and deeply religious. Although he was not very intelligent, he made up for it with tenacity and in the end he was successful in his studies.*

*On July 16, 1936, he renewed his vows and six days later, on July 22, he was arrested with the whole community in the convent itself and, two days later, taken with everyone to Madrid, to the General Directorate of Security, to be released the following day. After first taking refuge in the provincial house, where his sister, a Sister of the Holy Family of Bordeaux, was able to visit him and recalls: "I was with him for a few moments. I remember asking him how he was in good spirits, and he told me: 'We are in danger, and we are afraid of being separated; together we encourage one another. However, if we have to die, I am ready, certain that God will give us the strength we need to be faithful'". These are the exact words of my brother, which, spoken at that time, will never be forgotten.*

*On October 15, 1936, he was arrested and taken to the Modelo Prison. There he met those Oblates whom he had not seen since leaving Pozuelo and later, together with his religious brothers, he was transferred to San Anton. From there he was "taken out" along with 12 other Oblates and martyred at Paracuellos del Jarama on November 28, 1936. He was the youngest of the group: he was only 18 years old.*

*July 24*

#### MASSACRE AT LA BROSE-MONTCEAUX

*July 24, 1944, five Oblates, who were active in the Resistance, Fathers Christian Gilbert and Albert Lucien Joseph Piat, Brothers Jean-Marie Cluny and Joachim Nio, and the scholastic brother Lucien Perrier, were killed by German soldiers at the scholasticate of La Brosse-Montceaux (France). The whole community was later deported to the concentration camps of Compiègne and Péronne.*

Today we commemorate heroes hidden in the shadows. They were religious killed by the furious Nazis, who were aware that they were losing the game and that fear led to a blind repression. It was a desperate crime. They fired upon freedom. They were afraid of freedom. Yes, these religious were in the shadow resistance. They wanted to remain silent religious. They dreamed neither of victorious parades nor of solemn decorations. They just wanted to be guardians of peace, the daily bread of their ministry. But the tragedy of an enslaved country forced them to sacrifice their lives. They had chosen to be a discreet link in a chain, which was to safeguard human dignity in the face of racism and violence. After the liberation, they dreamed only of the foreign missions and Christian witness. Humbly, like apostles in the shadows. Sacrifice is part of the mission of the Apostles. Christians know this. There is no Church without martyrs.

But their sacrifice had started well before July 24, 1944. As obedient religious, they asked themselves: how to respond to the duty of civil disobedience? Traditionally respectful of legitimate order, they had to develop a change of conscience, to become heralds of refusal, prophets of freedom, by saying “no” to a blind commitment to an order dictated by force.

It is difficult for us, in this peaceful summer, to share the anguish of humble and faithful men before the insurrection needed to be able to look at the sky, with dignity and freedom. Indeed, how could these servants of love and non-violence listen to the call of duty, to the point of hiding weapons in the Fathers’ cellar? That is precisely the sacrifice, in this moral inversion. Because man is man, and dignity is a violence done to oneself, in the soul and the conscience.

[...] The resistance is much more than a defensive reaction; it is the affirmation of a transcendent free conscience. And there, Christian or not, everyone is recognized in the gospel of the gift of oneself in order to give life. Yes, if the grain of wheat does not fall into the earth, there is no abundant harvest. This Christian truth has many human seeds. [...]

We remember them in meditation and prayer, to say today to those who forget that risk and sacrifice are part of life and are often – and increasingly – the price to pay for freedom to live and hope to survive. (Gérard Defois, Archbishop of Sens, La Brosse-Montceaux, July 24, 2014, *In Memory of the Fallen Oblates*)

M. Quéré, *Scholasticate behind Bard, 24 July 1944-31 August 1944*, “Oblatio” III (2014), p. 401-421; L. Wisselmann, *Cinq Oblats de la Brosse*, [Héritage oblat 12], Rome 1998.

July 25, St. James, Apostle

#### IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE APOSTLES

*“Walking in the footsteps of the Apostles” is an expression that comes back over and over in the writings of the Founder. It almost always means to imitate their life of union with Christ and his mission. We find it already in the first letter to Tempier:*

We have laid down the foundations of an establishment which will steadily furnish our countryside with fervent missionaries. These will ceaselessly engage in destroying the empire of the demon, at the same time as providing the example of a life worthy of the Church in the community which they will form.... You will have *four companions*. If presently we are not more numerous, it means we wish to choose men who have the will and the courage to walk in the footsteps of the apostles. (St. Eugene to Fr. Tempier, October 9, 1815, *Oblate Writings*, 6, p. 6-7)

In his important circular letters on *Preaching* and on *Studies*, Father Soullier mentioned the Apostles several times in the same way the Founder did. He published his letter on *Preaching* in February of 1895. After holding forth at length on the dignity and the fruitfulness of preaching, he added: “The Apostles, sent by Jesus Christ, held the sublimity of preaching in high regard. When they were forced to choose, they entrusted the work of charity to subordinates and reserved for themselves the task of preaching [...]”

About ten times in his December 8, 1896 letter on *Studies*, he mentioned the Apostles who did not baptize, but reserved for themselves the ministry of the word. He stated that “the best means for regenerating the world was to come back to the method of the Apostles”, and went on to explain what this method entailed. In Chapter 5, treating of study and the Oblate in the foreign missions, he said: “You find yourselves in

the same situation as the Apostles who had the whole world to win over to the faith [...]; your role is, in a sense, more difficult than that of the Apostles’ “because “you have to face paganism before you, you have heresy at your elbow [...]”. In several places he spoke of the “apostolic man” who is the “propagator and defender of the faith”. (Y. Beaudoin, *Apostles*, DOV, p. 32)

July 26

### OBLATES, “OBEDIENT SONS”

*For Eugene de Mazenod obedience “is the basis of any religious edifice” (To Fr. François Bermond, August 19, 1841) and Oblates should be “obedient sons” (To Fr. Jean-Baptiste Honorat, September 29, 1841).*

Let all be intent on making our community very fervent. Fidelity to the Rules, exact discipline, charity, mutual support, goodwill in doing promptly and willingly all that obedience demands, these are the virtues to practice which makes religion a true paradise on earth. (St. Eugene to Fr. Dandurand, August 11, 1843, *Oblate Writings*, 1, p. 55)

Who can tell what good will be effected by the ministry of our people now that union and charity reign amongst them and now that simple, frank and prompt obedience will settle all matters and rule all minds; for that is the decisive point, to know how to renounce one’s own ideas and submit one’s judgement to the directions which are intimated to us on behalf of God... to live a life of faith which tells one that God is in one’s superior, no matter who he is, even believing oneself to be better endowed with wit and wisdom than him.... (St. Eugene to Fr. Honorat, October 20, 1844, *Oblate Writings*, 1, p. 109-110)



July 27

OBEDIENCE: A SURE PATH THAT LEADS TO HEAVEN

Keep repeating to the novices that by their consecration they give themselves to the Church without reservation, that they completely die to the world, to their families and to themselves; that they vow a perfect obedience by which they sacrifice unreservedly their own will so as to wish only what is prescribed by obedience; it is not only a question of obeying, but also in heart and spirit acquiescing with obedience, of being detached from places, things, even persons whom they should all love with the same charity. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Santoni, master of novices, March 16, 1844, *Oblate Writings*, 10, p. 123-124)

Steep yourself more and more, my dear friend, in the grandeur and sublimity of your holy state; but never lose sight of the obligations which it imposes upon you. Read and reread our holy Rules, fully convince yourself that you are quite happy to belong entirely to Jesus Christ. No, my dear brother, you are no longer your own man in any way and you ought assuredly to congratulate yourself much about this. You know only too well the use, or rather say, abuse that you made of your freedom when you had no other master but yourself. Now it is Jesus Christ, our divine Saviour, who is your Master and he manifests his will to you through the Rule that you have embraced with love and through the voice of the superior who stand in his place. Open the lives of the saints, you will see how they understood this truth and especially how they put it into practice. It is them you ought to take as your models; with such examples one cannot go astray. Oh, holy obedience! Sure road which leads to heaven, may I never deviate from the way you mark out for me, may I ever be docile to the least of your counsels! Yes, my dear brother, outside this path there is no salvation for us. But thanks be to the goodness of God, you have already understood this and your letter allays the concern that was rightly aroused in me. [...]

Were obedience to put me at a door to open and close to those who come and go, I would consider myself very happy and I would believe, not without reason, that my salvation was more assured by this situation in which I was forced to be against my liking. One always does enough

when one does only what obedience prescribes. It is only a matter of doing it well, not only exteriorly, but with heart and soul, and then one cannot be other than saved. So, my dear friend, cease to be grieved in the slightest on this subject.... (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Bourrelier, September 19, 1821, *Oblate Writings*, 6, p. 84)

July 28

#### THE SUPERIOR: ANIMATOR OF COMMUNITY LIFE AND MISSION

*Circular Letter No. 24 (March 5, 1872) of Fr. Joseph Fabre, the Superior General, was addressed to the superiors to help them live their assigned task. It is a true masterpiece, 29 pages which should be read in full. Here is a little taste.*

The duty of the local superior is to maintain the family spirit, which is and must be a spirit of self-denial. The works to which we are called by vocation are not, humanly speaking, either beautiful or brilliant. They do not lend themselves at all to stroking egos, or to placing the religious in a flattering situation, which would surround him with an aura of human glory. The most abandoned souls, that is the inheritance which the Father has left us; in the forests, on the icy wastes of the New World or in the countryside of the civilized countries, there are Christians to make or recover, with so much suffering, often without being paid humanely, without other comfort than that of the grace of God, which is never lacking. To accept these works to be performed with zeal, you need a great spirit of dedication. Woe to us if that is missing! This generosity needs to be nurtured, and supported, so that one will not yield to the temptation to avoid these works, or to seek less burdensome and easier ones. The local superior should ensure that this spirit of sacrifice, typical of our beloved Father and of our elders, always exists among us.

Love of our holy vocation: we must esteem the vocation, preferring to any other the ministry entrusted to us, reminding ourselves that the Savior chose it for himself. But esteem for our vocation is not enough, we have to love it. Each local superior must consider it his duty to inspire and continuously maintain this love; he must show this attitude

in his conduct and use all opportunities, all the means at his disposal to achieve this. One does well only what is done with love. [...]

Have we not received the most precious of lives in the Congregation, religious life, and the life of Oblates of Mary? If a local superior loves the Congregation, he will be jealous and happy to make her loved, easily finding the tools fit for that purpose. Let him be a father to his subjects; may they always find in him a good and compassionate heart, willing to share their joys and sorrows, happy for their successes, sad for their disappointments. In short, by his dedication the local superior shows that he is superior, not for himself, but for his brothers; not to be the master, but a father and friend. He will be loved by his subjects with a real and sincere affection, and with him the Congregation will be loved. We will not look elsewhere, we will think of nothing else, we will love the Congregation and cherish it. (J. Fabre, *Circular Letter* No. 24, March 5, 1872, *Circulaires administratives*, 1, p. 242-243)

July 29

#### FRATERNITY AND OBEDIENCE

*Commenting on Constitutions 24 and 25 (1982 text), Fr. Fernand Jetté points out the new understanding of obedience offered by the Second Vatican Council.*

Obedience was held as of major importance in the Founder's thought. As he said already in 1818: "The saints regard this vow as the most important and essential of all... Obedience...is the bond of union in every well-ordered society... In following the directives of superiors let our members keep before their eyes God himself, for it is out of love for him and to him alone that they submit in the person of their superiors" (quoted on p. 36 of the present Rule book).

The same spirit is found in the present *Constitutions*, but with a new insistence on each one's commitment, responsibility and "freedom fortified by obedience" (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 43). [...]

Again it is Christ who calls us to follow him on the road of obedience. He "became obedient unto death, even death on the cross" (Philippians 2:8). The Father's will is our food, the food which gives us life.

We are disposed to follow it "without reserve" in order "to accomplish his plan of salvation", The Oblate, like the priest, will find the deep unity of his life in obedience that is intensely lived in the following of Christ. [...]

This and the following article present the benefits and signs of consecrated obedience. To begin with, through obedience "we become the servants of all". We may be surprised to find this fraternal aspect mentioned at the outset of this sector on obedience: we would rather expect to find first a mention of the bond which links us to authority. The text, however, reflects well the current outlook and right from the beginning reminds us that obedience too is a community service. Obedience situates us in today's world; obedience contests the spirit of domination and recognizes, through the fraternity that animates it, that all are brothers in God's sight, and obedience gives witness to "that new world wherein persons recognize their close interdependence." In line with the reference to St. Paul (Galatians 5:13), we see how community obedience to God's will is based on faith and love and opens us to mutual service. Through obedience "the freedom of the Gospel" is made real and even becomes, as *Lumen Gentium* puts it, a "freedom fortified by obedience" (No. 43). (Jetté, *O.M.I. The Apostolic Man*, p. 166-169)

July 30

#### THE ROLE OF THE SUPERIOR

The role of the superior is not just functional. He is not only the group facilitator. His role is also of the sacramental order. Community life lived in faith, in fact, makes Christ present (C 37), of which the superior is a sign (C 81). "The local superior has the task of animating and directing the community so as to ensure the progress and the greater good of the members" (C 89). This good concerns the integrity of the Oblate vocation. St. Eugene wrote to Fr. Soullier, recently appointed superior of the Limoges community: "Have piety especially reign in your midst. It is monstrous to see religious who dispose of so many means of sanctification and perfection huddling in indifference and laxness." (Eugene de Mazenod, September 23, 1854, *Oblate Writings*, 11, p. 246) [...]

The Superior “is the pastor of his brothers” (WAC 23, 6). Responsible for the internal and missionary life of the community, he must take care of all its members. The Founder invited Fr. Honorat, first superior of Canada, “endeavor more to endear the hearts of those under you by charity and mildness than to lead them by authority.” (September 29, 1841, *Oblate Writings*, 1, p. 13) Two years later he again wrote to him: “It is the duty of the superior to insist upon the worth of his members, as it is the duty of the members to uphold the worth of the superior.” (Eugene de Mazenod, October 7, 1843, *Oblate Writings*, 1, p.63)

As promoter of fraternal charity, the superior should involve all members of the community, and in particular his council in the decisions. To the same Canadian superior Eugene wrote: “In the name of Heaven, amend yourself and cease taking upon yourself alone a responsibility which necessarily has to be shared by others and with which you cannot proceed, nay you cannot even propose it, without my consent. It is thus, by giving others marks of confidence, by showing them deference, by knowing how to modify one’s own ideas and to adopt those of others that one gains their sympathy, their help and their affection.” (Eugene de Mazenod, January 10, 1843. *Oblate Writings*, 1, p. 30)

The whole community and the superior in particular is called upon to act and to grow according to the charism of the Institute, expressed especially in the Constitutions, in unity with the major superiors. “In the spiritual or temporal government... neither do or permit anything alien to the spirit of our Institute.” (to Honorat, September 20, 1841, *Oblate Writings*, 1, p. 9) That is the Founder’s own spirit. He wrote to Fr. Guigues that he was looking for a superior for Oregon who, “is a devout and experienced man full of the spirit of God, imbued with my spirit, who acts by himself as I myself would act.” (Eugene de Mazenod, January 24, 1847, *Oblate Writings*, 1, p. 160)

Let us end with two texts from the Founder. “Remember that you must be a model for everyone. Make your oraison often on the subject of the duties of your position; it isn’t a small thing; keep a close eye on yourself.” (To Fr. Mille, superior at N.D. du Laus, May 2, 1835, *Oblate Writings*, 8, p.155) “So call fervently on the Lord and our good Mother, and then use all your skill to ensure success.” (To Fr. Dassy, newly ap-

pointed superior of the new foundation near Bordeaux, October 5, 1851, *Oblate Writings*, 11, p. 61). (M. Zago, *Letter of the Superior General to the local superiors*, “OMI Information”, No. 341, January 1996, p. 7-9)

*July 31, St. Ignatius of Loyola*

#### IN ST. IGNATIUS' ROOMS

*From the time he lived in Venice St. Eugene always had a great devotion and admiration for Saint Ignatius and the Society of Jesus. Some Jesuits have greatly contributed to his spiritual journey, the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius were a guide for him and the Constitutions of the Jesuits were one of the sources for the drafting of his Rules in 1818.*

*August 1, 1830, he wrote to Father Tempier sharing his impressions of the previous day during the celebration of Mass at the Jesuits, in Freiburg, on the feast of St. Ignatius:*

I was happy at the altar as I offered the holy sacrifice for the Order of Jesuits without forgetting our own family. I congratulated their holy Founder for the marvels he had worked. But how great the help he received! [...] From the first years of their coming together, it could be said of each of them that they did more than he did. I do not speak only of the first companions; I speak of all those who joined them as soon as they became known. It seems that all those zealous to defend the Church so horribly torn apart, who felt they had the ability to be useful to her and the virtue to devote themselves to this great task, flocked to the banner of Ignatius. His company was from the beginning an army of generals. Can we then be surprised at all they have done! (*Oblate Writings*, 7, p. 204-205)

*During his stays in Rome, St. Eugene visited many places linked to the memory of St. Ignatius and the Jesuits. Among others the rooms where the saint lived and died. In his diary on March 4, 1826 he notes:*

For a long time, I have wanted to say mass in the interior chapel of the Gesù, in the very room where Saint Ignatius and Saint Francis Borgia died. I had that consolation today.... The saint lived in that room, he

composed his constitutions there; Laynez, the Order's second general, died there.... I presume that many other saints have celebrated the holy sacrifice on this altar, before the Blessed Virgin's image, which was already there at the time of Saint Ignatius. Saint Philip Neri came as well to this place several times to talk with Saint Ignatius. They have marked the place where the saint used to pray and the one where Saint Francis Borgia welcomed Saint Aloysius Gonzaga and Saint Stanislaus.... I had the good fortune of saying mass on the altar where all those saints celebrated before me, and made my thanksgiving on the spot where they say Saint Ignatius used to pray; so much for the *resemblance*; but I would have to create a much longer song than the one from which I borrowed this word, if I had to note the *difference*. However, all these precious memorabilia give me the greatest pleasure, and such locations are too much to my liking for me not to be deeply moved at having come across the ones in this place. (*Oblate Writings*, 17, p. 111-112)

*Almost thirty years later, going back to the same place, he writes:*

I began my day by going to say the holy mass in the room where Saints Ignatius and Francis Borgia died, after having lived in it during their holy generalate.... After it was transformed into a chapel, Saints Charles and Francis de Sales came there to celebrate holy mass, on the same altar, where I myself also had the joy of celebrating the holy sacrifice. I always pray in that holy place with a profound sense of devotion; I cannot forget the favor I received during my first trip to Rome, when I had so great a need of protection from all the saints that I went to invoke in each of their shrines. What a mass that was! I can count only four or five in my life when I experienced that sort of grace; one does not ask for it, but when you receive it, you are overcome and give thanks with a deep sense of gratitude. (November 27, 1854, *Oblate Writings*, 17, p. 213)

Y. Beaudoin, *Mgr Eugène de Mazenod et les Jésuites*, "Études oblates" 51 (1992), p. 125-179.





# August

**T**he anniversary of the birth and baptism of St. Eugene will be the occasion to look at how his contemporaries remembered him. This month we will also continue our reflection on obedience above all to the Constitutions and Rules, as a manifestation of God's will.

*August 1, Saint Alphonsus de Liguori*

## BIRTH OF ST. EUGENE

*St. Eugene usually remembered his birthday. In his diaries and letters we can capture the different sentiments with which he relived the anniversary of August 1, 1782 from year to year.*

As you look at the date on this letter, you will recall my dear friend that I enter today into my forty-ninth year. I was busy yesterday, the whole day, with the thoughts that the circumstance of the end of my forty-eighth year brought to mind. I have groaned, as you can imagine, over a quantity of miseries; I thanked God for many graces, but I was saddened – and it is herein that I have been wrong – to find in my life as a whole a field more vast than that which I have traversed; I meant that it seems to me I have not really fulfilled my course. Is it my fault? Is it a question of time? The director to whom I confided these regrets seemed persuaded that it is the fault of the times and the misfortune of circumstances. I then complained in a way to God for having given me more thoughts, more desires, more means, more will than strength. (To Fr. Tempier, August 1, 1830, *Oblate Writings*, 7, p. 204)

Another year to add to the 58 already passed. I enter today into my 59th year, which includes 25 years in the world, 25 years in the ecclesi-

astical state from the tonsure to the priesthood, and soon 8 years in the episcopate. Priest at 28 years of age in 5 months, Bishop at 49 in three months. All these calculations show first that I am no longer young, far from it, and they explain enough the disgust I feel for all things here below. They also remind me of God’s blessings; would to God they do not reproach my little correspondence to grace of my triple vocation. (August 1, 1840, *Oblate Writings*, 20, p. 187)

Nothing special today except that I finish my 59th year. This is how we approach the end almost without even noticing it. We grow older one day at a time, but then comes the anniversary that reminds you that you are older by a year, and each year the number grows and eventually surprises you because in this rapid progression nothing seemed changed, neither in the strength of the body nor in the mind.... And so I fall into the sixties. It would almost be better not to know it, because it seems that is the end of life, and then where to find the courage to do something? It takes an effort of the will, powerfully stimulated by the grace of God. (August 1, 1841, *Oblate Writings*, 20, p. 217)

You will have seen from the date of this letter that I am writing to you on the anniversary of my birth, that is to say, that which terminates the 75 years that I have already spent on earth. I know that neither you or my other children in Jesus Christ forget on this day to pray that the good God may show me mercy. Such is the thought with which I am going to unite myself to you in a mass of thanksgiving and reparation that I am to celebrate.... (To Fr. Tempier, August 1, 1857, *Oblate Writings*, 3, p. 133)

There it is, August 1 has come around once again. A few years ago It would have been welcomed with a certain joyfulness. It reminded me quite simply of the day I was born; it was an invitation to thank God for the gift of my existence and I was pleased to receive the compliments of my friends. The feelings aroused by these circumstances turned to my well-beloved mother; today things are different. First of all, that good mother to whom I owed my birth and who had nourished me with her milk, is no longer on earth, and the anniversary of my birth, by bringing back memories of the time when she was so happy to have given a son

to the family and all the birthdays which she celebrated with me right up to a very old age only make me feel more poignantly the misfortune I had to lose her and the state of loneliness in which she left me. I could speak to her as mother, my very dearest mother, until I was seventy years old. She was ninety-two years of age when she was taken away from me. Besides, celebrating a seventy-seventh birthday is not a very wonderful experience! How many are there who continue their career to the age of eighty? That means three years of life, or even less, still left for me. I certainly have no illusions but what matter! It is a reminder of death rather than a commemoration of birth. Are we not created for heaven which is our true fatherland? Therefore, it is not death that should sadden us but rather the awareness of our sins.

This year the day coincides with that when our good fishwives, the ladies of the market, celebrate the feast of their patroness, St. Anne. Every year I go to celebrate Mass and Communion for them. In the little talk which I gave them in Provençal I mentioned the fact that I was born on this day, but when I told them that this was my seventy-seventh birthday that I was celebrating with them these good ladies responded in a loud voice: some said “*longue mai*” which means long may you live; others “*que le bouen Dieou vous conservò*”: May God preserve you; “*Pourqu’es vivro cent ans*”: may you live to be one hundred! (Diary, August 1, 1858, *Oblate Writings*, 22, p. 135-136)

Y. Beaudoin, *Bishop de Mazenod and the Anniversaries of His Birth and His Baptism*, “*Vie Oblate Life*” 43 (1984), p. 199-207.

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#### FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLE OF SAINT ALPHONSUS DE LIGUORI

*Alphonsus Maria de Liguori, whose feast is celebrated on August 1, was one of the saints who had most influenced St. Eugene’s views on morality, for the foundation, and in drafting the Rules. He knew his writings already while in Venice. He became a promoter of his doctrine and commissioned the writing of the saint’s first biography to be published in France.*

I have studied his works extensively and we have taken him as one of our patrons; we would like to walk in his footsteps and imitate his virtues.... I have some (of his writings), among others his moral theology which I like very much and have studied in a special way when I had the time to study.... (To his father, Charles Antoine de Mazenod, May 1, 1816, *Oblate Writings*, 13, p. 6)

*Thanks to St. Alphonsus St. Eugene was inspired by the love and mercy of God manifested in Christ the Saviour, as he writes to the first community of Aix:*

*Christe salvator.* That is the aspect under which we ought to contemplate our divine Master. Our particular vocation is such that we are associated in a special manner with the redemption of men; the Blessed Liguori has likewise put his Congregation under the protection of the Saviour. Would that we all endeavour, by the sacrifice of our entire being, not to render his redemption useless, both in regard to ourselves and in regard to those whom we are called upon to evangelize. (July 1816, *Oblate Writings*, 6, p. 20)

*He entrusts Father Domenico Albin with the task of teaching the moral theology of St. Alphonsus in the moral classes at the scholasticate and later at the major seminary of Marseilles and that of Ajaccio.*

*It will be primarily on the pastoral level that St. Eugene reflects Alphonsus' moral leanings. This can be seen, for example, in contrast to Mgr. Arbaud, Bishop of Gap.*

P.-E. Drouin, *Origines liguoriennes de nos saintes Règles*, “Études oblates” 1 (1942), p. 210-220; G. Orlandi, *St. Eugene de Mazenod, A Supporter of St. Alphonsus Liguori's Moral Theology*, “Vie Oblate Life” 63 (2004), p. 291-308; J. Pielorz, *Alphonsus de Liguori*, in *Historical Dictionary of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, II, Rome, AOSR, 2010, p. 3-14.

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*On August 1, 1854, on the occasion of the anniversary of his birth, St. Eugene wrote his testament.*

August 2

## MY JESUS, GIVE ME YOUR LOVE

*During his retreat in preparation for ordination to the priesthood, Saint Eugene expresses his desire for a great love for Jesus Christ:*

I will take as model of this worship that I owe God, his adorable Son Jesus Christ our lovable Saviour, for whom I will try to have the most tender of devotions and the most ardent love, having in my mind and even more so in my heart the memory of his generosity. And recognizing too that I am as incapable as I am unworthy of loving him, I will ask him this grace every day in the holy Sacrifice and one hundred times each day with this ejaculatory prayer: *My Jesus, give me your love.* Ah! The battle will be won if I have this devotion to J.C., one that should be par excellence that of a priest.

I will meditate on Jesus my love in his incarnation, his hidden life, his mission, his passion and death; but especially in his Sacrament and Sacrifice. My chief occupation will be to love him, my chief concern to make him loved. To this I will bend all my efforts, time, strength, and when after much toil I have succeeded in winning but a single act of love towards so good a Master, I will rightly consider myself very well paid... remembering that the whole life of Jesus my model was a perpetual cross and a continual martyrdom. *Tota vita Christi crux fuit et martyrium* (LII., c. 12, v.7). (Eugene de Mazenod *Rule drawn up on my retreat in Aix, December 1812, Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 14).

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## SAINT EUGENE'S BAPTISM

The anniversary of my baptism. Before leaving St-Martin to go to Marseilles, I said, at the Mass, with a profound sense of gratitude, repentance and confidence, joined to what I dare to believe, sincere good will, these beautiful prayers from the Vienna missal:

*Blessed may you be Lord, you who in your great mercy have given us new birth to a living hope of an incorruptible inheritance, grant us*

*always to desire, as new-born infants, pure rational milk so that through it we may advance to salvation. (Cf. 1 Peter 1:34 and 2:2) God, thanks to your inestimable love, we are called to be your children and such we are (1 Jn. 3:1), grant that, through the power of this sacrifice, we, who have received the Spirit of adoption as children in baptism, may obtain the promised blessing as our inheritance. Lord, this faith, that you have given us at our baptism, we now renew at your altar, renouncing Satan and choosing to fulfill the law of Christ; grant that we, who have received a pledge of the eternal life promised to us, may gain continual growth in the sinless life to which we have dedicated ourselves. (Eugene de Mazenod, Diary, August 2, 1837, Oblate Writings, 18, p. 226)*

*August 3*

CHRISTOPHE ERNEST BONJEAN (1823-1892)  
FIRST ARCHBISHOP OF COLOMBO

*He was born into a Voltarian bourgeois family, and in 1846 he entered the seminary of the Paris Foreign Missions. He was ordained a priest then left for Coimbatore in India, where he worked in various parishes. Having heard about the Oblates, he asked to join their mission in Sri Lanka. In 1868, Pope Pius IX appointed him Vicar Apostolic of Jaffna. He took part in the First Vatican Council. He was subsequently Vicar Apostolic and then Archbishop of Colombo. A great preacher, writer, organizer, sure guide of the nascent Church of Sri Lanka, he is remembered as a humble and simple man of faith and prayer. Soon after his oblation he wrote to St. Eugene from his mission in Trincomalee:*

I had the joy, beloved Father, to make the total offering of myself, in the offering that I laid in the hands of our Father, Mgr. Semeria, on the 20th of this beautiful month of Mary, the anniversary of the precious death of one of the most holy of your sons, the Ven. Fr. Albini, whom Mgr. Semeria wanted to give me as a model and protector. [...] I take up my pen to announce these good and happy events, and to tell you that today another son was born for you in these distant lands in the East.

The novitiate year, which preceded the great act, was not without its storms, fears and struggles; there were the difficulties of community

life, but also a commendable fraternal charity that helped my weakness. In those times of violent struggle of the heart and mind, I was lucky to have such a reliable guide, faithful friend, and tender Father as the beloved Bishop Semeria, whose charitable ways and gentle care have helped me to run my boat through the midst of all the storms and turbulence. Before coming here, I expected some hurricanes because I have never done anything important in my life for my soul, without having to go through some pretty hard tests; but despite the experience of not seeing everything in detail, when the good Lord made me go through it, I found myself lacking courage and strength, not recognizing myself any more, and surprised to find a deadly bitterness in what had hitherto appeared to me as a dream of happiness. As a seminarian, priest and missionary with many faults, all my life was a continual longing for religious life, yet on the eve of enlisting myself under the beloved banners of Mary Immaculate, I found myself to be shy, cowardly, confused, and uncertain. Finally, when the day arrived I took this big step, not under the influence of any feeling of powerful attraction, (I was incapable of feeling anything of the kind) but only through reasoning, if you wish, with a simple faith that such was the will of God, and that I had no reasonable grounds to change my resolve.... (May 28, 1858, in E. Jonquet, *M<sup>sr</sup> Bonjean, o.m.i., premier archevêque de Colombo*, Nîmes, 1910, vol. 1, p. 108)

E. Jonquet, *M<sup>gr</sup> Bonjean, omi*, Nîmes 1910, 2 vol.; R. Simon, *Die leuchtende Insel, Lebenswerk eines apostels*, Hünfeld 1937; G.B. Lingueglia, *Un grande Vescovo missionario nell'Isola di Ceylon*, Mons. Bonjean, SEI, Torino, 1946, 166 p.

*August 4*

#### CHARITY, A DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTIC

Charity is not an Oblate exclusivity. It is the new commandment given by Jesus to his disciples. Religious life itself was defined by Vatican II in relation to charity. Charity is the ultimate rule in the very exercise of mission, as John Paul II recalled in his missionary encyclical (Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 60).

So, what is new in Oblate charity? The Founder wanted us, above all, to be authentic Christians, true religious, zealous missionaries. He wanted our communities to be in the image of the primitive Christian community as described in the Acts of the Apostles. The expression "one heart and soul" refers us to this ideal, linked to witness and apostolic fruitfulness. He wanted that we be the continuation of the spirit and works of the suppressed religious orders. In other words, he wanted that we live the soul of consecrated life. "For thanks to God's love poured into hearts by the Holy Spirit, a religious community is a true family gathered together in the Lord's name and rejoicing in His presence" (*Perfectae caritatis*, 1; Cf. 15). He wanted us to be zealous missionaries, that is to say, filled with active and creative love for souls loved and redeemed by Christ.

This specificity is noticed by others. Those who are familiar with the Chapters and congresses of various Institutes and who come to our houses have told us that – in fact – they noticed something different in our way of living fraternity, of behaving toward each other, in a cordiality that is always simple and open, in family life. This fraternal coloring has its effect on our way of living community life. Even if we cannot say precisely what distinguishes us from other religious on a particular point, the important thing is to be ourselves and to fully live that to which we are called.

The Oblate ideal of charity and zeal is a characteristic of our charism, it is the privileged way of our interior purification and of our union to God, it is our road to holiness, it is our way of communicating and transmitting the paschal mystery. (M. Zago, *In the footsteps of St. Eugene. Letters to the Oblates in First Formation*, General House, Rome 1997, p. 98-100).

*August 5, Dedication of the Basilica of St. Mary Major*

#### OUR CONSECRATION TO MARY

*During his stay in Rome, St. Eugene went repeatedly to pray in the Basilica of St. Mary Major. "They also call this basilica Saint Mary ad Nives from the miracle of the snow; it is also named the Liberian basilica from Pope Liberius who consecrated it.... Sixtus III had it magnifi-*



cently rebuilt in 432.... I have never seen such beautiful marble forms as those which adorn the Blessed Virgin's chapel; the eye could never have its fill of them. (Diary, December 2, 1825, Oblate Writings, 17, p. 36-37)

Religious profession in the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the oblation, like the religious vows, is essentially a consecration to God. But, for us, this consecration is done “under the auspices of Mary”, as the Founder says (20 March 1826). In this sense it is a consecration to Mary to reach God with her and through her, as the Founder said in the text cited above (December 20, 1825): “Know that it will be glorious and consoling for us to be consecrated to Mary in a special way and to bear her name!” [...]

The oblation, by which we are incorporated into the Congregation, makes us officially ministers of Mary's mercies, her collaborators in the role of *Alma Socia Christi*, her continuation, her “double” in the ministry of co-redeemer, the fullness through which she carries out her spiritual motherhood. [...]

We were made by God, it seems, to highlight the role of maternal mercy of the *Alma Socia Christi*, the Immaculate, Mother of Mercy. In this respect, the role of Mary in our Oblate ideal is more than a particular goal to be achieved, it is the atmosphere in which our entire life is lived, the practical and psychological motivation of all our activities, that which gives the institute its own character, which is eminently Marian. (M. Gilbert, *Notre consécration à Marie Immaculée*, “Études oblates” 12 [1953] 187, 193,194)

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BLESSED CÁNDIDO CASTÁN SAN JOSÉ (1894-1936)  
LAY MARTYR OF SPAIN

*He was born on August 5, 1894, in Benifayó de Espioca (Valencia). A railroad employee, he lived with his wife and two children in Pozuelo de Alarcón since the end of 1930.*

*The Catholic trade unions were his specific vocation and his main dedication for most of his life. He was the driving force, practically the founder, of the Catholic railway union in Madrid. Under his presidency, the section started many activities: the night academy for members and classes for their children, the common aid fund for the needs of members and their families, and, of course, the struggle for decent working conditions by presenting various and just claims to the management of the railway companies. He writes and sends frequent articles and reviews to the union's biweekly newspaper, called “El Ferroviario”.*

*Vice-president of the Confederation of Catholic Trade Unions (1919-1924), he was elected for two terms as president (1924-1932). The Confederation grouped more than 60,000 workers, affiliated to 192 male and 42 female unions throughout the national territory and will grow in membership over time. He passionately defended the worthy demands of the workers, even before the national parliament. Without ever leaving his work as a railroad worker, he collaborated in various tasks with the Madrid City Council and was called to form part of several state commissions. In his public occupations, he knew how to combine a dialoguing spirit with his deep evangelical convictions in a very difficult time.*

*When he finished his work as president of the Confederation, in his last years he dedicated himself to his family and to his simple job as a train conductor, which he had never left, residing in Pozuelo, near the Oblate scholasticate.*

*Although he was always a man of prayer, in his last years in Pozuelo he has more time to dedicate to his spiritual life. His daughter says: “My father fulfilled the obligations of hearing Mass every Sunday and feast days. In my home there was also a deep climate of religiosity. My father prayed the rosary every day and was very devoted to the Blessed Virgin, teaching us that she was our Mother in Heaven. He visited the Blessed Sacrament in the afternoon. I know this because, although many times I accompanied him, at other times he would comment at home that he had gone to such and such a church...”.*

*On July 18, he suffered a first attack at his home and was taken prisoner in the house of the Oblates and then executed with them. According to the testimony of his daughter: “In my house, my mother al-*

*ways considered my father as a martyr, because she knew that the only cause of his death was religion”.*

### *August 6, Transfiguration of the Lord*

#### THE CONTEMPLATION REQUIRED OF THE APOSTOLIC MAN

*The feast of the Transfiguration reminds us of the contemplative dimension of the Oblate, that is called for in this text of St. Eugene’s Rule:*

Art. 1. The whole life of the members of our Society ought to be a life of continual recollection. Art. 2. To attain this, they will first of all make every effort to walk always in the presence of God, and frequently try to utter short but fervent ejaculatory prayers. Art. 3. They must also have the greatest love for holy solitude, and they will not leave their rooms without necessity. Art. 4. Silence, being prescribed in every religious institute, and being a most suitable means of [securing] perfection, we will esteem it at all times.

N.B. Were anyone tempted to regard these and the following rules as too severe for human weakness, we beseech him to consider: firstly, that our ministry will be forever fruitless, unless we fervently strive for our own spiritual advancement; secondly, that we shall never attain the perfection to which we are called, except by means of that regularity, which has been pronounced indispensable by all the fathers of the spiritual life, and especially by the holy founders of religious orders; thirdly, since the missions and the spiritual exercises that follow them force us to spend three-fourths of the year in the world where we occupy ourselves principally and almost exclusively with the conversion of sinners, we risk the danger of forgetting our own needs if we do not return to the rule of strict discipline—at least in the brief intervals of this perilous ministry. *[Because of the great success in the missions, this ministry was so perilous, i.e., the missionaries could out of pride attribute to themselves what was the fruit of divine grace. Cf. infra, Part 1, chap. 3, art. 5.]* Thus, if we have at heart our salvation, if we are unwilling to run the risk of being ourselves cast away after we have preached to others, so far from experiencing the slightest repugnance to this regu-

larity, which is the best preservative of virtue in our souls, let us rather feel sorry that the duties laid on us by charity remove us so frequently, and for such long periods, from the community in which regular discipline reigns, and for a great part of our life deprive us, to our regret, of its wholesome influence. (*The Rule of St. Eugene de Mazenod*, Woestman, ed., p. 55-57)

*August 7*

OBEDIENCE: OBLATE, ONLY AT THIS PRICE!

*Father Léo Deschâtelets, in his Circular Letter 191, August 15, 1951, defines Oblate obedience:*

Without obedience, there is no Congregation or Society. There would be only an agglomerate of personal wills. – Is that even possible? – But there would certainly be no Oblate Congregation....

If we follow Father de Mazenod's line of thinking, we will see that obedience is the ultimate way to make a priestly soul so flexible that it can meet all the requirements of that total oblation to God and souls....

We can sanctify ourselves in many ways, but there is only one way for an Oblate to obey, and that is by not leaving any chance for one's own will, in short, an affective and effective obedience to the will of God manifested by the Superiors. We are Oblate only at this price.

The Congregation can do no good in the Church, if it does not hold the will of its subjects in its hands in order to send them out to do the most difficult tasks....

It is the main virtue, the most important one for the apostolate. Why should it be otherwise, since the Son of God Himself was obedient unto death on a cross! If there was a better way to save the world, surely He would have taken it, He, the first Oblate! (*Circulaires administratives*, 5, p. 335-338)

August 8

CONSECRATION OF THE CONGREGATION TO THE HEART OF JESUS

*August 8, 1873, at the conclusion of the General Chapter and at its request, the Superior General, Joseph Fabre, solemnly consecrated the Congregation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the chapel of the scholasticate in Autun.*

Friday, August 8, at seven in the evening, the members of the Chapter and the scholastics gathered in the beautifully decorated and brightly illuminated chapel.... The Blessed Sacrament was exposed. The Rev. Fr. Sardou sang the Litany of the Sacred Heart with an emotion that was felt by all present. All hearts were prepared.... After the prayer of the Blessed Sacrament, the Superior General, accompanied by the first two assistants general, advanced to the middle of the chapel, wearing a surplice and stole, and holding the candle of expiation in one hand, and in the other the act of consecration prepared by Fr. Rambert, superior of the seminary, he pronounced in a trembling voice the following words:

“Sacred Heart of Jesus, the only Son of God the Father and the Virgin Mary, our Immaculate Mother, heart, tabernacle of the Holy Spirit in whom the fullness of the Godhead lives, [...] the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate consecrates itself to you in the person of the Superior General, his assistants and all the members of the General Chapter here assembled. It consecrates itself for your honor and your service by an absolute and perpetual consecration. It gives you without reservation its persons, property and works. It recognizes you as its only Master and Sovereign. In you alone, it wants to be, to move and to have life. To love you will forever be its only joy; to possess you, its sole treasure; to serve you, its unique glory. [...]

Sacred Heart of Jesus, heart full of kindness and love, give us this charity, the testament of the heart of our beloved Father present here, so that we may always live as brothers, with one heart and one soul. [...]

Sacred Heart of Jesus, O heart, burning furnace, inflame us with your divine fire, that we may spread it on the earth and fruitfully fulfill our apostolate of regeneration and sanctification of the souls you have redeemed.”

All present responded, Amen! [...] The *Te Deum* broke forth from everyone's lips: this sublime song resounded with a unison and a spirit which reflected the feelings that filled everyone's heart. Outside, a storm raged: claps of thunder were a wonderful accompaniment, the lightning mixed its fast and dazzling flames with that of the candles, rain fell in torrents and whipped the windows of the chapel. Nature's upheaval did not in any way disturb the calm and majesty of our songs, of our attitude in the presence of the Sacred Heart [...]. Oh, Sacred Heart of Jesus, always be the safe refuge of the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Under your divine protection, it does not fear to face the storms. (A. Rey, "Missions OMI" 11 [1873], p. 254-257)

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*August 8, arrival of the first Oblates in Ireland.*

*August 9*

#### REFLECTIONS ON THE RULE

The Rule cannot be put aside, the modifications should be rare and approved. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Moreau, November 10, 1841, *Oblate Writings*, 9, p. 191)

I have no Rule to give other than the one that exists, that is the one we have vowed and must faithfully observe. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Magnan, October-November 1849, *Oblate Writings*, 10, p. 277)

If regular discipline is not established in time, you will soon lose the spirit of our Institute, to the great detriment of your souls and of public edification.... We must beware of human weakness which always tends to relaxation, and yet we are bound to maintain ourselves at the height of the duties our vocation imposes on us.... First establish a perfect regularity, and let each one get used to walking by the virtue of obedience. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Courtès December 30, 1847, *Oblate Writings*, 10, 201)

You will always have to act under the impulse of the Holy Spirit in God's presence, keeping in mind only the good of the interests entrusted to you and always being in conformity to the spirit and even the letter of the Rule from which you must try never to stray. No one will have anything to say or to complain about when you regulate things according to the code that all are to know and to observe. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Soullier, October 16, 1855, *Oblate Writings*, 11, p. 286)

You must attack head on all that has been a cause of laxity in discipline, come down heavily on all abuses so as to extirpate them for good. Demand strictly, rigorously, the most exact observance of the Rule and never deviate from it yourself.... Imbue yourself with the spirit of the Rule and put it into practice. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Guigues, July 16, 1844, *Oblate Writings*, 1, p. 96-97)

Y. Beaudoin, *Le Fondateur et l'observance des Constitutions et Règles, d'après ses Écrits*, "Études oblates" 43 (1984), p. 81-112.

August 10

PIERRE FALLAIZE (1887-1964)

VICAR APOSTOLIC OF MACKENZIE AND CONFESSOR AT LISIEUX

*The Servant of God, Bishop Pierre Fallaize, died on August 10, in Fort Smith, Canada. Orphaned of father and mother, he entered the minor seminary of Lisieux in 1899. After finishing his military service, he applied to enter the Oblates and, without awaiting a reply, presented himself at Bestin (Belgium) to begin his novitiate on December 8, 1906. He was ordained a priest in 1912. The following year, he was sent to the polar missions of Mackenzie, considered then as the most difficult. He was ordained a bishop on September 13, 1931. Eight years later, he had to submit his resignation because of almost total blindness which he accepted with heroic patience. The Inuit or Eskimos called him "Inúk Ilaranaikor" (the man who never gets angry). He went back to France and exchanged his episcopal crosier for the white cane of the blind and his sled dogs for a guide-dog. For many years, he was a faithful confessor for the Carmelites and the many pil-*

*grims that go to Lisieux. In his old age, he let himself be seduced by missionary nostalgia and decided to go back to the North Pole where he died three years later.*

Traveling to the new mission of the Eskimos of Great Bear Lake.... After the murder of our beloved Fathers Rouvière and LeRoux by the Eskimos, Bishop Breynat saw in this trial not a failure, but the certainty of success, because the blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christians. Therefore he decided to immediately resume the work by appointing me and Fr. Frapsauce.... I left the Resolution mission in the company of a small fifteen-year-old Eskimo.... We met five other Eskimos with whom we traveled together. Among them was the mildest of our Fathers' murderers. He came to shake my hand, that I shook with somewhat mixed feelings.... He had been released after two years in prison. By way of revenge, we will try to save his soul. (Pierre Fallaize, August 2, 1920)

From the country without sun I send you my best wishes for a Happy and Holy New Year. Our greetings have not suffered in the least from the influence of an environment where everything is frozen; on the contrary, our hearts – that need to produce a large surplus of physical warmth to withstand the extreme temperatures, and spiritual warmth to wrap the Eskimos we meet with charity – can only give you warm and ardent wishes.

We would like to offer you a bouquet of flowers on the occasion of the first day of the year. But flowers cannot possibly blossom at 66 degrees Fahrenheit below zero. In addition, the soil we live on is entirely rocky.

However, in this arid and cold part of the Father's household, watered by the sweat and blood of our martyrs, the good seed has sprouted, grown and flourished. I just got here in time to catch and offer you the first Arctic flowers. [...]

My Eskimo parish currently has six faithful; I baptized five at Christmas. I hope to double the number before the spring [...]. (Pierre Fallaize, Letter to the Superior General, January 1, 1921)

R. Buliard, *Inunuak. Mgr P. Fallaize, omi*, Paris 1972, 256 p.



ST. EUGENE AS SEEN BY THE HISTORIAN LUDOVIC GIRAUD

If we judge the value of a leader by the continuity of his work, and the value of a Christian by the courageous conquest of himself, Eugene de Mazenod was a great bishop and a great saint. No one more than he could say with Fenelon, that of the two dioceses he had to govern, one in Marseilles and the other that of his soul, the latter presented him with more difficulties than the first, which also caused him more than a few [...].

Intransigent in the face of opposition, he was disarmed by docility [...]. His humility was magnificent. When he realized that his impetuous nature had made him go too far, or despite having reason, that he had expressed himself with excessive rigor, he retraced his steps with disarming honesty. Time and again, after publicly rebuking a parish priest, he could be seen kneeling before him, asking him to hear his confession, and thus receive the sacramental forgiveness from the same man he had humiliated.

While being persevering in his undertakings, he did not insist on his own ideas and knew how yield to the suggestions of the councilors. When their judgment differed from his, he became silent, bent for a while, prayed, and often let himself be convinced [...].

There were two men in him: the bishop and the religious. A grand gentleman when it came to his rank, he dressed superbly and traveled by carriage for the greater solemnities. Then back in his bishopric he was at ease with the habits of a poor life, working without lighting the fire in winter, on a worm-eaten table, in a bare apartment, with old furniture that he never wanted to replace [...].

Living poorly, he always remained close to the people. As a young priest he had dreamed of being the priest of the poor. He was the same as a bishop.... A recurring expression used when people wanted to give an exact definition of him: he was majestic. In his words, in his attitude, in his works, in his errors, and even his face, surrounded by the halo of a magnificent head of hair, there was something leonine. (L. Giraud, *L'Église de Marseille au XIXe siècle. Monsieur Vitagliano...*, Marseille 1949, p. 51-56)

August 12

REFLECTIONS ON THE RULE

Above all take great care to be bound by all things prescribed by our Rules and Constitutions. You have in the book wherein they are inscribed a sure and faithful counsellor to guide you on all occasions and advice which will enable you always to do what is most agreeable to God and most useful to yourself and others. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Perron, August 25, 1845, *Oblate Writings*, 3, p. 17)

I re-read our Rule during my annual retreat, in a profound spirit of recollection, and I remained convinced that we are, of all men, the least worthy of heaven's favours, if we are not penetrated with a gratitude that would inspire us to the point of heroism for the favour that God has done us. There is nothing on earth higher than our vocation. Amongst religious, some are called to one good work, others to another; some are destined, be it indirectly, to the same end as ourselves. But for us, our principal end, I would almost say our only end, is the self-same end that Jesus Christ proposed to himself on coming into the world, the self-same end that he gave to the Apostles, to whom, without any doubt, he taught the most perfect way. And so our humble society knows no other founder than Jesus Christ, who spoke through the mouth of his Vicar, and no other Fathers than the Apostles. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Vincent Mille, November 3, 1831, *Oblate Writings*, 8, p. 40)

It is the code which God has given us. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Jolivet, July 21, 1849, *Oblate Writings*, 3, p. 43)

Firmly convinced that the sanctification of the members of our Society and the success of their work depends on their loyalty to punctually observe the holy Rules of our Institute, we recommend very strongly to all our Fathers who make up the community of our house at Notre-Dame of Laus, to imbue themselves more and more with the spirit contained in our Rules and not deviate too easily from even the letter of these Rules, which could be misinterpreted by moving away from it.

(Eugene de Mazenod, Act of Visitation, June 28, 1828 *Administrative Circulars*, I, p. 306)

The only appropriate expression of the gratitude we owe God [...] is a firm resolution to walk always in his presence according to our vocation, in the exact observance of our Rules. [...] It is for you to open the Rule book so that each one may draw his inspirations from it, and knowledge of the style of conduct he must pursue. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Guigues, September 3, 1834, *Oblate Writings*, 8, p. 124)

August 13

LUIGI MORANDINI (1816-1838)

LIKE JOHN BERCHMANS

*In his first stay in Rome St. Eugene celebrated Mass in the room of St. Aloysius Gonzaga. He then visited the room "in which the venerable Berchmans used to live," which was not far from St. Aloysius' room. (Diary, Feb. 17, 1826) Though he would be beatified by Pope Pius IX only in 1865, St. Eugene still considered him a model for Oblate theology students. July 20, 1858, writing to Fr. Bellon, he recommended the biography of scholastic Brother Camper: "You will distribute it in your communities and they will find food for their piety therein. What a good effect it will produce in the region which gave us this angel, who can be favorably compared to Aloysius Gonzaga, Berchmans and others like them!" In his diary on December 15, 1838 he copies the letter in which Fr. Magnan tells him about the young brother Morandini who was dying. This is followed by a note by St. Eugene himself. Fernand Louis Camille Morandin, a Corsican, was just beginning his theological studies after his oblation, when he fell seriously ill. He died in Aix on December 27, 1838.*

It seems the good God continues to purify this angel and wants us to be witnesses for longer of a sight which astounds everyone who comes in here: not the least sign of impatience, he even tries to hide his intolerable suffering from us. As for myself, it would take much to make me give up my place at this deathbed. I fear that he might die

in our absence. I would not want to miss contemplating the beauty of his soul which is evident in the serenity of his countenance or even the smile which appears in response to even the slightest word of consolation spoken to him. The lay persons whom we have invited to be witnesses to his last will could not get over their surprise at seeing such perfect calm in circumstances which are otherwise so sad. We have only one regret which is to see him buried in the common cemetery until such time as there is a community burial place. Whatever happens, his holy death will be one more proof of the protection given by the Blessed Virgin to our confreres in their last moments and I am not sure if the death of Fr. Arnoux was more edifying than this. The charity shown by our Fathers has been admirable as usual.

I have no hesitation in taking the trouble to copy these lines to the glory of our dear predestined confreres. I pray, I meditate, I rejoice, I offer to God a painful sacrifice and, at the same time I feel consoled that material is being prepared for his praise and for the future edification of our family as I watch those who die such holy deaths and whom God calls to himself from the bosom of our little Congregation. If his child, this angel, were to die as a Jesuit, he would be made a Berchmans or a Stanislaus, an Aloysius Gonzaga. Why, therefore, should we not give praise to the Lord for his great mercy towards us by granting our confreres the grace of the death of the predestined? (Eugene de Mazenod, *Diary*, December 15, 1838, *Oblate Writings*, 19, p. 264-265)

*August 14*

#### INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE HAVING THEIR ORIGIN IN THE MISSIONARY CHARISM OF BISHOP DE MAZENOD

*April 22-24, 1991, twenty-seven Superiors General of Institutes founded or fostered by Oblates, met at the OMI General House in Rome. They were representing (including the OMI) about 14.000 consecrated men and women from foundations spread around the world. They included contemplative and apostolic groups. On Friday, April 26, the Pope John Paul II received the group in a private audience. From his speech:*

I am pleased to have the opportunity to meet such a large number of Superiors and Moderators of Institutes of Consecrated Life having their origin in the missionary charism of Bishop de Mazenod and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. This flowering of Religious Families is one more sign of the greatness of the Blessed Bishop of Marseilles, whom my predecessor Pope Paul VI once described as “passionné de Jésus Christ et inconditionnel de l’Église” In addition to the Sisters of the Holy Family, who are affiliated with the Oblates, and the Work for Youth founded by Father Timon-David, more than forty Communities of consecrated persons have grown up around the Institute of the Oblates or as a result of their work.

Your foundations have become specific responses to the Church’s missionary needs, offering not only new forms of apostolate but at times new ways of being missionaries as well. The contemplative Communities have borne witness to the need for prayer and for full consecration to God as the irreplaceable soul of all missionary activity. The Secular Institutes have expressed the importance of a new Christian presence in the world. And other foundations have given abundantly of themselves in order to provide spiritual enrichment for priests and other members of the Church.

The goals of your Institutes express some of the many ways in which the Church’s one mission is carried out: through prayer and contemplation, as well as through evangelization and missionary proclamation, the formation of young people, service of the poor, works of charity and education, and the various forms of involvement in the work of justice and peace. At the same time, they express a great adaptability to the requirements of the places where they have spread and where they are providing pastoral service. Thus, the Oblate ideal is expanding throughout the world with creativity and originality.

The idea of holding this meeting, sponsored by the current Superior of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, is a source of satisfaction, and I hope that it will lead to an increase of communion and collaboration between the different Families, for a deepening of your common charism.

A first characteristic of your common identity and the deepest source of the special bond that unites you in the Oblate Family is your consecration to God and to the spreading of his kingdom. [...]

The second character common to all your families is mission. Your Institutes, which have generally come into being in mission countries in response to the missionary challenges of various cultural and religious environments, are destined to live intensely their commitment to proclaim Christ to those who do not know him. [...] You who are gathered here express, in some way, the variety of missionary paths, while by the particular gifts of your consecrated life you illustrate in the Church the multiple faces of charity and contemplation, of the proclamation of the Gospel and the promotion of the human person, of dialogue and inculturation. [...] I repeat to you today and I emphasize once again that the call to mission is the call to holiness.

May an ardent devotion to the Immaculate Virgin, special patroness of all your religious families, sustain your zeal and hope in your spiritual journey and in your ministry. The Mother of Jesus is a model of life for all believers, and especially for you who are consecrated to her. Called to follow Christ more closely with an ardent and undivided love, you will be able to bear witness to him in the world by your life, even before you do so by your words. May the protection of Our Lady, the intercession of your many Founders and Foundresses, of so many missionary confreres, sanctified by ministry and martyrdom, obtain for your various Institutes a spiritual renewal and an increase in number!

M. Gilbert, *Congrégations et Instituts à la fondation desquels les Oblats ont participé*, “Vie Oblate Life” 47 (1988), p. 177-208, 313-348; 48 (1989), p. 103-137.

*August 15, Assumption of the Virgin Mary*

#### THE OBLATE MADONNA

*August 15, 1822 is remembered by the Oblates as the day of the “Oblate Madonna.” According to Fr. Edmond Dubois, the “beautiful statue” [of the Virgin] installed “as a souvenir [of the Virgin] in [the Mission] Church”, before which St. Eugene was praying, is said to have “opened its eyes and slightly tilted its head toward the Founder” with a smile, filling his heart with an inexpressible joy and strength. (Testimony in the beatification process.) But the Founder’s own testimony is*

*much more sober. The only time he mentions it is in the letter written to Fr. Tempier that same day.*

The ceremony has just finished, very dear and good brother, silence reigns in the house. It is broken only by the sound of a distant bell which announces the departure of the great procession. Satiated with the sincere tributes that we have just rendered to our good Mother, at the feet of the beautiful statue that we have installed as a souvenir of her in our church, I am letting the others take care of honouring her with the external pomp of a parade which would add nothing further to my perhaps over-demanding piety. Let this interlude be used to converse with you, dear friend, in sweet outpouring of the heart.

Would that I could share with you all that I experienced in the way of consolation on this beautiful day devoted to Mary our Queen! I had not felt for a long time as much joy in speaking of her grandeur and in encouraging our Christians to put all their confidence in her, as during my instruction to the Sodality [of Christian youth in Aix] this morning. I can safely hope I was understood and I can well believe that all the faithful who came to our church this evening shared the fervour with which I was inspired at the sight of the statue of the Holy Virgin and greater still by the graces which she obtained from her divine Son, I dare say, while we were invoking her with so much affection, because she is our Mother.

I believe I owe to her also a special experience that I felt today, I will not go so far as to say more than ever, but certainly more than usual. I cannot describe it too well because it comprised several things but all related, however, to a single object, our dear Society. It seemed to me that what I saw, what I could put my finger on, was that within her lies hidden the germ of very great virtues, and that she can achieve infinite good; I found her worthy, everything pleased me about her, I cherished her Rules, her statutes; her ministry seemed sublime to me, as it is indeed. I found in her bosom sure means of salvation, even infallible, such is how they looked to me.

Only one reason for regret came to diminish and almost entirely efface the joy by which I would fain have let myself be carried away: it was myself I saw myself as the sole and real obstacle to the great good which could be done, but only vaguely could I see what I must do in

order to be more useful to the Society and to the Church. (St. Eugene to Fr. Tempier, August 15, 1822, *Oblate Writings*, 6, p. 92-93)

“Many events that occurred in the Congregation after that date indicate that Eugene saw Mary’s maternal gaze, full of tenderness, upon him; he saw in Mary the Mother who took him and all the members of the Congregation. This experience could not be defined in a better way than “the Mother’s smile.” A smile that Eugene experienced in a time of moral weariness, as he felt the weight of the trials that the Congregation faced. It infused new strength into his heart, to withstand the harshest difficulties that would arise in the future. The Founder lived this moment “with the eyes of faith”! That statement appears to be the closest to the truth, in which extraordinary things too are unable to find their place. This truth - simple and so deep - it is much more beautiful!” (K. Lubowicki, *Maria nella vita del Beato Eugenio de Mazenod e della sua Congregazione*, Teresianum, Rome 1987, p. 147-148, Typewritten.)

B. L. Wittenbrink, *The Oblate Madonna. An Essay on the Miraculous Virgin*, “*La Vierge au Miracle*”, “*Études oblates*” 1 (1942), p. 221-234; É. Lamirande, *Notes de lecture, La Vierge au miracle*, “*Études oblates*” 15, (1956), p. 177-179; K. Lubowicki, *Marie dans la vie du Bx Eugène de Mazenod et de sa Congrégation. L’expérience du 15 août 1822*, “*Études oblates*” 47 (1988) 11-22; Y. Beaudoin, “*Oblate Madonna*”, *Historical Dictionary*, I, p. 593-595; H. Nsolo, *Aux origines de la dimension mariale du charisme des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée (1782-1861)*, Rome, 2012, p. 102-116; F. Ciardi, *Madonna Oblata*, « *Oblatio* » 11 (2022), p. 3-22.

*August 16*

#### REFLECTIONS ON THE RULE

So now you are back at Bordeaux. I have sent you a good colleague who will help you form a little community; you will thus be able to follow more easily the Rule, which is so important for you to observe faithfully, both for your own sanctification and for the salvation



of souls which it is your mission to convert. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. L'Hermite, August 17, 1852, *Oblate Writings*, 11, p. 94-95)

You are all young, and others will walk in your footsteps; and so receive my blessing, my dear children whom I love with so tender an affection. Live for God and for the Church, for the sanctification of the poor heathen, for the Congregation to which you give honor, in return for the favor that she does you in welcoming you into her bosom. Be united, *cor unum et anima una*. Constantly re-read your holy Rules. By being faithful to them you will become holy. Be full of the respect that you owe to your superior, who represents in two ways the person of Jesus Christ our Master. Put aside every thought that could lead you to loosen the bonds that should unite you. Remember that *Deus caritas est*. (Eugene de Mazenod to the Oblates in Saint Boniface, May 26, 1854, *Oblate Writings*, 2, p. 75-76)

One more thing I recommend to you is that, when returning to the community after the most brilliant ministry, you immediately live in the most exact observance of the Rule, in the practice of the virtues of religion, so as to conform yourself well to the spirit of our vocation which wants us to be apostles on the outside and, in a certain sense, recluses in our communities in order to devote ourselves therein to study and to our personal sanctification. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Baret, November 9, 1856, *Oblate Writings*, 12, p. 28)

*Fr. Augustin Gaudet, a missionary in Canada and Texas, leaving Europe in September 1847, wrote to the Founder that only his body would separate them.*

My heart remains riveted to yours. Moreover, I take my Rule with me. I will find there your salutary advice, your will, your whole heart. You will be always with your child; I will read it often, and often press it to my lips. It will be my refuge and my comfort in my sorrows. I am confident that with my Rule, I will sanctify myself, and that it is only through her that I will sanctify souls. I swear her love and faithfulness forever, yes forever.

August 17

THE RULE, A SECRET TO PERFECTION

*On August 2, 1853 St. Eugene writes the first official circular letter on the occasion of the reprinting of the Rules, which had been revised by the General Chapter of 1850 and approved with the brief of March 28, 1851 and the rescript of January 14, 1853.*

[The Rule] is the code that the Church gives to you so that in the assiduous meditation of it you may find the constant and inviolable rule for your conduct thus fulfilling the obligations of your vocation: it is by this code especially that you will be judged by the Lord for your reward or condemnation. [...] I have a great hope, my beloved children, that the second promulgation of our laws will awaken an increased fervor in each one, generate a renewal of your youth, so that your virtue, shining more brightly in the Church of God, will increase the edification of the faithful and contribute more to the conversion of the sinners whom you evangelize. [...]

Dear sons, I want to focus my advice in one recommendation: read and meditate the holy Rules. Therein lies the secret of perfection; all that will lead us to God is there. Beautify your souls with every virtue, accumulate merits, assure your perseverance; read, meditate, observe your Rules, and you will become saints, you will edify the Church and, honoring your vocation, you will obtain the grace of conversion for the souls to be evangelized and much blessing for the Congregation your mother and for those who are your brothers. Read, meditate, scrupulously observe the Rules and you shall die in the peace of the Lord, confident of the reward promised by God to those who will persevere to the end in the practice of duty. [...]

I close a long letter, beloved sons, recommending myself more than ever to the prayers of everyone to obtain from the goodness of God forgiveness for the sins that I have committed in the government of this beautiful family of God entrusted to me and to which I have tied my existence; and may God grant me the consolation of seeing it grow in virtue and holiness as I saw it grow in number and extent. [...]

Meanwhile, may the joy of the Lord always reign among you. Be perfect, encourage one another, be in agreement, at peace, and the God of peace and love will be with you. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the outpouring of the Spirit be with you. “For the rest, brothers, be joyful, strive for perfection, encourage one another, have the same mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss ... The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor 13: 12-13). (*Circulaires administratives*, 1, p. 108-113)

*August 18*

ST. EUGENE AS SEEN BY THE HISTORIAN CANON AUGUSTE BRASSEVIN

The future bishop of Marseilles, superior of the Missionaries of Provence before, was already well known in our city for his zeal and his achievements. He brought a dowry of the most valuable qualities to the government of the new diocese: an open mind, sharp and of course right, when no prejudice dominated him; a strong will, a fiery spirit, a true desire for good. He was able to quickly grasp all sides of a question and give, without delay, a precise answer.

He could take a position promptly and, once decided, pursue with perseverance the realization of a project.

A brilliant intelligence placed him above most. His activity has extended geographically to the ends of the earth, and until his last hour. In private life he was sensitive, capable of friendship, grateful for the services rendered to him. In public life he had learned at home the ways of a good education from a society of times gone by.

A Christian of the past, he lived frugally, slept little, practiced poverty both in his furnishings and in his clothing. He gave away everything in alms. Even in old age, he would never reduce his fasts and austere practices. His piety was deep and alive: he went every evening to the church for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, despite an exhausting workload....

This rich nature, however, had one flaw: it had not been acquired by opposition, nor moderated by obedience. Mgr. Eugene de Mazenod had been in charge all his life: already while in the seminary he imposed

his will on the directors of Saint-Sulpice; as a priest, he founded a Congregation of which he became immediately the superior; as vicar general of the diocese he ruled absolutely, without ever having occupied a subordinate position.

He never received, then, that precious lesson of distrust of self, that is born from the need to obey and the disappointments of life.

His character, which was, in the words of Gregory XVI, “fiery as high noon”, always kept all of its natural impetuosity. (A. Brassevin, *Histoire des Prêtres du Sacré-Cœur de Marseille 1732-1831*, Nouvelles éditions 1914, p. 359 360)

### *August 19*

#### SAINT EUGENE AS REMEMBERED BY TIMON-DAVID

One day, I had a heavy heart; worries about my youth work have always burdened me. I said to myself, “I will go to the bishop’s house!” Monseigneur was at St. Louis. I took a carriage and arrived. No one at the door, everything is open. I go up to his room on the first floor, no one in the antechamber. The door to the room was open. On hearing that he was in, I started to go back down the hall, but he too had heard me. “Who is it? he shouted loudly. I entered timidly. “It is me, my lord.” “Who told you that I was here? A bishop cannot therefore have a minute of rest?” I did not know where to hide: “Excuse me, my lord, I will leave,” I answered trembling. [I was still a young priest] “No, since you’re here, wait in the anteroom.”

A moment later I hear a formidable “Come in.” Stammering, I explain my business. As I speak, I realize that his heart is touched, the sky clears: he became kind, then affectionate, then tender, then fatherly. “But, my son, why don’t you come to confide in me when you have some problems? Am I not your father?” And when he hugged me, I felt his tears flowing down my cheeks.

I never knew anyone with charm equal to his. Many times I came out from his room crying after he had made me wait in the hall for hours; but at times I’d would even have given my life for him. (In Rambert, II, p. 603-604)

August 20

JACQUES JOSEPH MARCOU (1799-1826)  
ONE OF THE FIRST OBLATES

*August 20, 1826, Jacques Joseph Marcou, one of the first Oblates, died. On August 20, 1838, St. Eugene, who every year remembered the anniversary of his death, wrote this about him in his diary:*

He was one of the first seven who made up the youth congregation which the Lord inspired me to found in Aix in 1813. His ardent zeal which was evident at the time of his first communion made me choose him as the leader of that first special group. He never let me down and he constantly gave the example of scrupulous fidelity to the regulations which I had given to the congregation in which he was responsible to see that they were observed by the other members. [...] After several years in the movement he entered the seminary. [...] Several seminarians told me that it was due to his ingenious charity that they did well in the seminary. The Lord rewarded his zeal by strengthening the resolve which he already had when entering the seminary to be associated with the word of the missionaries whom I had united in the society while he was still only a member of the youth congregation. He had always kept his intention to do so hidden from me. I got to know about it only on the day when he came to ask me insistently to accept him as a member of our society. [...]

He had scarcely been raised to the priesthood when he launched out on the missions where his love for God and for his neighbor caused him to work wonders. Alas! It must be said that it also caused him to do imprudent things. He soon wore himself out by forcing himself to undertake tasks in the diocese of Nîmes where my supervision could not moderate his zeal. In fact, that zeal was encouraged rather than moderated by the example of the Superior I had assigned to him, and whose wisdom nevertheless equals his piety and his talents. [...] The task was too great and Fr. Marcou's health suffered as a result. [...]

He was certainly not the one who was least pleased about the success of my journey to Rome where I had just obtained approval for the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary to be recognized in the

Church on an equal footing with other Congregations. Fr. Marcou, although quite weak, wanted to be present at the general assembly which I had called to give an account of my mission and of all the good God had done for us. [...] His name is inscribed in the register where we all signed the minutes of this memorable meeting. That was the last important act of this life in which he sealed his consecration to God and the offering of his whole being which he had made throughout many years. Fr. Marcou lived only for a few more months, gradually fading away and resigned to being the victim who made his sacrifice to God. [...]

I brought the community together and having recommended our intention to the intercession of Blessed Alphonsus de Liguori we went from the chapel to the sick room to arouse his faith. [...] I went to visit him every day during that last week of his holy life.... A few words were sufficient to set his heart aflame and he had to be made to keep silence when he wanted to express the consolation and happiness he felt, in a loud voice. “Oh, how happy I am to die in the Congregation!” he would say, remembering the blessings that God had given him. [...] Suddenly he fixed his eyes on high and raised his arms as if to let me know where he was about to go. He cried out with an exclamation of joy which I am unable to describe but which I still clearly remember. He cried: “beautiful heaven” and breathed his last, leaving me convinced that God had come to reveal to him the place he was to occupy. That was the way in which this perfect model of Christian charity and apostolic zeal ceased to live here below and his memory must live with us alongside that of Suzanne, Arnoux, etc. (*Oblate Writings*, 19, p. 173-176)

*August 21*

MAURICE LEFEBVRE (1922-1971)

MARTYR IN BOLIVIA

*He was born in Montreal, Canada, August 6, 1922. He entered the Oblates in 1953 and received an obedience to Bolivia. A few days after his arrival he writes: “This is my country, my love. My first duty is to love our miners and, above all, our people. Here we will create something like a second home.” In 1968 he went to Europe to study sociology in Rome and France. Back in Bolivia he taught at the university and*

*worked for a more just society, to the point of being accused of “playing politics”, of being a “communist.” “If the principle of equitable distribution of goods is communist it is certainly also Christian. More Christian, I think, than the principle which currently assures the manager of a mine wages one hundred twenty times greater than that of a miner... as if some should eat, dress or play one hundred and twenty times more than another just because he is called Mr. Director.” He did not miss an occasion to denounce injustice, that of structures like that of the powerful of the country or of foreign countries. He stood on the side of the poor and oppressed. He received accusations, threats, was imprisoned, and expelled from the country. On his return he began again his social work, driven by love and respect for the poor.*

*On August 21, following the coup, the fighting in the capital was furious. A phone call asks him to help someone who is injured. With the van, accompanied by two nurses and a doctor he went into the most dangerous part of town. Despite waving the big banner of the Red Cross he was met by bursts of gunfire that hit him in the chest. Leaving the house he had said to the community: “I have to go because they are in danger, some are wounded, some dead, they are people who need me. I am their friend, their priest, and so I must be with them.”*

*“The Institute for Sociological Research” (La Paz, Bolivia) has borne his name since 1999.*

*In 1962, after nearly 10 years of ministry, Fr. Lefebvre describes his ideal and the missionary work of the Oblates:*

*Since then we have learned many things; but we mainly applied ourselves to learning one thing, the most important and the only necessary one: LOVE. Learning to love is harder than you think, but that is the missionary life.*

*A new love for our people helped us understand that the communism professed by many and desired by many, is not a stubborn or perverse materialism, but the natural desire for better living conditions. We said then: a struggle against communism would be a great injustice. What right do we have to deprive these poor people of a beautiful dream? By what right.... If we do not help them at the same time to find other paths to reach the goal they aspire to....*

*Le courrier de Maurice Lefebvre*, « Pretres et laics », 22 (1971), 514-575; P. Mauricio Lefebvre, *Arriesgar el pellejo...*, “Sangre en Latino America”, n. 4, Cochabamba, Bolivia [s.d.], 16 p.; G. Iriarte, *Le Père Maurice Lefebvre, martyr de la liberation*, “Missions OMI” 98 (1971), p. 464-472.

*August 22, B.V. Mary, Queen*

#### OBLATES FOR MARY, QUEEN

*In 1938, the Superior General, Théodore Labouré, had asked the Holy See to establish a liturgical feast of Mary, Queen of the World. Shortly after the beginning of the Marian Year of 1954, the Superior General, Léo Deschâtelets addressed a similar petition to the pope:*

To His Holiness Pope Pius XII

Most Holy Father,

It is my pleasant duty to share with Your Holiness a wish expressed by our General Chapter, which was held in the month of May 1953.

By unanimous vote and with great fervor, all the Chapter members asked the Superior General of the Congregation to present to Your Holiness a petition for the designation of a liturgical feast in honor of the Universal Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

By this spontaneous initiative, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate wanted to show their loyalty to this Marian devotion, given to them in legacy as a precious treasure by their Founder, the Servant of God Bishop Charles Joseph Eugene de Mazenod, Bishop of Marseille.

They also wanted to join their voices to those of the vast majority of Catholics who today recognize Mary Immaculate as Queen and Empress, and whom they make known as such to the crowds in the exercise of their vocation as missionaries of the poor and the most abandoned souls.

Holy Father, I am happy to make myself the official interpreter of all the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in beseeching Your Holiness to grant the prayer and the hope of more than six thousand and five hundred religious who ardently desire that Your Holiness proclaim in this providential Marian Year the Universal Queenship of the Virgin



and the establishment of a liturgical feast that would every year recall this glorious privilege of the Queen of heaven and earth.

Léo Deschâtelets, O.M.I., Superior General (“Missions OMI”, 81 [1954], p. 182-183)

*August 23*

#### THE RULE: GOD ALONE IS UNQUESTIONABLY THE AUTHOR

*The retreat that St. Eugene made in October 1831 had as its object a meditation on the Rules. He wrote a little booklet, “Considerations on the Rule”. Here is something from the beginning.*

Careful reading of the Rule during the retreat filled my mind with astonishment and at the same time with bitter reflections that I have to put in writing.

What a shame to have such a perfect code in hand and to not understand its meaning! [...]

Meditating on the Rules I said to myself that we will never thank enough the Divine Goodness who gave them to us, because God alone is unquestionably the author. The one who wrote them does not recognize himself there and therefore can express his opinion freely, as if it were a work that is foreign to him. But what judgment must I make if the Church has spoken? [...]

It is only a matter of appreciating the meaning of the words “eminently salutary work” adding to them the concluding words of the Apostolic Letters [of approval of the Rules]: “We hope that the members of the this holy Family, which, thanks to the protection of some laws, really apt to form hearts to piety ... “; and one will be convinced of the excellence of this Code and the obligation to observe it with diligence: “We order that they be faithfully observed.”

Thus observing the rules we obey the Church, “We order that they be observed faithfully”; not observing them is then to disobey the Church and the Pope. Who does not, judges himself; I do not answer for his soul. Poor fellow! I pity him.

But how sweet to think that following the Rule is to obey the Church! On the other hand, since it involves all the actions of one’s life

and the spirit that should govern them, all we do adds to the merits of obedience to the Church; and because the Church commands only what is good and what leads to salvation, it is clear that following the Rule you are walking on the path to heaven. There is no doubt.

So, let's esteem this precious Rule; let us always have it before our eyes, and especially in our heart; let us feed our soul with the principles which it contains; let us act, talk, and think with its spirit. Only then will we be what God wants us to be, and worthy of our vocation. [...]

We must therefore fill ourselves with the spirit of the Rules, make them the regular theme of meditation. I leave the retreat with this conviction, and for my own use I thought to extract from the Constitutions the articles that best express why we were born and what we must be. This little work will be my vademecum and should be of great spiritual help for myself; and if others want to they can also use it. For my part, seeing all the perfection attainable on earth condensed in a few pages and considering that the Constitutions offer it to form the Oblate prototype, I rejoice in being called to such a high perfection and I get embarrassed at the thought of my extreme weakness, full of confidence in the strength of the One who always gives the grace to follow the precepts He imposes. (*Nos Saintes Règles*, 8 October 1831, *Circulaires administratives*, 1, p. 121ss)

*August 24*

ST. EUGENE AS SEEN BY ADOLFO TAVIERNIER

I was thirteen when one day a friend of my family came to say that the Abbe de Mazenod invited and welcomed the youth of Aix at his place, that he was dedicating himself to training them in virtue and helping them to know and love religion. I was introduced to him.

He was tall and noble. His gaze was firm and powerful; he had an uncommon intelligence and an energetic determination, yet tempered with kindness and gentleness. Two big black eyes lit up his masculine and serene face and threw a glow softened by the modesty of his soul on his broad and uncovered forehead; he greeted me with his usual condescension. I did not feel too dominated by the superiority of his nature. I found great distinction in his speech and especially in his ways. [...]

His speech was soft and affectionate. [...] Of all the gifts heaven had given him, speech was the instrument that best served him. [...] His eloquence was natural, broad, always correct, strong, lively, always formal. It's from his soul that he drew the treasures of his speech; in the impulses of his heart that he found the secret to stir, and the ardor of his faith the constantly renewed fire for his action. It was remarkable! He did not need this preparation. The more his improvisation was sudden and unexpected, the better it was, the stronger the blow, the more success was assured. [...]

Besides these general traits that describe the remarkable man of whom I speak, there are others that can be found in his rich nature and that arouse a more tender admiration. He gave himself entirely to all those young hearts that he had gathered around him. But he still knew how to adapt his gifts to the needs, the nature, and characteristic requirements of each one. To the one who showed him filial affection, he replied with a paternal tenderness. To the one who showed keen interest in his person and his qualities, he replied with equal care; he entered into the intimate details of the life of the heart.

Heaven desired that I would be one of them. I loved him and respected him as a father; he loved me like a son. When away from him, I would write to him with abandonment whatever reflection, study, country life and the vivacity of a young imagination put under my pen. He answered my letters from the midst of his evangelical work, with reflections that he described in lively, rapid, and gentle strokes, and they were many. His letters were graceful models of the epistolary art; it is impossible to express better and more simply, affectionate and simple things, and describe them with a purer, more correct and literary style. (A. Tavernier, *Quelques souvenir sur Mgr Charles-Eugène de Mazenod...*, Aix 1872, p. 5-8)

*August 25, St. Joseph Calasanaz*

#### TO SEE ONESELF IN ST. JOSEPH CALASANZ

*During his first stay in Rome St. Eugene was able to learn more about the life of St. Joseph Calasanaz (1556-1648). What impressed him above all were the difficulties that the saint had to go through in found-*

ing his religious congregation, the Piarists. St. Eugene found a deep similarity to the difficulties that he too was experiencing. He went several times to pray at his tomb. In his diary we read: «I went to see Monsignor Adinolfi, very early this morning [...]. Coming home, I visited the church of Saint Pantaleon, where lies the body of Saint Joseph Calasanz, to whom I fervently recommended myself.» (December 24, 1825, *Oblate Writings*, 17, p. 59-60) January 5, 1826 he writes to Fr. Tempier: «I began my day by going to offer the holy sacrifice on the tomb of St. Joseph Calasanz, with the intention of obtaining by his intercession the light and strength necessary to sustain this new battle prompted by the demon against our holy enterprise». (*Oblate Writings*, 7, p. 8)

I read yesterday at one sitting the whole life of Saint Joseph of Calasanz. Here is to be found much to comfort us in the kind of sorrows to which we are too often subjected. Several times he saw himself abandoned by all his people; once only one of them remained with him. He was obliged, in order to continue the schools, to take in mercenaries and another time, this salaried personnel, after having learnt his method well, left him together with a great number of those who belonged to his Order. Fourteen of his more competent members said goodbye to him on another occasion. After his Congregation had been joined to another, his new affiliates soon became bored with this union and wished to separate from him again. How many of his members, tired with regularity, attacked the validity of their vows and got themselves dispensed! Others abandoned him in order to enter other religious communities. Finally, he had the sorrow of seeing an infamous scoundrel of his Order weave such a frightful plot against him as to get him destituted, take his place and, in league with a great personage, work before his eyes with the aim of destroying his Order and succeed to a large extent. The saint died before matters could again take a turn for the better. If the saints have been treated in this manner, how can we be surprised that we too are afflicted? (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Tempier, December 3, 1825, *Oblate Writings*, 6, p. 203)

August 26

BISHOP DE MAZENOD AS SEEN BY SOME BISHOPS OF HIS TIME

He really was a holy bishop, who lived only for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. In his apostolate he accomplished great works. It is largely due to the zeal advocated by its holy bishop and his constant work that the city of Marseilles is among the most Catholic of the world and among the most beautiful by its faith and love of God. It is therefore a wonderful legacy that I received: to follow one of the greatest servants of God (Patrice-François-Marie Cruice, Bishop of Marseilles from 1861 to 1864)

Mgr. de Mazenod was one of the great bishops of our time. There was something in him of the bishops of the early Church. The breadth of vision, the courage of his proposals, steadfastness that went hand in hand with goodness, allowed him to renew the Church of Marseilles and make it what it is today. (Jean-Marie-Mathias Debelay, Archbishop of Avignon 1848-1863)

Mgr. de Mazenod was a genius of the episcopacy, he was one of the great bishops of our time. (Félix-Antoine-Philibert Dupanloup, Bishop of Orleans 1849-1878)

He gave a splendor to the Church of Marseilles that previous centuries had never known. (Georges-Claude-Louis-Pie Chalandon, Archbishop of Aix from 1857 to 1893)

One of the greatest and holiest bishops of France. (François de Marguerye, Bishop of Autun from 1853 to 1872)

August 27

BLESSED JOSEPH GERARD AND THE RULE

*The observance of the Rule was one of the aspects on which Blessed Gerard constantly insisted.*

As a soldier, [the Oblate] has also his banner; his motto is that of my Lord Jesus Christ: *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me, pauperes evangelizantur*. That is his mission, and what a mission it is! Great God! To save abandoned souls, [...] souls who do not know the good Lord, the Blessed Virgin. To keep himself fit for the lofty claim of his vocation, he has only to observe his Rule: *Hoc fac et vives* [Lk 10,28]. Everything is there. But he must not omit even one *iota* of this law of this gospel. Thus the rule speaks of the way to meditate, to worthily say Holy Mass; it speaks of humility, the essential basic virtue. It seems to me that only the virtue of humility will save me in keeping the four vows. O, yes, only humility... that is the virtue that will save me. (The Oblate of Mary Immaculate, *Oblate Writings*, II, 4, p. 190)

I must keep in mind our holy deceased Oblate Fathers: our Founder, Bishop Semeria, Fathers Chardin, Dutertre, Leydier, Lacombe, Lagrue whom I knew well. To do that I must live my Holy Rules, their spirit which is the particular holiness of the Oblate; Holy Rules which tell us that our spirit as Oblates is the immolation of our whole person, life, comfort in life, accomplished by humility, which makes our immolation acceptable to the good Lord, along with modesty which edifies our neighbour, gives him virtue and makes religion attractive.... (Notes of the Annual Retreat, March 1880, *Oblate Writings*, II, 4, p. 210)

O Holy Spirit my God, have mercy on me! I have often saddened you. Come into me, fill my poor arid heart, dry, evil, and ill, with your precious gifts in order to save me and a few souls.... I have long wanted to change and be converted, but I always say *tomorrow, tomorrow*. Today: *If today you hear the Lord's voice, harden not your heart*. [Ps. 94:8] Today, the holy day of Pentecost, I say: *dixi nunc coepi* [Ps. 76:11].

What I need is a religious life, to observe our Holy Rules.... Oh my God, where am I at in this? What a life of activity! Have mercy on me. Oh Spirit of my God, enlighten me, strengthen me, bring me back to the holy truth of the right road. How many good examples I have before me of true Oblates, zealous men! (Notes of the Monthly Retreat, Pentecost, May 1885, *Oblate Writings*, II, 4, p. 224-225)

I have to see seriously to my perfection through fidelity to our holy Rules, the practice of the virtues that they prescribe, especially charity, humility, obedience, fervent constant prayer, recollection, modesty. (Annual Retreat, February 8, 1904, *Oblate Writings*, II, 4, p. 248)

*August 28, Saint Augustine*

#### IN SAINT AUGUSTINE'S FOOTSTEPS

“St. Augustine is one of the men (I am not thinking of him here in his capacity as a saint and doctor of the Church) whom I love best as he had a heart of the same calibre as my own, he understood what love means; when I read his *Confessions*, where he speaks of his friendship with Lipius, it was as if he were writing in my name.” *That is how St. Eugene describes his character when he entered the seminary. (Oblate Writings, 14, p. 68)*

*Mgr. Dupuch, Bishop of Algiers, returning from Pavia, where the body of St. Augustine is preserved, invited St. Eugene to go with him to Algeria, to Bône, the ancient Hippo, to bring back a relic of the saint, who was bishop there from 396 to 430. St. Eugene kept a detailed diary of the trip, from October 22 to November 13, 1842.*

Sunday the 30<sup>th</sup> was the day set for the transport of the holy relics to Hippo. We said Mass in the early morning and, at eight o'clock, the procession began.... This triumphal march had something very imposing. It is easily imagined what thoughts, what feelings each of us experienced in such a solemn moment. Was this not indeed an occasion, for Christian hearts, to be captivated at the sight of this amazing triumph awarded to the grand bishop of Hippo, to the holy doctor restored to his seat, from the place of his exile, by six bishops, representatives of all the bishops of the Gauls? [...]

Towards the heights where Augustine formerly reigned, and at the place where his pontifical throne was raised, we had erected an altar to him where, in a manner again seated, he will bless all the lands round about and the whole of Africa with a fecund blessing which will make Christianity germinate there again [...].

We left the table to go all of us together to the banks of the Seybouse, where we embarked in order to go to rejoin our vessels, which were in the harbor to await us. It is in this way that we made our adieux to this land of Augustine. Will I tell you that I experienced some pain in parting from these precious relics, which seemed to me to not be sufficiently safe in the midst of a people still not won to the faith? We soon got under way, we headed for Algiers, where we arrived at two o'clock in the morning of All Saints Day....

Sunday evening, I was made to officiate at Vespers and to bless the statue of Saint Augustine. The bishop of Algiers, after having spoken with us, distributed to us a fragment of the relics of the holy doctor. This was very apropos, because we had made a resolution, with common accord, to establish in our respective dioceses the feast of the Translation of the relics of Saint Augustine to Africa, in memory of the part that we had played in this grand solemnity and to perpetuate the memory of our pilgrimage. (Eugene de Mazenod, *Diary of Voyage to Africa, Oblate Writings*, 21, p. 63-73)

*August 29*

#### THE RULE WILL MAKE US SAINTS

*During his 31 years as General, Father Joseph Fabre, St. Eugene's successor as head of the Congregation, constantly stressed the love of and fidelity to the Rules. He wrote six circular letters on their observance or non-observance, like these excerpts from one of them:*

We would like to be able to say: Yes, the holy Rules are loved, valued, and observed. But to tell the truth we feel we should say that affection, respect, and fidelity to the holy Rules are not what they should be and what we would like them to be. [...]

What are the holy Rules for us, beloved Fathers and Brothers? They are the life of the family. If we exist, if we form a Congregation, if we are religious, if we have the possibility to follow our vocation and to accomplish the good assigned to us, it is because of the holy Rules....

How many do not esteem them as they should, do not seek in them what they contain, do not understand the value of the holy book handed



to them on the great day of their oblation! Yet [...] the holy Rules were given to them as the surest and most effective means to ensure perseverance and to keep the promises made. This holy book should have reminded them every day of the duties to perform and the virtues to be practiced. [...]

We must read daily a few passages to nourish the spirit and the heart and to know at least what it prescribes and what it prohibits. But unfortunately! How many let weeks and months go by without opening it! How many still marvel when they sometimes recall an article of the Rule! They are surprised and astonished: they had forgotten it [...]. They made their own rule in its place. [...] One who does not value the Rule does not value his vocation, does not value his religious family. Now, beware! From disdain to contempt there is but one step. [...]

The Rule makes us saints, it strengthens our vocation, makes our work fruitful, increases, develops and invigorates the Congregation. [...] It progressively strips away our self-will, clothing us each day more perfectly in the likeness of Christ. It makes us love passionately the supernatural life on earth that ennobles the soul and makes it happy. The religious who is faithful to the Rule can say the same words as Jesus: "My food is to do the will of my Father." (*Circular Letter* No. 26, April 2, 1874, *Circulaires administratives*, 1, p. 285ss)

*August 30*

#### SAINT EUGENE AS SEEN BY CARDINAL ETCHEGARAY

"A man with a passion for Jesus Christ and an ardent supporter of the Church". This expression of Pope Paul VI, the day of the beatification of Bishop de Mazenod in 1975, defines well the Bishop of Marseilles and the founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

Indeed, from 1805 and especially one Good Friday that followed, Eugene was "touched" by the merciful love of the Savior. This powerful experience of conversion filled him with both pain and happiness, repentance and recognition. As a man of the heart, unable to do anything halfway, he responded to that love with love by giving his life to his Savior. "Love is repaid only with love," he wrote to his sister shortly after he entered the seminary.

This discovery of the Saviour was so deep that Eugene could not but also grieve over the situation of so many men in the Church who ignore or despise the blood shed for them by Christ. From then on and throughout his life, his vision and his love for the Church carried the indelible marks of his own conversion. For him, the Church has always been and should be the family of all those who, like him, have been redeemed by the precious blood of the Savior. His desire to atone for his own faults immediately extended to the entire Church that he wanted to love and serve with all his strength.

His vocation to the priesthood is likewise born from the love of Christ and of the Church. “Strongly moved by the Spirit of God to imitate the active life of Jesus Christ”, he entered the seminary “with the desire, or better, with a clear determination” to devote himself “in the most absolute way to serve the Church, in the exercise of the ministry most useful to the souls” for whose salvation he was burning to dedicate himself.

Here we have the characteristic note of Eugene de Mazenod’s life: the continuity of his vocation. His whole life was devoted to loving and glorifying Christ, to loving and serving the Church. From the early years of his ministry, he knew the limits of one who is alone, he felt it necessary to unite with other priests who were filled with the same love and to work with them for the salvation of souls. The grace of his conversion then became a charism for the Church, expressed especially in the Preface of the Rules, and destined to last in time.

He wanted “apostolic men” as collaborators, men “solidly grounded in virtue”, who would not only “labour with all the resources at their command to convert others” but are resolved “to strive to be saints”, to “walk courageously in the footsteps of the apostles,” men “living in community”, “ready to sacrifice goods, talents, ease, self, even their life” and “to fight even unto death.”

His call is “urgent”, his eagerness to serve the Church wants to embrace everything to remedy all its ills, to correct as much as possible all disorders: preach parish missions, care for seminaries, replace the religious orders that had disappeared, guide youth, bring the Good News to the ends of the world. “How vast the field that lies before them! How worthy and holy the undertaking!” he exclaims. This is nothing less than to “continue the great work of men’s redemption; it is only to this

that all our efforts should tend”, “with the same means our Savior employed”!

In his last Pastoral Letter, in 1860, Bishop de Mazenod wrote: “To love the Church is to love Jesus Christ and vice versa.” These words of faith and love, he wrote them with his life, he lived them with all the vitality of his great heart. This “great mystery of the union of Christ and his Church” (Ephesians 5:32) made the unity of his life. (R. Etchegaray, *Petite vie de Eugène de Mazenod*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris 1995, p. 218-220)

*August 31*

#### HENRI GROLLIER REACHES THE ARCTIC CIRCLE

*In the history of our Congregation August 31, 1859 is a memorable date: Fr. Henri Grollier reached Good Hope at the Arctic Circle. Born in France March 30, 1826, he arrived at the Rivière Rouge, in Canada in June of 1852. After founding several missions, he thought it was time to head to the extreme north to meet the Eskimos. On March 15, 1859 he wrote to St. Eugene: “At Fort Rae I have had occasion to see some natives of Good Hope, who are sympathetic toward us [...]. Oh! If we could, by carrying the torch of faith to the ends of the earth and acquiring for the Church these many tribes that no missionary has visited so far, make the words of the Prophet come true: “The ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God” (Ps 97:4).*

*In his biography Fr. Lingueglia says of Grollier:*

On his arrival in Good Hope, August 31, 1859, Fr. Grollier, according to his custom, well worthy of an Oblate of Mary Immaculate, hastened to dedicate to his heavenly Mother the Mission, which he was about to found so far removed from any civilized country. The English name, Good Hope, suggested the title to be chosen: he called it Our Lady of Good Hope. Did not this title express clearly why he had decided to undertake such a long journey, that is, the burning desire to win to Jesus Christ those regions all the way to the shores of the Arctic Ocean? The fur merchants, founders of that remote place, hoping to make a fortune, had called it Good Hope. In turn, the Missionary called

it Our Lady of Good Hope, in the hope of procuring for a multitude of souls the eternal light, of which the Immaculate Virgin was the Mother: *Aeterni Luminis Mater*. His hopes were not disappointed: from his first preaching, he could hope for the most consoling results in the near future. And in fact, in the month of May 1861, he was already able to write to his Superior General: "Now, all our natives want to belong to our holy religion." (*Un pioniere del Circolo artico, il P. Enrico Grollier*, SEI, Torino 1943, p. 91-92)

*Fr. Grollier died at Fort Good Hope five years later, June 4, 1864. June 30, Bishop Vital Grandin wrote to the Superior General:*

"Very Reverend Father, this is the first Oblate to die in this far distant country. You see, he died as a worthy Oblate of Mary, in the greatest poverty, without a doctor, without medicines, without even having a drop of milk or a potato to alleviate his suffering. He died while teaching the natives and when his tongue could no longer speak he taught them by his patience and the holiness of his death. Zeal was the virtue of Father Grollier, zeal that, in his case, eclipsed all others. This zeal was so great that it became at times excessive... God is well acquainted with those who work for him; Father Grollier was the man who was needed in the circumstances in which we are. Far from any superior, he made abundant use of presumed permissions and he accomplished tasks which no superior could ever have permitted or even advised. Once they were accomplished they could merit only praise, and we bless the Lord for that." (In J. Fabre, *Le R. P. Grollier*, Circulaire no 25, le 2 novembre 1864, « Notices nécrologiques », 1, Paris, 1884, p. 174-175)

In his *Esquisse sur le Nord-Ouest de l'Amérique*, Bishop A. Taché speaks of him as "the first martyr of the apostolate in the Mackenzie vicariate" ("Missions OMI" 8, [1869], p. 277).

## September

**T**he texts this month mainly concern Oblate identity. At first there was talk of the “spirit” and “vocation” of the Institute. Only later did the term “spirituality” and finally “charism” appear. Other writings will concern the vow of perseverance and prayer.

*September 1<sup>st</sup>*

### THE DRAFTING OF THE RULE AT SAINT-LAURENT DU VERDON

*On August 16, 1818 the Vicar General of Digne wrote to St. Eugene proposing that the missionaries take the direction of the shrine of Notre-Dame-du-Laus and devote themselves to preaching missions in the surrounding region. It would become the second house of the Missionaries of Provence outside of Provence. It was time, then, to write a Rule to maintain the unity of the two communities and those that would arise later. Eugene had already decided to go to Saint-Laurent du Verdon to rest. His mother and his niece Nathalie were already there waiting for him. He left Aix on September 1 with two young men in formation, Marius Suzanne and Noël François Moreau. They arrived the next day and remained there until September 16. In his Memoirs he writes:*

I felt obliged to hold an extraordinary council of all those who made up my little society, even the young ones who were not yet in Holy Orders. It was to make them understand that being called to another diocese to make a new establishment, it was necessary to broaden the regulation that governed us, and to write more extensive constitutions, form closer ties, establish a hierarchy, in a word, to coordinate everything so that there would be one will and one spirit of conduct. All agreed and they asked me to see to seriously and expeditiously drafting the constitution and the rule that we should adopt. I left immediately

for Saint-Laurent-du-Verdon, my family’s land, between Quinson and Riez, only a few miles from Digne, to work in solitude at the task they had given me. There, with the help of God and prayer, I wrote the main articles of the Rule that still governs us today. (In Rambert I, 282-283)

*Here is what Fr. Suzanne writes in his Memoirs:*

He left at the end of August, accompanied by Moreau, a deacon who was preparing for ordination to the priesthood in September, and Suzanne, who was still a novice. He brought them with him to Laurent, near Nice (sic!) to a beautiful place owned by his mother. It was there, separated from the world and only occupied with the work God had given him through the voice of his colleagues, that he began to lay the foundations of our constitutions, and in less than three weeks his work was finished.

One day after completing the chapter on the vows, he called the young Suzanne, who did not yet know about the plan: that is, to oblige the members of the society to make vows. He read the entire chapter to him and asked his opinion and his resolution in this regard. This reading and the request astonished and surprised him at first. He asked for a moment of reflection; he pensively went to the chateau’s park, and after a quarter of an hour of reflection and some prayer, he returned and promised the Superior to take the vows as soon as he was judged worthy.

J. Pielorz, *Le séjour du Fondateur à St-Laurent et la rédaction de nos Règles*, “Missions OMI” 16 (1957), p. 297-322.

*September 2*

## THE OBLATE VOCATION

*Fr. Joseph Fabre, the immediate successor of St. Eugene, is the first to define the Oblate vocation using the combination, “priests and religious”. Already in his first circular letter he writes:*

To what are we called, my dear Brothers? To become saints, to effectively work for the sanctification of the most abandoned souls. This is our vocation, do not lose sight of it, and strive to understand it well.

We must work actively and generously for our own sanctification, that is to say, meditate every day more seriously and thoroughly on the duties of our state, know better the virtues that God demands of our soul, so that by an increasingly religious conduct we will be able to carry out our holy obligations.

We are priests, we are religious; this dual quality imposes duties which we must never misunderstand nor forget. To work for the sanctification of others by doing external ministry is a beautiful mission, but this is only part of our holy vocation; it presumes the first as the principle and source of its fruitfulness. Indeed, can we effectively and supernaturally respond to the grace of the ministry of souls, if we do not already have a clear idea and a deep sense of the need for our own sanctification?

Let us not forget that it is to achieve this goal that our holy Rules require us to spend a considerable part of the year in the interior of our houses to work at becoming worthy instruments of God's graces through the practice of all the religious virtues. [...]

Yes, my dear Brothers, let us love our vocation, may the thought of it stir up in our soul a deep gratitude to the Lord who gave it to us rather than to others. It is a precious treasure; it is a remarkable grace. Let us not diminish its value by our indifference. Is it not one of the greatest of favors to have at our disposal the most effective ways to sanctify ourselves and to sanctify others? Therefore, let us love our holy Rules that provide us such sure and powerful means. [...] Let's keep our holy Rules as the most valuable of legacies, and they also will keep us faithfully. The zeal that we will have in keeping them with affection and punctuality will be the measure of the zeal that we will have to sanctify ourselves. (*Circular Letter* No. 11, March 21, 1862, *Circulaires administratives*, 1, p. 3-5)

*September 3*

YVES-JOSEPH-MARIE PLUMEY (1913-1991)  
ARCHBISHOP OF GAROUA

*In the night of September 2 and 3 Bishop Plumey was killed, possibly by robbers, in his home in Ngaoundéré. He left France as a young*

*man and was the founder of the Church in North-Cameroon, its first Prefect and Vicar Apostolic, and then its first bishop and archbishop. The most beautiful eulogy of him was perhaps the one by John Paul II during his visit to Garoua:*

The Holy See, sensitive to the needs of evangelization here and in the neighboring region of Chad, decided in 1946 to entrust the responsibility for it to the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Monsignor Yves Plumey, whom I salute with reverence, was at the head of these brave pioneers. In this vast territory with numerous ethnic groups, each with its own traditions and language, they came to live in the cities, the villages, and also in the northern savannah and mountains. They relied from the beginning on friends and native collaborators who helped them become familiar with the country. In a few decades, they worked relentlessly to increase the number of mission stations, schools, and clinics. They trained many catechists. They taught and baptized the people who welcomed them with joy and confidence, in the midst of human trials. It is right to pay tribute to the Oblate Fathers and Brothers. (Homily, Garoua, August 11, 1985)

Go and teach! That is the watchword that the Lord gives to us who continue the work started by the Twelve. The teaching of catechism, of revealed truths, must be the first concern of a priest and a missionary who is entrusted with a community of Christians and catechumens. It is an imperative duty to dedicate a bit of time every day to the formation of the groups of catechumens. In the bush and in the centers we have to sow the truth, the Word of God, which has in itself the power of light and strength to conquer. Efforts to organize catechism classes everywhere, the constancy to continue it throughout the year, will bear immediate fruits. Experience has proven it. We need to devote the greatest care to the teaching of catechism, above all in the schools. We have the invaluable assistance of the Sisters whom we thank for their cooperation in this area. In addition, let us see that we ensure good and well-prepared catechism classes for the children and youth in the official schools. I repeat, it is essential for the propagation of the faith in North Cameroon. Those in charge of the Mission must establish a plan for the religious education in their sector, in agreement with their collaborators, the fathers, sisters, brothers, and catechists. It is their responsibility.



ity to check the work, and reorganize it, if necessary. The formation of catechists also requires much attention. We can assure their religious and spiritual formation during the sessions at the mission center: one or more days every time. It will be an opportunity to offer them an explanation of the truths that they will teach in the coming month or quarter. (Y. Plumey, Letter to the missionaries, November 7 1958, in Y. Plumey, *Mission Tchad-Cameroun. L'annonce de l'évangile au Nord-Cameroun et au Mayo Kabbi, 1846-1986*, Editions Oblates, 1990, p. 472)

F. Carpentier, *La vocation de monseigneur Yves Plumey omi*, « Oblatio » VII (2018), p. 97-132.

*September 4*

#### THE CHARACTERISTIC TRAITS OF THE OBLATE

*In his commentary on the Rule, Father Alfred J. B. Yenveux (1843-1903) was one of the first to clearly outline the main distinguishing traits of the Congregation.*

According to the first article of our holy Rules, the Congregation must have seven main distinctive features: 1. Be small and humble. 2. Be devoted in a special way to Mary Immaculate. 3. Its members must be secular priests, bound to their Society with the vows of religion. 4. They must be intimately united with each other through the bonds of fraternal charity. 5. Their job is to be missionaries, and this in a special way. 6. Missionaries of the poor and the abandoned souls, following the example of Our Lord Jesus Christ. 7. In fact, a full compliance with the virtues and examples of our Divine Savior must be the object of their constant efforts. [...]

Fraternal charity must be the special mark of the Oblates of Mary: *Sicut fratres habitantes in unum*. They must be noted especially for their family spirit. Our Venerated Founder desires that fraternal charity and humility be like the proper mark of his spiritual sons, learning from the example of the Heart of Jesus: *Discite a me quia mitis sum et humilis Corde* (Mt 11:29).

The Congregation of the Oblates of Mary is a Society of Missionaries. The title of Missionaries, their first name and their real characteristic, places them in the great apostolic family, whose head is the one who calls himself the One sent by the Father: *Donec veniat qui mittendus est* (Gen. 49:10); it has the twelve Apostles as ancestors, and as its members all those who in the course of centuries, have traveled the world preaching the gospel of salvation. We can say that the title of *Missionaries* explains all the Rules that Bishop de Mazenod left us and that form like the code of the *Missionary Oblate*. We can even add that the Rules for personal sanctification he has drawn up were intended only to make us Missionaries who are powerful in word and deed [...].

The Oblates of Mary must carry out their apostolate especially in favor of the poor: *Præcipuam dent operam pauperibus evangelizandis*. Our Venerated Founder does not say that the poor must be the sole object of our zeal, but he desires that in keeping with the example of Our Lord J.C. *qui omnes homines vult salvos fieri*, each of us can say (1 Tim 2:4): *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me* (Luke 4:18). I was specially sent to evangelize the poor.

By the poor, *pauperibus*, we must not simply understand those who are lacking in spiritual goods of grace, even if they have inherited the gifts of fortune, but the poor as such. [...]

Every religious Society, while taking, in a general way, Our Lord Jesus Christ as its model, ordinarily chooses a special virtue from the life of the Divine Master, and makes it like a seal that characterizes it. Normally this is the virtue that has shone with greater splendor in the Founder of that Institute. So, the disciples of St. Francis have poverty as a virtue of predilection. The Oblate of Mary, having as his goal to supply, to some extent, for all the ancient religious orders destroyed during the riots of 1793, must strive to reproduce the virtues of all those Societies by becoming a perfect and complete copy of Our Lord Jesus Christ, so that it can be said of him: *Oblatus alter Christus*. (*Les saintes Règles*, Paris 1903, Vol. I, p. 25-35)

OBLATION, A DISTINCTIVE TRAIT

*In his famous Circular 191, Fr. Léo Deschâtelet, goes through the Constitutions and Rules, and traces an extraordinary synthesis of the Oblate vocation. Among other topics he focuses on the meaning of oblation.*

Does not our name of *Oblates* seem totally justified? Is not this priestly, religious, and missionary life *a total giving* of ourselves, a total commitment, an unlimited *oblation*? When the Founder gave us the name of Missionaries of Provence, then the Oblates of St. Charles and finally the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, was he not obeying some imperious law flowing from the spiritual principles on which rested the new apostolic life he had given to the Church? Perhaps without thinking had he not affixed the last strong and characteristic “mark” to the religious priest and missionary whom before God he had envisioned?

To penetrate the innermost reality of this name – always keeping an eye on the perfect code of Rules that for us, we hope, is not a “closed book” – we resume our meditation and try to understand how the Patriarch of the Congregation conceived this *absolute oblation* of ourselves.

The texts seem to clearly say that what really defines our vocation and mission is *a higher degree of commitment to the service of God and souls*, an unlimited gift of self to the service of God, of his glory, of his love and his infinite mercy. It is an enthusiasm, a special intensity of priestly charity, of zeal for the most difficult works, – let us say it, and we cannot find a stronger expression – it is an *unlimited oblation of ourselves*, such that we cannot be defined but by saying, “They are *Oblates par excellence*.”

Undoubtedly all religious institutes seek to attain perfection through the gift of self. However, when the continued striving toward perfection in every field and with every fiber of the heart and soul aims to inform all of one’s life, it is a special vocation: this is our vocation. In contemplating the great figure of Mgr. de Mazenod, reading his letters and pondering the Rules, does it not seem that a total gift of self precisely defines a Missionary Oblate in the history of the Church?

We repeat it, our characteristic “mark” is that spirit of *unlimited oblation. without reserve*, expressed by our name and contained in the spirit and letter of the Constitutions – from the Preface to Article 697 – in which the Founder has infused the whole ardor of his fire. (*Circular Letter* No. 191, August 15, 1951, *Circulaires Administratives*, 5, p. 302-303).

September 6

## THE MISSIONARY OUTLOOK

*“Missionary Outlook”, a document of the 1972 General Chapter, presents this profile of the Oblate:*

We see ourselves as apostles in the spirit of de Mazenod and in the fullest biblical sense of the word:

Men called to be witnesses of the living Lord to the very ends of the earth (Acts 1:8, 21-22);

Men who have first experienced in our own lives the loving kindness of God made visible in the person of Jesus (see Titus 2:11-13);

Men who are driven on by this love to risk our lives for the sake of his Gospel (see 2 Cor. 5:14 and Acts 15:26);

Men who live apostolic poverty so as to free ourselves from all that might obstruct us from our mission (see Mt. 10:9-10);

Men who celebrate our common hope in the Kingdom by breaking the bread of the Lord together in joy and simplicity of heart (Acts 2:44-47); men gathered together with Mary, as were the first Apostles (see Acts 1:14). (*Missionary Outlook*, No. 18)

September 7

## A NAME, AN IDEAL

“Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate”. In a name we find the keyword of an ideal.

*Missionaries.* They continue the work of Christ and the Apostles. They are called to go together, in community, to the poor, to build up

the family of God's children with them – through the traditional ministry of evangelization, “announcing who Christ is” – and thus they help realize the prayer of Jesus: “That all may be one.” In mission they will find their way to holiness. But what kind of missionary and what kind of community is needed to accomplish this divine plan?

*Oblates.* Missionaries totally given, unconditionally and without return, to the God to whom they already belong and of whom they profess to be creatures, the fruit of His eternal love. Oblates, men who have made a holocaust, an immolation of their whole being to the God who has given Himself fully to them in his Son. Oblates, the logical consequence of having understood who God is and of having seen how He has been present and has worked in the history of salvation. Oblates, a response of love to the love with which Jesus Christ “loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). It is dying with him to be in him, of “losing one's life to find it” (Mk 9:35) in him. We are here in the mystery described by Paul: “I am crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:19-20). Grafted into the fruitful death of Christ, the missionary can hope to become, in a real way, his co-workers in the paschal mystery. Just as the offering that Jesus makes of himself to the Father is a way of salvation, of new life and unity for the human race, so their “oblation”, bound to his and confirmed by his, will be also the secret of their apostolic fruitfulness. Oblation, that radical dedication, without reservation, to the work of Christ, the fulfillment of his mission: these are all elements that indicate a full cooperation in his work of salvation. (F. Ciardi, *Eugenio de Mazenod, Un carisma di missione e di comunione*, Città Nuova, Roma 1995<sup>2</sup>, p. 132)

*September 8, Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary*

A NAME, AN IDEAL

“Missionary Oblates of *Mary Immaculate*”. The Pope approved the Congregation with this new name, an unexpected one but one prepared from all eternity for this family that Mary, in silence, had been forming. [...]

The Oblates are offered like her, on her model. They are offered to her and in her, united with her in her own adherence to Christ. Mary

teaches how to live the death of Jesus, how to be united with him in his paschal mystery, how to become his cooperators, that it is only through the mystery of the cross that we can become fathers and mothers of souls and generate the Church. It is only “inspired by the example of Mary,” as we read in the Rule, that we put ourselves “totally at the service of the Church and the Kingdom.”

Mary expresses God. She is the creature for whom God is her whole life. She reflects God perfectly. Having extinguished in herself all that is human and created, she lives in a great solitude with God, without human support. But precisely because of this solitude, because of this fullness of union with God, she becomes Mother. Alone and Mother of the Church. The highest solitude, the maximum fecundity.

The Oblates will live their mission with her. Their cooperation with Christ begins in her, and the fruit of their apostolic work must return to her, as stated by Leo XI in the decree approving the Rule: You Oblates have to “bring to the womb of the Mother of Mercy those children whom Christ from the cross wanted to give her.” That’s why when Eugene contemplates Mary, he calls her “Mother of the Mission,” “Mother of Mercy”, “Stair of Mercy,” “New Eve,” “Co-Redemptrix,” “Mother of souls,” “Spiritual Mother of many children of God,” “Great enemy of the Empire of the devil,” “Dispenser of graces”. (F. Ciardi, *Eugenio de Mazenod, Un carisma di missione e di comunione*, p. 134-135)

\* \* \*

BLESSED CECILIO VEGA DOMÍNGUEZ (1913-1936)  
MARTYR OF SPAIN

*He was born on September 8, 1913. He had finished his third year of theology and had perpetual vows, professed on December 23, 1934. Born in Villamor de Órbigo (León, Diocese of Astorga) to a couple of humble farmers, he had distinguished himself for his constancy and tenacity in the face of difficulties, in particular the loss of sight in one eye due to an accident. He was kind-hearted, noble, pious, docile, frank and of good relations with others. He loved his Oblate vocation and the Congregation very much, emphasizing his devotion to the Eucharist*

*and the Blessed Virgin. He was 23 years old. He was a subdeacon and was already on the verge of the diaconate and the priesthood.*

*His niece Virginia Domínguez and his sister Manuela tell us about a letter in which he emphasizes his disposition to martyrdom. In response to the concern of his father, who had written to him urging him to return temporarily to his father's house, Cecilio had replied that "they had the Seminary very well walled and that nothing would happen to him, and that if he had to die, he would die, but that he would not return home". He made it clear that he wanted to be wherever his community was and that he was ready for martyrdom if necessary. His father received this letter when his son had already died.*

*After two days of uncertainty, anxiety and harassment in the Scholasticate, he was "taken out" on the night of July 24, 1936, and shot at dawn in the Casa de Campo.*

*September 9*

#### THE OBLATE CHARISM

*The Congress on the Oblate Charism Today (Rome, April 26 to May 14, 1976) noted the essential features of the charism, which were later incorporated into the first 10 articles of the 1982 Constitutions.*

Above all, we recognize the power of CHRIST over us, the Living One, who now ardently desires to liberate the world, with our help, provided that we first accept that he liberate us.

We want to EVANGELIZE, that is to say, to make Him known, the God who became totally human to save us fully and fraternally; remembering that our Founder gave priority to the proclamation of the Gospel in view of conversion, we want to show by our lives the joy of the Good News.

It is to the POOR above all that we must take this message of liberating joy: to the most abandoned humans, those whose situation cries out for justice before God; it does not exclude bringing this message to anyone who is in urgent need of this Good News, even if not materially impoverished.

We receive our mission from the CHURCH and we accomplish it in her, a people of believers, where the action of Christ is made actual and effective today.

For that reason, we live in COMMUNITY, a human group where we strengthen each other in faith, in charity, enriching each other from our discovery of God and of Christ who lives and works in us and in the world.

Joined together by fidelity to the vows, this group lives RELIGIOUS LIFE, a radical acceptance of Gospel values, of total belonging to the Lord, publicly professed, as a testimony to the joy of full salvation.

Recognizing MARY as our mother, we entrust our lives and our work to her; without forgetting her privileges, we praise her and make her known and loved as the Poor One who teaches us how to welcome the Savior, and how to lovingly present Him to the world like her, the servant of all, who followed Jesus Her Son.

All Oblates are not PRIESTS, but all see each other fully as Oblates. However, we are pleased that the Congregation is “priestly” in its origins and its legal status; it is in principle called to show and make real the priority that belongs to God and to Christ in the gift of Life through the Word and the Sacraments; it thus serves the common dignity of all the baptized members of the royal priesthood of Christ.

Finally, we remember that to finish identifying the Oblate charism today, our Founder wants us to carefully discern the MOST URGENT needs of the Church and the world, without fear of being rushed to heed with holy boldness the actual call that God cries out to us for the poor. (*Final Declaration of the Congress, « Vie Oblate Life »* 36 [1977], p. 301-302)

*September 10*

## WHAT IS YOUR CHARISM?

Personally, when I am asked: “What is your charism?”, I cannot help but tell a story....

The story of a young man, Eugene de Mazenod, who experiences in himself the merciful love of God, manifested in the Crucified Christ,



the Savior. Redeemed by Him, he feels called to become in Him and with Him, an instrument of redemption: a co-operator of Christ the Savior. In the light of this mystery, with the new eyes of faith, with the same eyes as the Savior because he has identified himself with him, he looks at the Church and recognizes her as the Bride of Christ, the fruit of his martyrdom. He sees its deplorable state, he hears her calling out to her children and he is ready to respond. He is moved with compassion at the sight of the poor, for whom Christ gave his blood, and decides to devote his entire life to them in the priesthood, to let them know, through the ministry of evangelization, who Christ is, thus helping them become aware of their dignity as sons and daughters of God.

He invites other priests and later lay brothers, with whom he chooses to live the evangelical counsels, following the example of the Apostles, to live radically and fully the Christian call to holiness and to enter upon the ministry of evangelization of the whole person, of all men and women, especially the poorest and most abandoned. He gradually discovers the presence of Mary in his life and in his ministry. He sees himself as an instrument of her merciful love and feels called to bring back to her, the Mother of Mercy, the scattered children of God. And so with his brothers he begins to turn to those who are less easily reached by the ordinary pastoral care of the Church, where others will not or cannot go, with a style of evangelization that is bold, avant-garde, capable of opening new ways in which they will work tirelessly, leaving no stone unturned. Thus he contributes, in communion with all the other vocations in the Church, to God's plan: to gather men and women into the great family of God, leading humanity toward the unity Jesus asked of the Father, so that they may all be one.

It is an experience that I also try to share. It is an experience that can be shared or that can enlighten the one to which we are called, in the marvelous variety of vocations called forth by the Spirit in the Church. (F. Ciardi, *Eugenio de Mazenod, Un carisma di missione e di comunione*, p. 194-195)

September 11

LAYING THE FOUNDATION STONE OF NOTRE DAME DE LA GARDE

*From the thirteenth century there has been a chapel dedicated to the Madonna of the Guard on top of the hill that overlooks the city of Marseilles. In 1524 a military fort was built there that incorporated the oratory which, nevertheless, remained a place of worship, until the early years of the French Revolution. In 1802, the chapel was reopened to the public, and in 1823 the new Bishop, Fortuné de Mazenod, St. Eugene's uncle, entrusted the care of the chapel to the Oblates. On September 11, 1853, St. Eugene, after having previously obtained permission from the President of the Republic, who later became Emperor Napoleon III, was able to tear down the old chapel and lay the foundation stone of what today is the largest shrine in Marseilles. For a century, missionaries left from there for all parts of the world. The Oblates remained chaplains until the expulsion of the religious from France in 1903. The community, which was always large, also took care of the prisons, hospitals, and did parish missions....*

*Eugene wrote a letter to his sister sharing with her his joy at laying the foundation stone:*

One will never be able to fully describe the beauty of the spectacle: the newspapers have given you only a very imperfect idea. All the way from the church of St. Joseph, where we began the procession, up to the summit of the mountain, the crowd was so thick that there was no room even for a pin. What a sight to see the hill overrun with a countless multitude that with such joy on their faces, sang hymns and canticles with enthusiasm, bowing and kneeling at the passage of the Bishop, who with emotion blessed this crowd of Christians, who had come from all over to take part in Mary's triumph!

How to describe the view from the top of the fort, where we had placed the statue of the Virgin Mary for all to see. At the time of giving the benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, when I raised my hands to heaven to pray to the Holy Trinity, the innumerable multitude, now numbering at least one hundred thousand people, from the mountain top to the city below, was prostrate in unanimous adoration, in response

to the invocation to receive the blessing. The blessing reached the city and the region: all eyes were turned to the sacred mountain to participate in the celebration that even the wind had not disturbed: it in fact had calmed down at the moment the procession started, as if to demonstrate the power of the great Queen of Heaven.

You will not be surprised if I tell you that I was not tired at all after. I could not hold back my joy and I felt twenty years younger. Ah! it was wonderful! (In Rey, II, 480)

### *September 12, The Holy Name of Mary*

#### WHY THE NAME OBLATES OF MARY?

The norm that regulates the names of things differs from the one that names individuals and families. While the first expresses a profound reality, [...] the latter are usually left to free choice, without a specific meaning. [...]

It is not so, however, for the names given from heaven, either directly or through a celestial messenger or the infallible Vicar of Jesus Christ. They signify a title of predestination for a person, or a religious family, that God chooses as collaborators and love, which is its principle, is never frustrated [...]. Thus, it is with our glorious title of Oblates of Mary Immaculate. [...]

Why this title and not another – especially at a time when the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was not yet defined?

Indeed, the consecration of the Institute to the Immaculate would become for each of its members a new source of interior life that would subsequently have its effect, through the apostolate, on the most abandoned souls, our inheritance. [...]

To imitate Mary in all her mysteries, is to reproduce Jesus in the same mysteries which are, at the same time, theirs and ours; and in the actual economy of Providence, to go back to God, by the same route He traveled to come to us. [...]

God will choose a religious family, to reproduce, in a special way, the perfection of the Immaculate Mother. It will be the matter on which the divine love will work to give it that form, which is a copy of the

Immaculate. (G. Depoortère, *Notre Baptême marial: Ses conséquences diverses*, “Missions OMI”, 62 [1927], p. 103- 114)

*September 13*

#### MOTIVATION AND TOOLS FOR PERSEVERANCE

The first motive, the greatest support for our fidelity is the example of Jesus himself and the power of his Spirit. “Jesus always loved those who were his own in the world and to the very end he showed how perfect his love was... His Spirit inspires all Christians to constancy in their love.”

Our link to the Congregation is a bond of life. The Congregation has given much to us and we ourselves have decided, with Christ’s grace, to make our way to God through the Congregation, to journey to God as members of our Institute.... As in marriage, though in a different order, we have made a definitive decision to belong, for life until death. Perseverance may at times appear to be an external thing: I am in and therefore I stay!

I persevere because I love, even though the sensitive attitudes of my heart might change. I commit that in me which is most stable and profound, that in myself which in some-way transcends time and can remain unchangeable....

My fidelity thus consists in never on my own calling into question the gift of my person that I made to God in a given institute. He himself is faithful; he does not change. He gave me a sign; I believed in him, I loved him and have followed him on this given road. Through his grace I too will be faithful; I shall not change; in humility and patience I shall overcome difficulties....

The conditions of fidelity: “We will help each other find joy and fulfillment in our community life and in our apostolate” and we will support “one another in our resolution to be faithful to the Congregation”, and that “whatever the circumstances which could provoke its dispersal or tempt us to withdraw from it.” (C. 29) [...] Through mutual support and friendship among Oblates we ought to help each other find our happiness therein and fully live out our situation with joy. On no account should we ourselves provoke or freely entertain temptations of

infidelity, that is to say, consciously entertain sentiments of bitterness and revolt, in times of crisis refuse to open oneself to a confrere who is a friend or to one's superior, allow oneself to go to the very limit of all possible worldly distractions. (Jetté, *O.M.I., The Apostolic Man*, p. 181-183)

*September 14, Exaltation of the Holy Cross*

THE CROSS AT THE CENTER

The mystery of the Savior's passion will have first place in the heart of the novices.... Words like Passion, Calvary, etc., should thrill them, filling them with love for Jesus and a desire to imitate him.

May the cross be among the most prized objects of their piety. Let them stop often at his feet, and may the wounds of the Savior, in particular those of the Sacred Heart, be their sweetest home and shelter from all the pains and against all the assaults of the enemy.

May they repeat frequently in their mind and practice faithfully that phrase of the author of the Imitation: "Seek refuge in Christ's Passion and make a happy abode in his holy wounds. If you prayerfully take refuge in the bruises and precious wounds of Jesus, you will find great comfort in time of tribulation." (*Directory of the Oblate Novices*, [1831-1835])

*September 15, Our Lady of Sorrows*

PRAYER TO MARY, THE SORROWFUL MOTHER

O Lord, almighty God, you endowed the Blessed Virgin Mary with the fullness of every gift and grace; by allowing her heart to be pierced with the deepest sorrow, you crowned her merit and placed her at the head of countless legions of martyrs who for love of your Son Jesus Christ have shed their blood. Through the painful martyrdom endured by this gentle Mother seeing her beloved Son dying as a Victim because of his love for us, grant us the grace to bear with fortitude the disappointments and setbacks in our life, and not to fear torment or death it-

self, when we are called to confess our faith in Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen. (Attributed to Eugene de Mazenod, *Oblate Prayer*, p. 56-57)

September 16

## I WANT TO LOVE YOU

My God, double, triple, increase my strength a hundredfold that I may love you, not merely as much as I can, that is nothing, but that I love you as much as did the saints, as much as your holy Mother loved and loves you. My God, that is not enough, and why I should I not love you as much as you love yourself? That cannot be, I know, but to desire it is not impossible, for I form it in all sincerity in my heart, with all my soul. Yes, my God, I would like to love you as much as you love yourself; this then is how I may undertake to make reparation for my past ingratitude.

You gave me intelligence, will, memory a heart, eyes, hands, in a word all my bodily senses, all my soul's faculties, you gave me all these things for yourself, to use them for your glory, for your unique, your greater glory.

My God, that is all over henceforth and for my whole life. You, you alone will be the sole object to which will tend all my affections and my every action. To please you, act for your glory, will be my daily task, the task of every moment of my life. I wish to live only for you, I wish to love you alone and all else in you and through you. I despise riches, I trample honours under foot; you are my all, replacing all else. My God, my love and my all: *Deus meus et omnia*. (Eugene de Mazenod, Notes made during the retreat in preparation for priesthood, December 1-21, 1811, *Oblate Writings*, 14, p. 216-217)

My Jesus, give me your love. (Eugene de Mazenod, Rule drawn up during his retreat in Aix, December 1812, *Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 14)

September 17

FOR PERSEVERANCE IN OUR VOCATION

Almighty, eternal God, you have called me, your unworthy servant, through no merit of my own, but solely out of your great mercy, to serve your divine Son in the Congregation of the Immaculate Virgin Mary.

Humbly I pray, through the merits of the precious blood of our divine Savior, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary conceived without sin, and of my patron saints: grant that I may not weaken in this holy resolve through any effort of the enemy of my soul.

May I not be deterred by impulses of the flesh, dissuaded by love of parents or counsel of relatives, restrained by fear of difficulties, distracted by the vanity of this world, overcome by bad company; that my passions may not impede me, work not break me, nor the suggestions of Satan pervert me.

You have given me your gift to begin: give me now the power to persevere according to your holy Will. O God of Love, especially give me the talents I need to reach my goal, as well as confidence in those who are my spiritual fathers. Grant that I may labor unceasingly for my own and my neighbor's salvation, and, above all, to promote your glory. Amen. (Eugene de Mazenod, c. 1849, *Oblate Prayer*, Rome 2019, p. 54-55)

September 18

PRAYER IN THE LIFE OF THE OBLATE

*According to St. Eugene we cannot be apostolic men without an interior life, without seriously and always striving for holiness. To do this it is necessary to pray always and not to lose heart.*

Imitating these illustrious models, [Our Lord Jesus Christ, the chief founder of our Society, and that of his Apostles-our first fathers], the missionaries will give one portion of their life to prayer, recollection, and contemplation, while living together in the seclusion of God's house.

The other portion of their life they will zealously devote to the works of the exterior ministry.... Whether out on the missions or at home, their chief concern will always be to make progress in the way of religious perfection.... In a word, they will try to become other Jesus Christs by spreading abroad everywhere the fragrance of his amiable virtues. (*The Rule of Saint Eugene de Mazenod*, Woestman, ed., p. 62-63)

Mental prayer will be made in common twice a day: in the morning, after morning prayer, for three quarters of an hour; and in the evening, in the church, before the Blessed Sacrament, for half an hour. We will meditate especially on the theological virtues, and on the virtues of our Lord Jesus Christ, for these should be exemplified in the life of our members [...]. All the members of the Institute are to spend some time every day in the study of Holy Scripture. (*The Rule of Saint Eugene de Mazenod*, ed. Woestman, p. 57)

Thanks be to God, the great majority of you have understood this well. Yet, I say this in sorrow, too many still leave much to be desired in this matter. [...] What are they doing during oraison, which twice a day places them in God's presence in order to contemplate his divine perfections, to enter in his mysteries and to train themselves in imitating the divine Model, whose life we meditate and precepts we appreciate? The evening oraison especially has Jesus Christ as its objective, the Jesus Christ in whose presence we have the great happiness of being gathered together. Of what use to them are the two examinations of conscience.... Do they find no food for their soul in the Holy Office properly recited in choir, in the holy Sacrifice preceded by the morning prayer which fashions the soul to receive all the impulses of grace? And what about the day of retreat each month and the spiritual exercises which each year precede the renewal of vows? Or confession at least once a week, and direction, conferences of the coulpe? In short, this ensemble of a life of perfection which is quite adequate to form great saints in God's Church? [...]

Now in order to appreciate the good fortune of living thus in community with brethren... One has to love oraison, prayer, meditation, all the exercises which promote piety and maintain it in our souls. (Eugene



de Mazenod, *Circular Letter* No. 2, February 2, 1857, in *Oblate Writings*, 12, p. 212-213, 219)

Our prayer is part of our whole life. It will depend, to a large extent, on the option that we have made for Jesus Christ. If we have truly given everything to Christ and if it is he whom we seek in all things – or at least have that desire – it is very likely that our prayer life will go well. Otherwise, if there is little space in our life for Jesus Christ, our prayer is likely to always be a very superficial appendix. (F. Jetté, *Conversation with the Oblates of Villeneuve*, Ottawa, April 21, 1989)

September 19

EMMANUEL 'MABATHOANA (1904-1966)  
THE FIRST MOSOTHO BISHOP

*On September 19, 1966, Archbishop Emmanuel 'Mabathoana died of a heart attack on a plane while he was on his way to attend the Conference of Bishops of South Africa in Pretoria.*

*Emmanuel 'Mabathoana, was a descendant of the famous Moshesh, a leader of Basutoland, which is today Lesotho. It was Moshesh who welcomed Father Gerard and opened the country to Christianity. Emmanuel 'Mabathoana was the first Oblate Mosotho and the first native Bishop of Lesotho. Having a deep knowledge of local languages, he worked for the translation and the inculturation of the liturgy, in line with the Second Vatican Council, in which he had taken part. As Archbishop of Maseru he made a remarkable contribution to the development of the local Church.*

*A month before his episcopal ordination he wrote to Fr. Anthime Desnoyers, Assistant General: "As my nomination as (Bishop) was announced during the Octave of the Immaculate Conception, and my ordination is to be on the Feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin, and noting also that my nomination is an honour for the Oblates on the occasion of the centenary of their arrival in South Africa, I have chosen as my motto a phrase from Article 62 of our Rules and Constitutions – 'Favente Immaculata'." At the end of the dinner following the ordination he said: "Let us all be united in one prayer for the conversion and*

*advancement of our beloved continent of Africa so that it may no longer be 'the Dark Continent' but one of shining light. "*

*On September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1964, amidst the heat of independence debates, he sent a letter to every priest, brother and sister urging them not to take sides:*

From the pulpit, in the confessional, in our letters, in our classrooms, in conversations, in our writing to the Press, have we not shown that we are biased in favour of one party, instead of being above all parties? [...] Can we say that, though we condemn their evil attitudes and ways, we really love each one of them, trying to convert them to love their neighbor as God loves them? [...]

What every single human being wants, however bad he is, and what our people here in particular need, is to see God. "Lord, show us the Father and it will be enough for us." We are appreciated, we are wanted, we become an essential part of the social structure when we become Christ-like, servants of the community, *that they may know how much God loves them*. This is the message we have come to broadcast, this is the reason of our calling, this is why we are Missionaries. "Woe to me if I do not evangelize." We may work very hard, sacrifice ourselves heroically, spend a life of renouncement, yet if out of it all the message of the Gospel does not come clear and resounding through our deeds and words, we are failing God and the nation. "Martha, Martha, thou art anxious and troubled about many things; yet only ONE thing is necessary..." That knowing how much they are loved by God, they may become one as the Father and the Son are one. We must leave to the politicians their necessary work, remaining above any political allegiance, teaching everyone to work, not FOR his Party but WITH it for the community, its peace, rest and contentment. To be efficient, however, we must remain in contact with everybody, more concerned with spiritual structures than with the material fabric of our Missions. Each one contacted by us should leave us with a renewed sense of his mission and a new love for the poor and for those who don't know. [...]

Let us act so that every Mosotho, regardless of faith, can say of each of us: "They are fathers, sisters, and brothers, not just in name, but in fact, because they truly love our country."

J. FitzPatrick, *Emmanuel 'Mabathoana, O.M.I., 1904-1966*, Rome 1992.

September 20

#### ORAISON BEFORE THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

*Oraison before the Blessed Sacrament is an initiative of St. Eugene, that he left us as a typical prayer of the Congregation. At St. Sulpice it was done only once a week and it is not found in the other Rules in which the Founder sought inspiration.*

I must say that it happens sometimes when I find myself in the presence of Jesus Christ that I experience a kind of illusion. It seems to me that you are adoring Him and praying at the same time as I and with Him being as present to you as to me, we feel as if we were very close to one another although not able to see each other. There is something very true in this idea. I revert to it constantly and cannot describe the good and the consolation I derive from this. Try to do the same and you will experience it as I do. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Pierre Aubert, February 3, 1847, *Oblate Writings*, 1, p.162)

It is a great consolation to have a common center where we meet every day. What a delicious rendezvous is that altar on which the holy victim is offered, and that tabernacle to which one comes every day to adore Jesus Christ and speak with him of everything that concerns us. I speak to him of you in the outpouring of my heart; I speak to him of all the other children his goodness has given me. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Végreville, March 25, 1857, *Oblate Writings*, 2, p. 142)

Every day, at least once, if not twice, I pass you all in review before the Lord. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Pierre Aubert, March 29, 1859, *Oblate Writings*, 2, p. 211)

You know that you are always present in my thoughts, in the morning at the sacrifice of the Mass and in the evening at the audience that our divine Master gives us when we come to pay him our respects at

oraison which is made in his presence before his holy tabernacle. I recall it to your mind, my dear child, so that you meet with me at this rendezvous. This is the only way of reducing distances, to be at the same moment in our Lord's presence, it is so to speak like being side by side. We do not see each other, but we sense each other's presence, hear each other, lose ourselves in one and the same central point. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. L'Hermite, January 10, 1852, *Oblate Writings*, 11, p. 71)

You could not believe how much I think in the presence of God of our dear Red River missionaries. I have only one way of drawing near to them, and that is in front of the Blessed Sacrament, where I seem to see you and to touch you. And you for your part must often be in His presence. It is thus that we meet each other in that living centre which serves as our means of communication. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Lacombe, March 6, 1857, *Oblate Writings*, 2, p. 140)

*September 21, St. Andrew, Apostle*

THE APOSTLE WHO LOVED THE CROSS OF JESUS CHRIST THE MOST

He is perhaps, of all the others, the Apostle who loved the cross of Jesus Christ the most. He was a disciple, an Apostle, a Martyr of the Cross.

He was a disciple of the cross by the promptness and generosity with which, at the first call of the Savior, he left everything he owned to follow a Master who offered him suffering in return. St. Gregory the Great, speaking of him, cannot ignore the beauty of this sacrifice, not so much in considering the intrinsic value of the abandoned boat and nets, but because the generous heart of the apostle would nevertheless lead him to give up, without regrets, all thrones, all worldly goods....

Apostle of the Cross, he preached with heroic courage in various realms, becoming revered and loved by many people.

Martyr of the Cross, for through it and on it he gloriously completed the race. On the cross he rested from the labors of the apostolate, and from the cross he reached the much desired heaven. (Eugene de Mazenod, *Meditations and conference notes while at the seminary [1808-1812]*)

THE HIDDEN APOSTLES

The Hidden Apostles *is the title of a famous book by Fr. Duchaussois, which in 1924 made known the missionary presence and work of the Oblate Brothers.*

The Brother is a missionary, *at all times*, first of all as a *companion* to the priest. In the solitary missions of Athabaska-Mackenzie with what feeling do we hear the words: “My companion!” Thanks to the presence of the good Brother, who is a religious associate, a table companion, a confidant, a counselor, a friend, the isolation of the missionary, which was the cold of the heart, has come to an end.

The Brother is a missionary too, because all his works, like his life, contribute to the spread of the Gospel.

The mere sight of his example is a continuous irresistible preaching. An old seadog, who came to the Mackenzie, had just passed from Protestantism to the truth. He said to Bishop Breynat: “If I am a Catholic today it is thanks to your Brothers whose religious and devoted life touched me deeply and convinced me.” (p. 48).

*In an article in “Missions OMI” (1961, p. 278) entitled A dynamic missionary Congregation, Fr. Perbal wrote:*

Father Duchaussois found a word for them that has made history in missionary literature: hidden apostles. They are apostles, not only for the support they often give the priest in catechesis. They are apostles and they love the apostolate.... They are robust apostles, in the sense that they save a lot of time in places where there is still everything to do: construction, furniture, getting supplies of food by fishing and hunting, in a word, all the necessities where there is nothing to harvest, because nature is extremely ungrateful, and where the priest alone would have only a few minutes for his spiritual commitments.

September 23

## GIVE ME YOUR LOVE

Jesus, good master, turn a look of compassion on your poor servant. It seems to me that I love you but I am afraid of deceiving myself. [...]

I repeat, I am afraid of deceiving myself and while I believe I love you, you would see... that in fact I do not love you at all.... I am a sinner; I am aware of it....

My Saviour, my Father, my love, bring me to love you; this only do I ask, for I know full well that that is everything. Give me your love. [...]

The past is still present to my mind.... But you, O my Saviour, do you forget it, and keep in mind only your mercies. (Eugene de Mazenod, Retreat in preparation for priesthood, Amiens, December 1-21, 1811, *Oblate Writings*, 14, p. 213-214)

Lord, Jesus, not only are you my Creator and Redeemer, as you are all men's, but you are my special benefactor, my friend. and applied your merits in an altogether special way to me; my generous friend, you forgot all my acts of ingratitude to help me as powerfully as if I had been always faithful to you; you carried this rebel on your shoulders, warmed him against your heart, washed his wounds, etc. Good God, merciful Savior, a thousand lives employed in your service, sacrificed to your glory, would be the least compensation your justice would be entitled to demand of me. (Eugene de Mazenod, Retreat in preparation for ordination to the priesthood, Amiens, December 1-21, 1811, *Oblate Writings*, 14, p. 224)

September 24

## THE OBLATES' SECRET FORMULA

Einstein discovered a hidden secret of nature, when he discovered his famous formula,  $e = mc^2$ , that energy equals mass multiplied by the square of the speed of light. [...] Is there such a secret hidden in the mission of the Oblates? [...]

Our Founder started with his personal mission work. Finding the youth, the workers, and the prisoners of Aix in such an urgent need he started on his own. After having fallen seriously ill, he realized that the task was too big for him. From that time, the Oblates came into existence.

In order to come to a formula, let me start with an image. Please just imagine one of the mission crosses planted by the first Oblates in the villages of Provence. I believe we can find here the ingredients for our formula. These ingredients are: into the midst of people who were among the most abandoned of their time Christ the Savior's cross is brought by an apostolic community. Are not these the three essential elements of Oblate mission? Is this not our essential mission statement?

Playing around a bit, we could say it in mathematical language: bringing hope to the poor (H) is equal to Christ's cross (C) multiplied by a witnessing community (W) (or if you do not find it exaggerated, by the square of such a witnessing apostolic community). Therefore,  $H = CW^2$ .

Let us put it in the language of the last General Chapters: Being at the service of the most abandoned, we bring them the Immense Hope of Christ by means of a community that dares to cross borders.

Commitment to bringing hope to the most abandoned of our time, faithfulness to Christ the Savior and witnessing as an apostolic body, this is the secret formula that explains the Oblates' extraordinary strength during the past 190 years. (W. Steckling, *Oblate Mission Today*, November 21<sup>st</sup> 2006.)

*September 25*

### A HEART AS BIG AS THE WORLD

The invitation made by one of his episcopal colleagues, Bishop Bertaud of Tulle, still merits emphasizing: "Go to Marseilles. There is a bishop there whose Congregation is still small, but the man himself has a heart as big as St. Paul's, as big as the world". These are words that truly convey the enthusiasm felt by those who knew him in life and by those who have gotten to know him through the works he established and the writings he has left behind. A heart as big as the world! The

young priest who renounced the advantages of his aristocratic origins to become the servant of the poor, who shared his generous zeal with a group of others, young priests like himself, so that becoming the friends of the lowly and unpretentious, speaking their language, visiting them, welcoming them, they journeyed up and down the roads of Provence, often on foot, to rekindle the faith, even in the most remote villages.

A heart as big as the world! Even when he still had only ten companions in his society, the Rule Eugene wrote for the group in 1818 already stated emphatically, “Their ambition will be to encompass in their holy desires the immense breadth of the entire world.” That ambitious dream began to take form in 1841 when Bishop de Mazenod sent his first disciples to Canada. It was the beginning of a heroic epic that would see the Oblates of Mary Immaculate spread from pole to tropics: in Canada, Sri Lanka, Southern Africa and today in over sixty countries – wherever the apostolate demands a radical renouncing of self on the part of those whom Pius XI once called, “specialists in the most difficult missions.” Thousands of Oblates have lived and spent themselves in the radiance of the Founder’s “big heart.”

A big heart such as his is a gift from God, privileged with abounding sensitivity; indeed, Eugene de Mazenod felt deep distress in the face of any inequality or injustice.

That big heart was also and especially the result of an extraordinary grace. On Good Friday, 1807, Jesus caused him forcibly to feel the strength of his love. Eugene wept, he lamented his sins and he felt immense joy at discovering the meaning of his life - that he was destined to give himself totally to Jesus Christ, the Savior. That was to be the reality inspiring his entire life. Because of his passionate love for Jesus Christ he became unconditionally committed to the Church: “To love the Church,” he said, “is to love Jesus Christ, and vice versa.” And in loving Christ, he discovered the value of every single soul, ransomed by the blood of the Son of God. That love of Christ was the cement that bound him to his apostolic companions and that continues to give Oblates today the strength to live together as brothers. Christ’s love made itself manifest to Eugene in Mary Immaculate. In her he could admire the marvel of Redemption which Christ accomplished: “We glorify God in the masterpiece of his power and love ... It is the Son whom we honour in the person of his Mother.” A heart as big as the world! A



gift from Jesus Christ, confided to the maternal protection of Mary Immaculate. (A. Hubenig and R. Motte, *Living in the Spirit's Fire*, Rome 2002, p. vii-viii)

September 26

JEAN-FRANÇOIS ALLARD (1806-1889)  
FOUNDER OF THE MISSION IN SOUTH AFRICA

*In 1837, seven years after his ordination, Jean-François Allard entered the Oblate novitiate. He did ministry in various shrines and taught Holy Scripture.*

*In 1843 St. Eugene sent him to Canada as a visitor of the mission. Soon after, he was appointed master of novices. In 1851 he became the first Vicar Apostolic of Natal, in South Africa and was ordained a bishop in Marseilles by St. Eugene. Arriving in Port-Natal on March 15, 1852 he started the mission, going even to Lesotho. In 1870 he took part in the First Vatican Council. In 1874 he resigned and retired in Rome, where he remained until his death, September 26, 1889.*

Today (August 19), the Vicar Apostolic, with Fr. Gerard and Bro. Bernard, set out for Moshesh's country. At last, on October 11<sup>th</sup>, we arrived at the place appointed by Moshesh for our mission. The voyage had lasted 54 days. It was not without a great many hardships and troubles that we reached our station. First, the load of our wagon was too heavy, though we had left a part of it at M'burg. The span of oxen was too weak because the season was too much advanced and the grass was burnt. The consequence was that we were often journeying only half of the day—to give rest to our oxen.

At Drakesburg, a great trial awaited us. On the same day, all of our oxen fell sick from having eaten a poisonous grass. Three of them died, and the others could not pull until they had taken many days of rest. Those that died were replaced with three others we bought at Harrismith. At Elands River, we were obliged to leave behind us another ox. We did the same at Molapo's place for another. At our station, the sixth one fell into the river and, not having any aid, it died there. The 7<sup>th</sup> died from exhaustion. Thus, we had lost half of our span. [...]

November 12. But those losses and trials were compensated for by the blessings God gives to our mission, for though we had not yet held any public services for the Basutos, many of them have already asked to be members of the Catholic Church. The details are related in my diary and notebooks. [...]

Today January 12, the Vicar Apostolic and Fr. Gerard paid a visit to Moshesh, who showed an earnest desire to see our mission begin. He himself took the cross of Fr. Gerard.... He was explaining to the bystanders the manner in which Jesus Christ had been crucified, nailed to the Cross, crowned with thorns. There were present Marocco, his son, and many of his suite. There was also Lekula, a son to Moshesh, and Sophony, a brother to Moshesh, who is chief near John Letell. Those assisting numbered more than 50 people. This manifestation of our holy faith shall not fail to have a good result, because the confidence Moshesh showed for our religion and the Catholic missionaries became known through all of the Basuto land and abroad by those who were present. (*Failure and Vindication. The Unedited Journal of Bishop Allard, O.M.I....* by Howard St. George, Durban 1981, p. 123-126)

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LOUIS EDMOND (1876-1949)

LAY OBLATE

*September 26, 1949, Louis Edmond, Father Lelièvre's right-hand man, died in Quebec. Together they created a great Christian workers' movement involving thousands of men, organized retreats and information sessions, and spread the cult of the Sacred Heart. Born August 24, 1876 into a family of farmers who had lived in Quebec since 1600, he soon turned to the life of a worker in the nascent industries. A man of dialogue and mediation, he was part of the union, even when he was promoted to executive positions in the company. After marrying, he met Father Lelièvre and became involved thereafter in the apostolate among the workers. Fr. Lelièvre used to say he had found in him "a golden Louis" and considered that encounter, "as one of the greatest graces of my life."*

We sanctify ourselves through the duties of our state. If one really has the love of God in his heart, he can greet Him throughout the day while doing any kind of work. In life, this is what matters.

Work is our breviary, that's all.... Here's my breviary: chopping wood, earning bread for my family, having patience. So, why not offer all these things? Even with a pipe in his mouth, a man can speak with God.... Eating an apple is beautiful, but to also offer it while eating it, is to say to God: It is you who have made this apple, eating it will make you happy.... (One of the last talks of Louis Edmond to those who were finishing a retreat at "Jesus the Worker" center in 1949, in E. Madeau, *Un Louis d'or, le Chevalier Louis Edmond (1876-1949)*, Éditions oblates, Montréal 1952, p. 187)

*September 27, St. Vincent de Paul*

#### JOHN PAUL II: SIGN AND SEED OF HOPE

*On September 27, 2004, John Paul II received in audience the members of the General Chapter. He invited them to continue in the missionary spirit of the Founder and of the Congregation.*

On the occasion of the General Chapter of your Institute, I am pleased to welcome you and to assure you of my spiritual closeness in prayer. I greet in particular the Superior General and the members of the new General Council of the Congregation. I hope that their work will go well in this demanding office.

I thank you all for the affection you show to the Successor of Peter which I cordially reciprocate, also because of my devotion for your Founder, *St Eugène de Mazenod*, and my esteem for your Congregation which is both Marian and missionary.

"*Witnesses of hope*" is the motto of this Chapter Assembly which is in continuity with the previous one. Together with the whole Church, you have entered the new millennium in the sign of hope, and it is in this perspective that you desire to continue on your way, trusting in divine Providence. Your presence, enlivened by an authentic religious and missionary zeal, must be *a sign and seed of hope* for all those you

meet, both in secularized milieus and in contexts where the Good News has not yet been proclaimed.

I encourage you to persevere in order to reach the *objectives* you have set for yourselves, and first and foremost, a *renewed fraternal union* in accordance with the wishes of the Holy Founder, who conceived of the Institute as a family and whose members form one heart and one mind. Today you are present with more than 1,000 communities in 67 countries of the world; this unity is a challenge that is demanding but so important for humanity, called to take the path of solidarity in diversity.

I also appreciate your reflection on the *profound changes* that are marking the Congregation, whose center of gravity is moving toward the poorest areas of the world. This important fact is prompting you to update your formation, distribution of personnel and forms of governance and of the communion of goods.

May you be able to make *clear decisions on the basis of the priorities* of your mission. The prime requirements certainly include the permanent care of spiritual life for a constantly renewed fidelity to your original charism. Indeed, it is God with the action of the Holy Spirit who enables Religious Families to *respond adequately to new demands, drawing from the specific gift entrusted to them*.

For all these goals, I invoke from Heaven, through the intercession of Mary Most Holy, an abundance of light and strength. In particular, I ask her to watch over each one of you and over your confreres with maternal solicitude, and I wholeheartedly impart an Apostolic Blessing to you all.

\* \* \*

SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

*In the first letter that Saint Eugene wrote to Tempier there is already a mention of St. Vincent de Paul: “We will live together in one house, that which I have bought, under a Rule we shall adopt with common accord and for which we will draw the elements from the statutes of St. Ignatius, of St. Charles for his Oblates, of St. Philip Neri, of St.*

*Vincent de Paul and of the Blessed Liguori. (October 9, 1815) Two years later, writing to the community from Paris, after the date July 19, 1817, he adds: "Feast of our holy patron, St. Vincent de Paul. (Until 1969, the liturgical celebration was on this day.)*

*In the seminary he had chosen a saint for each day of the week to invoke as a patron: St. Vincent was on Tuesday. He met the Fathers of the Mission for the first time in Amiens. They were in charge of the seminary where he was welcomed to prepare for priestly ordination; he held them in high esteem. During his stay in Rome he was their guest at San Silvestro al Quirinale. The Daughters of St. Vincent, whom he called to the diocese of Marseilles, are frequently referred to in his pastoral letters as an example of dedication to the poor and the sick.*

\* \* \*

*September 27, 1852, St. Eugene was appointed an Imperial Knight of the Order of the Legion of Honor by Napoleon III.*

*September 28*

#### YOU ARE MY FATHER

My good God! If you had not accustomed me to the traits of your infinite mercy, if already you had not inspired in my heart a gentle trust, there would be every reason to draw back with horror. But no, you are my Father, it is you who since the tenderest days of my infancy have led me as it were by the hand. Everything you have done for me in the course of my life is too present to my memory, I feel again still today too vividly the effects not to count [p. 6] on your infinite goodness, not to throw myself with total abandon into your paternal bosom, fully resolved to do this time and always everything you demand of me, were it to cost me my life. Too happy to devote the few days left me to spend on earth to do your holy Will in bad times as in good, with the world's approval or condemnation, amidst consolations or overwhelmed with griefs. [...]

As always, nothing happens to me that you have not willed, and my happiness and my joy will be always to do your Will. [...]

Yes, be everything in me, be everything for me, and may your blessing as well as your grace multiply itself to the point of infinity so I may become ready to fulfil worthily my great ministry. [...]

You my God are my only hope and I know by experience that you are not lacking in case of need. [...] (Eugene de Mazenod, Retreat notes, Rome, at the house of St. Sylvester at Montecavallo, October 7-14, 1832, *Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 201, 206, 208)

\* \* \*

## OBLATES LEAVE FOR CANADA

*Sending the first missionaries to Canada marked a historic moment in the life of the Oblates: The Congregation opened up to foreign missions. On September 28, 1841, St. Eugene wrote in his diary: “Tonight we parted with our dear missionaries who leave tomorrow for Canada. Nothing more edifying than the feelings that animate them, they leave full of holy zeal and boundless devotion, generously sacrificing the most natural affections without even the thought of taking pride in them so that they be appreciated. It must be said because it’s true: they were all perfect; God will take it into account for them.” They were Fathers Jean-Baptiste Honorat (1799-1862), Adrien Telmon (1807-1878), Jean Baudrand (1811-1853), Lucien Lagier (1814-1874) and Brothers Basile Fastray (1805-1874), and Louis Roux (1814-1899). They arrived in Montreal on December 2.*

### Letter of Obedience for the First Missionary Oblates to Canada

God, Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, you who chose us and predestined us for the praise of your glory, you have established us to go and bear fruit, and fruit that remains. [...] Now we are sent not only to those who are close and who are our brothers in the faith, but also to others who are far away and outside of the faith. [...]

For this reason, brothers, be comforted in the Lord and in the power of his strength. Therefore, put on the armor of God, stand firm, loins girded by truth, clothed with the breastplate of righteousness and your feet shod in preparation for evangelization so that the Lord may grant

you to proclaim the Word with great strength and draw out of sin the Church's children and bring them back to holiness, but also open your mouth to make known the mystery of the Gospel to those who ignore it.

Encourage each other and build each other up. Be united in one spirit collaborating in the faith of the Gospel. Especially you, who have charge of the direction of your brothers, excel in merit and virtue rather than the dignity of your office; strive to win the heart of your brothers with charity and gentleness rather than guiding them with authority. Strive, through the observance of our Rules and the practice of piety towards God, to show yourself such that your companions will avidly seek to follow you step by step and imitate you. For your part, you whom our Savior has deigned to call to such a great work, in preference to your brothers, apply yourselves with all your strength to answer this holy vocation of God, being careful to lighten the burden of your superior with humility, the practice of mortification, zeal for perfection, assiduity to prayer, with real respect towards him for God, joyful obedience, and above all a true love.

As for me, I thank God every time I think of you in my prayers, beseeching him with joy for all of you because of your communion in the Gospel. I am confident that he who has begun this good work in you will lead it to its fulfillment until the day of Jesus Christ as he thinks is right for you whom I carry in my heart. In fact, God is my witness that I follow all of you with affection with the tenderness of Christ. I ask that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and in every sentiment, through Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God.

Undertake, then, this journey with a willing and happy heart. May the same God, our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ direct your steps. May the benevolent protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary conceived without sin and the careful watch of the angel of God be with you.

Given in Marseilles under our signature and seal and the signature of the Secretary of the Congregation on September 29 in the year of the Lord 1841. (Published in "Études oblates" 1 [1942], p. 126-128)

THE ANGELS, GOD'S CONCERN FOR US

Angels fulfill in the universe the various missions that Providence entrusts to them. They are all, says St. Paul, steward spirits, sent to exercise their ministry on behalf of those who will receive the inheritance of salvation (Heb. 1:14). [...] St. Michael, who stands up for the children of God's people (Dan. 12,1), who at the head of the other angels will fight against the infernal dragon in the last days of the world (Rev. 12,7), is considered as the one who has the mission to invisibly assist the universal Church so that the gates of hell do not prevail against her. [...]

The angels, who see in God his infinite mercy for men, who are initiated into all the secrets of his love, who receive a continual communication of his spirit which is charity, associate themselves with unceasing zeal and inexpressible affection with his tender concern for us. God, by making them supernaturally share in the same spirit which he pours out on us, and by calling us to the same glory and happiness which they enjoy in heaven, has placed us not only in fraternal company, but also in divine communion with them. [...]

But what duties do the consequences of this doctrine entail for us? We must, dear brethren, honor the good angels because they are friends of God whose holiness must be glorified in these noble creatures who have remained faithful to his glory and love. We must also invoke them to pay homage to the great power of which they are repositories; to recognize in them our own friends filled with a pious zeal for us, and to obtain or maintain their protection. How could we not be animated by a sincere piety and a legitimate confidence towards them when the functions which they invisibly perform on earth and for which they bear the name of angels, that is, messengers, have as their object our spiritual and temporal good? (Instruction and Pastoral Letter of the Bishop of Marseilles [Eugene de Mazenod] for Lent 1853 on good and bad angels.)



Mass is unquestionably the most excellent of all the prayers which can be offered to God whether on earth or in heaven itself. [...] After the Sacrifice of the altar the divine office is one of the most important functions of my ministry. [...]

But however holy, however excellent this prayer may be, it is not sufficient to fulfil the Saviour's precept which calls for our prayer to be continual, *oportet semper orare et nunquam deficere* [Luke 18:1]. [...] A simple and easy way of fulfilling this precept is the practice of the presence of God and ejaculatory prayers, adding to that the important, vital meditation which is like the arsenal that supplies the provisions for the day, *in meditatione exardescet ignis* [Ps. 38:4]. [...] By means of this holy practice, the faithful soul is ceaselessly in the company of his beloved, and if for a few moments it is obliged to be absent, it finds a way to show him, even from afar, that its greatest good would be never to leave him, it makes use for this purpose of ejaculatory prayers which are like so many arrows of love which one lets fly towards God to draw his grace into our hearts. And so during the day whether I am studying or eating or walking or alone or in the company of other persons, I will take great pains to keep myself in the presence of God. [...]

Oraison must be the daily bread of the priest; that is where he will find strength, light, consolation in all the afflictions with which his life will be marked; that is where God communicating himself to him through the intimate union of his inspirations and his grace, will give him in abundance everything he needs to fulfil his ministry worthily, and make it useful and profitable to his soul and those of his brothers, in a word it is there, and only there, that he will be able to learn the science of the Saints, and the ways they followed so as to imitate them and attain the same results as they. (Eugene de Mazenod, Rule drawn up during his retreat in Aix, December 1812, *Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 17, 19, 21, 22.)



# October

**T**he month of October is traditionally dedicated to the missions. Evangelization will therefore be the main theme this month, as well as the apostles, daring, urgent, and zeal, which are related to evangelization.

*October 1, Thérèse of the Child Jesus*

## THE OBLATES AND THE PATRONESS OF THE MISSIONS

*December 14, 1927, St. Theresa of the Child Jesus was proclaimed the special patron saint of missionaries, like St. Francis Xavier, although she never left her monastery. This is due to the Oblates, especially to Fr. Arsène Turquetil, a native of Normandy.*

*As a young seminarian, Turquetil became interested in the evangelization of the Eskimos. In 1900, at the age of 24 he left for the Apostolic Vicariate of Saskatchewan, Canada. He crossed Caribou Lake by canoe and then after a seven-day trip by sled he met some Eskimos and began to learn their language. Evangelization was not easy. Pessimism spread among the missionaries. "The Eskimos, the Eskimos – the superior said. For more than thirty years I have asked God to send them a missionary." (Fr. Henri-Marie, Mons. Turquetil et Sainte Thérèse dans le territoire des esquimaux, « Les Annales ... » 1932, p. 133).*

When the Apostolic Vicariate of Keewatin was created, Bishop Ovide Charlebois, OMI, entrusted Fr. Turquetil with the task of establishing a mission at Chesterfield Inlet, in the heart of Eskimo territory. He arrived there in August 1912 along with two companions. They lived a year of absolute solitude in that desert of snow and ice without any communication with the rest of the world. They tried to learn the language without a grammar or a dictionary, just by listening, observ-

ing, and asking the natives questions. They often received mockery and sarcasm from their listeners. In November 1913 they were all taken by surprise at the news of the martyrdom, not far from them, of two Oblate Missionaries, Fr. Jean-Baptiste Rouvière and Fr. Guillaume Le Roux. Bishop Charlebois decided to close the mission, which seemed futile and without a future.

*Meanwhile in the annual mail from Europe, a short life of Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus arrived from Lisieux, with an envelope containing some soil taken from her grave during the exhumation of her remains. A saint from his native Normandy, who promised to help missionaries? Fr. Turquetil turned to Bro. Girard: "Tomorrow morning, when the Eskimos are gathered in the hall to listen to the gramophone, I will give them a catechesis. As I speak, you will invoke little Thérèse, open the bags and discreetly scatter the content on the head of my listeners." The following day the witch doctor of Chesterfield, the worst enemy of the mission, came to ask for baptism, adding with conviction: "I will come here every day; I'll do whatever you tell me, because I do not want to go to hell. "*

*His conversion led other Eskimos to prepare for baptism. Visiting the Chesterfield mission in 1923, Bishop Ovide Charlebois, who a few years ago wanted to suppress the mission, decided to create other missionary stations. In Pointe-aux-Esquimaux the first church was built in honor of the Blessed Thérèse of the Child Jesus.*

*July 15, 1925, Fr. Arsène Turquetil was appointed the first Apostolic Prefect of Hudson Bay. The new missionary district was dedicated to the heavenly protection of the new saint, who loved the snow and had promised to spend her heaven doing good on earth. Her statue in the chapel was an attraction for the Eskimos. The Christian development of the area surprised the Congregation of Propaganda Fide, which in July 1931 raised the mission to a Vicariate Apostolic, entrusting it immediately to Fr. Turquetil who was then consecrated a bishop.*

*In May 1925, the month "the greatest saint of modern times" was canonized, Bishop Charlebois, the "polar bishop", suggested to some other Apostolic Vicars in Canada the idea of proclaiming the new saint, patroness of the missions. He collected 12 signatures. By March of 1927 he had already collected the signatures of 232 bishops from around the world.*

*Bishop Charlebois was able to write to the Carmel of Lisieux: "It is not right to give me all the credit. I admit I suggested the idea and have lent my name.... But, above all, it was our good little saint who sent a shower of roses from heaven to help our efforts bear fruit. She wanted to be the patroness of missionaries whom she so loved and for whom she sacrificed so much."*

G. Lesage, *Monseigneur Charlebois et sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus*, "Études oblates" 10 (1951), p. 6-34.

*October 2*

#### FEAST OF THE GUARDIAN ANGELS

First point. Adoration. – Adore God's Providence and admire how he acts out of the great love he has for all people, designating holy angels to be not only the protectors of cities, provinces, states and kingdoms, but even giving each person in particular one of his blessed spirits and one of the princes of the court to guide them, help them in their needs and defend them against their enemies.... (The young and the old, the poor and the rich, sinners and righteous, without exception each one has an angel as guide and an angel who watches over them constantly and never leaves them. Let us thank Our Lord for giving us such help and recognizing his infinite goodness, let us cry out with the saints: *O mira! O vera magna dilectio Charitatis!*)

The Saints tell us that they present our prayers to God every day.... They watch over us constantly and are continually with us to take our side against our enemies....

Let us remember that our good angels have such love and such charity for us that they always help us in every need; so that as St. Augustine said, they help us when we are working, they encourage us when we are fighting, they protect us when we rest.... (Eugene de Mazenod, *On the Guardian Angels*, From his seminary notes, 1808-1812)

## PURCHASE OF THE AIX HOUSE

*The Founder had always considered October 2, 1815 as the foundation date of the Missionaries of Provence. There is an example in his letter to Tempier on October 9, 1815, and in the Register of Formulas for Admissions to the novitiate. "I am in Aix the past few days, he writes in his diary on October 2, 1841. I said Mass at the Mission on the memorable day of the Holy Angels with whose help we formed this undertaking." In his Memoirs: "It was in 1815 that we laid the first foundations of our little Society." (Rambert, I, p. 161).*

*October 2, 1815, feast of the Guardian Angels, is the day on which a part of the monastery of the Carmelites of Aix was bought. (The deed will be signed on December 30, 1815). Perhaps Icard, Deblieu and Mye – the first three priests who had accepted his plan – joined St. Eugene on that day.*

*In August 1820 it was decided in a meeting at Notre-Dame du Laus to open a register for formulas of admission to the novitiate (Cf. Missions, 1952, p. 7-34). Each person wrote his own formula. Naturally, Eugene de Mazenod came first. Number 2, which was given to Tempier is chronologically inaccurate since he did not give his answer until the end of October. But number 2 corresponds to the place he would hold in the Society. Deblieu and Mie have numbers 3 and 4. Number 5 is Icard's, also in "October 1815". But in 1820, it is mentioned for the record that he did not write his formula, stating that he left "immediately". Then there is Maunier as number 6, dated March 15, 1816.*

*It is worth reading in full the first formula, Eugene's.*

1 / Mazenod / October 1815

I, Charles-Joseph-Eugene de Mazenod, wanting to devote myself in a special way to the service of the Church and the sanctification of my neighbour by giving missions, and recognizing that to succeed in this holy enterprise, it is necessary to walk in the footsteps of the saints and especially to follow the examples of those who have carried out the same ministry, I wrote a few rules, which were approved by the eccle-

siastical superiors and adopted by the priests that I had associated with my plans. Animated with the same spirit, they committed themselves together with me, to observe them always, persevering till death in the holy Institute which should help us acquire the virtues proper to the state of perfection which we wholeheartedly desired. Thus, we laid the foundations of the Society of the Missionaries of Provence in Aix the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 1815.

Given at Notre-Dame du Laus on the 12<sup>th</sup> of August 1820

Eugene de Mazenod, missionary priest, born in Aix the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 1782.

*October 3*

LOUIS SOULLIER (1826-1897)

THIRD SUPERIOR GENERAL (1893-1897)

*Louis P. Soullier died in Paris on October 3, 1897. He was first attracted to the missions as a seminarian, following conferences by Father Leonard Bayeux, an Oblate missionary in Canada. After his novitiate at Notre Dame de l'Osier, he completed his studies at the Major Seminary of Marseilles and was ordained a priest in Marseilles by Bishop Eugene de Mazenod, May 25, 1850. He devoted himself to the ministry of preaching missions and later to the Association of the Holy Family of Bordeaux. The General Chapter which was held in Paris in 1867 appointed him first assistant of the General Council of the Congregation, a position he held until his appointment as Superior General. As assistant he visited the missions in the Americas, Asia and South Africa. On May 11, 1892 the General Chapter of the Congregation elected him General on the first ballot. His first Circular Letter (February 17, 1895, 51 pp.) is devoted to the Oblates' preaching.*

Born to dedicate ourselves in this century to the reformation of the Christian people, we are bound by the most pressing need of preaching.

It is to us that the words of St. Paul are addressed: *Opus fac evangelistæ*; like the Divine Savior, we must say: *Oportet me evangelizare Regnum Dei, quia ad hoc missus sum.* (Luke 4:43) I must proclaim the

kingdom of God, because that is why I am a missionary. [...] And we also, the Oblates of Mary, are sent by the Holy Church to preach; this is our goal, this is our mission, this is our duty. [...]

What does this necessity of preaching, an absolute for our Society, mean for each member? There are so many texts in our Holy Rules: "The Oblates of Mary give their primary attention to the evangelization of the poor." – "All will strive to accomplish this ministry perfectly." – "The preaching of the divine word and the wise administration of the sacrament of penance being the great means to promote the good of souls, all will strive to become capable of performing such great works)." – "The Provincials and Vicars of missions, or on the orders of the latter, local superiors, will designate those who must go on a mission. Those who are selected will never refuse the order that has been given them in the name of obedience."

This is the duty of everyone: to do everything to worthily carry out this fruitful ministry of preaching and to be ready to obey the orders of the superiors. The motto of the missionary must always be: *Ecce ego, mitte me!* [...]

Do not forget, you younger members of the family, when looking at the various ministries of the Congregation, you have to envy the one that is the first, the one most in keeping with our vocation; you have to adapt your faculties to this divine function and keep your will open to the missions which will be given you in the name of the Rule. *Euntes, docete!*

And you who are already launched in your apostolic career, do not despair or be discouraged. Sometimes after the first enthusiasm has passed, in the face of difficulties that arise, or after unexpected failures, the apostolic soul is tempted to stop; it examines various places where life is sedentary and more comfortable, the work of the apostolate less hard; it is not content to submit its thoughts, and wishes, it insists to be granted easier ministries. These are attempts unworthy of a true soldier of Jesus Christ, who must love the corner of the battlefield where the battle is the fiercest and must have as motto the *impendar et superimpendar pro animabus* of the Apostle. We are happy to say that these cases are fortunately rare.

Also rare were those who backed down because of dangers to their health. [...] We like to recall that if some did, at certain times, show ti-



midity or indifference, almost all were ardent and persistent Apostles *usque ad finem*. How many have fallen, sword in hand! And it is wonderful to see, even today, veterans who have grown grey in the struggles of the apostolate repeat until extreme old age the words of St. Martin: *No recuso laborem!* [...] Hats off to these brave men! May they be models for those who will take their places in the arena of evangelical apostolate! (*Circular Letter* No. 59, February 17, 1895, *Circulaires administratives*, II, p. 9-14)

M. Soullier, *Vie du T.R.P. Louis Soullier, 3<sup>me</sup> Supérieur général des Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Paris 1907, 532 p.

October 4

#### A MANIFESTO FOR THE MISSION

*In October 1815, St. Eugene had prepared a “Program for the Missions”, almost a manifesto, to be distributed among the faithful of Aix, in which he indicated the aims of the Society of the Missionaries of Provence that he was then organizing and asked for financial aid. In it we find already ideas that will be taken up in the Preface to the Rules.*

The deplorable state of religion in our country, whose inhabitants seem to have abandoned the faith of their fathers, has so touched the hearts of several clerics, who having been able to fathom the depth of the wound, are determined to devote themselves entirely to the work of the Missions, to try to bring people back to religious principles.

The evil seems to be already at its worst, and yet it is still increasing daily. Moral depravity and all the disorders that are a result of irreligion, are making alarming progress, especially since the return home of many individuals who are accustomed to the most unbridled license and defiance of all duties. All attempts to inspire better attitudes have been so far without success. The most respectable pastors are barely listened to, and almost everywhere the efforts of their zeal are met with contempt or indifference. Many parishes are even deprived of this help because the scarcity of priests does not allow ecclesiastical superiors to provide for all needs.

In this extreme situation we thought it was necessary to resort to the only means that experience has proven to be almost always effective, the ministry of the Missionaries. [...]

The Missionaries are not unaware of the difficulties of such a great undertaking. But as invincible as the obstacles that oppose the missions seem, the clerics who devote themselves to them, have not given up. They hope to be numerous enough, so that some may devote themselves to prayer, study, and the meditation of sacred truths, while the others will spread out across the countryside to announce the word of God and to revive the practice of the evangelical precepts.

But an undertaking that will bear such great fruit, one that can be said to be necessary, cannot be formed if the faithful do not support it by their charity. There is no doubt that those who have a sincere love for religion in their heart, will make it a pleasant duty to share some temporal goods to reap eternal ones. [Below, find the appeal for the faithful's pledges and the application form, already mentioned above]. (“Missions OMI” 83 [1956], p. 244-246)

*October 5*

#### THE CALLS OF THE MISSION

*In his homily at the end of the Oblates and Evangelization Congress (Rome, August 29 - September 14, 1983), Fr. Fernand Jetté saw three concrete calls for the Congregation. A first call: to love people as God loves them.*

To love people as they are, to love them with their glories and their miseries, to love them in all countries and places, in all conditions of life, to love them even more if they are poor, more alone and more abandoned.

To love people as God loves them, is also to want their good, their earthly good, their health, their development, the improvement of their human environment. But more than that, and through all of that, to love as God loves is to want all people to enter fully into God's family with Christ and with us, that they become fully aware of their dignity as sons and daughters of God, and that they have eternal life.

To love as God loves, is likewise to go to the utmost limit, to the sacrifice of that which is most dear - his own Son - for the salvation of all. Our Founder would say: "be ready to sacrifice goods, talents, ease, even your life." (Preface to the Constitutions).

A second call is this; to become incarnate with people, to draw close to them, to enter their lives and culture just as Christ did.

This means getting out of ourselves, out of our habits and ways of doing things; this means learning people's language so that it will be possible for Christ, who is in us, to establish contact with them. Because - and we must never forget this - it is Christ who evangelizes and saves people. Through us, it is Christ who is to become incarnate among people.

For the Oblate, becoming incarnate in today's world is the normal way of evangelization. We must travel along this road with confidence and courage, but we must do so while having Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, always present in our spirit. What saves the poor, what saves people of each culture and of every culture, is not the presence of one more poor man in their midst or of an "inculturated" foreigner joining their ranks; rather, it is the presence of Christ in their midst, of Christ who, because he loves them, has freely chosen to become poor and incarnate among them. [...]

Out of this a third call comes to us: to live constantly in a faith perspective, never to lose sight of the fact that our mission, in a sense, is greater than we are: it is the work of God.

It is God who evangelizes by sending His Son into the world; it is the Son of God who is evangelizing by founding his Church and sending out his Apostles: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation. The man who believes in it and accepts baptism will be saved.... It is this same mission that is our *raison d'être* as Oblates in the world. [...]

Our mission is greater than we are; its effectiveness escapes us; its fruits can come only from God's Spirit unceasingly at work in the world. We are often tempted with impatience, by the tendency to reduce this work to human dimensions and thereby reap an immediate harvest.

Adaptation and inculturation, personal experience of Jesus Christ and fidelity to the Gospel we have received, profound humility in re-

gard to the task entrusted to us – all these things are necessary if, as our vocation requires, we are to be authentic evangelizers. (« Vie Oblate Life » 42/2E [1983], p. 191-193)

October 6

FOUNDED FOR THE MISSION, WE HAVE GROWN THANKS TO IT

*“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Mt. 28:19-20)*

The Oblate Mission is a reality we have much at heart. It is an essential and predominant aspect of our identity. [...]

The Founder was impelled to begin the community of Aix to evangelize the inhabitants of his area, especially the ordinary people. He requested Rome’s approval to assure the Congregation’s existence and its missionary activity.

Our growth, too, is due to the mission. With our going to Canada in 1841 and especially with our missionary commitments among the Indians, there quickly followed an explosion of vocations and enthusiasm, accompanied by a meaningful image that adhered to the Oblate work. Thus began a missionary epic in different parts of the world: from Sri Lanka to South Africa, from Oregon to Texas. The Founder’s vision took on new depth: evangelization was conceived not only as proclaiming Jesus Christ in order to reawaken the faith, correct mores and renew religious practice, but also as introducing people to Christ and to the Church in the way the Apostles did at the beginning of the Christian era. Oblates are *virī apostolici* not only inasmuch as they follow Christ and generously give themselves, but also inasmuch as they are doing the same things that the Apostles did, namely, going out into the whole world in order to evangelize people. The desire for universality that the Founder had nourished as a young man and had expressed in the first Rules was now being realized.

The Oblate is the missionary of the poor, missionary to people. He is open to every human person in need, welcomes the latter’s aspirations, accompanies him on his journey, reveals to him who Christ is. He

is open to the whole world, listening to its appeals and anxieties, sustaining the Congregation's commitments, making himself everywhere available. The Congregation's future will depend on the quality of our life, on our courage and our availability to respond to the challenges and needs of the Church wherever the Spirit will invite us to witness to the Gospel. (M. Zago, *In the Footsteps of the Apostles. Letters and Texts on Formation*, OMI General House, Rome 1997, p. 24-26)

October 7

## OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY

*The Rule of 1818 prescribed the daily recitation of the Rosary (Cf. P. II, Ch. I, § 5). In the book of meditations for the use of the Oblates, Fr. Boisramé refers to what the Directory of Novices and Scholastics prescribed:*

Do you take care to ponder these mysteries with an affectionate outpouring of the heart rather than with an excessive application of the mind, as noted in the Directory? Do you imagine, as in a painting, the mystery of each decade, and keep the eyes of the mind gently and lovingly fixed on the picture throughout the recitation of the decade? That is the recommendation of the Directory, in which we read: "1. You *see* and *contemplate* the circumstances of the mystery, the characters who take part, especially Jesus and Mary. 2. You *listen* to every word that is spoken. 3. You *feel* the sweet fragrance of the virtues and good examples. 4. You *taste* the delightful tenderness of their communication, the bitterness of their pain, the joy of their triumph. 8. You *touch* with respect the borders of their garments; you kiss the footprint of their steps, the places where they passed by." (*Méditations...*, t. 3, p. 276-277)

*Father Marcello Zago, in his letter "Journeying with Mary Immaculate" (1988) takes up the invitation of the new Constitutions and Rules:*

The Constitutions offer us a simple and traditional way of daily living such a relationship with Mary: "With Mary Immaculate, the faithful handmaid of the Lord, and under the guidance of the Spirit, we enter

into closer union with Jesus Christ. We will contemplate with her the mysteries of the Incarnate Word, especially in praying the rosary” (C. 36). [...] By means of repeating the prayers of the Our Father and the Hail Mary, we are invited to meditate the mysteries of Christ’s life with Mary’s heart and outlook. Such an exercise helps us to deepen our consecration to God through Mary’s patronage. It can also be a prayer of contemplation and communion for us. By praying with Mary and by sharing her attitudes in regard to the mysteries of Christ, we easily open our hearts to the needs of the human race, the Church and the Congregation. [...] The rosary is the prayer of the poor and it helps us to be simple and welcoming, just as Mary is. (M. Zago, *In the Footsteps of the Apostles. Letters and Texts on Formation*, p. 20-22)

October 8

#### INSTRUCTION ON FOREIGN MISSIONS

*In 1853 an Instruction on Foreign Missions was published. It was to be attached to the new edition of the Constitutions and Rules. Allegedly it was written by St. Eugene. Let’s read the beginning.*

The words once spoken to the Prophet Isaias concerning “the glory of God to be declared to the Gentiles” by the ministry of those “who would be sent to the islands afar off,” the commandment which Christ “in the days of His Flesh” afterwards gave to the Apostles, “go and preach the Gospel to every creature,” never ceased to be fulfilled in the Church, especially by so many Religious Orders, which, animated with the desire both of their own perfection and of the salvation of others, have as their end to work strenuously for the salvation of souls as well among those born in the Faith as among those who are yet “sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death.” Hence for many centuries in the past, not a few members of the families of Saint Benedict, Saint Francis and Saint Dominic travelled through many distant countries, earnestly preaching the kingdom of God.

Desirous of following in their footsteps, the members of the Society of Jesus, with Francis Xavier at their head, brought the nations of the Eastern and of the Western Indies to the light of the Gospel. Filled

with the same spirit, the Priests of the Mission and members of other Congregations applied themselves with indomitable courage to this holy labour.

Our little Congregation itself, since its enumeration among the Religious Orders, has increased in number and strength, has rejoiced in being inflamed with the same apostolic ardour, and, responding to the call of many Bishops, has for many years carried on zealously the work of foreign Missions.

God showed how pleasing this enterprise was to Him by the great blessings showered on our labours, and in order that no incentive be wanting to us, the Church herself, who by the mouth of Leo XII, of happy memory, seemed to have given us the whole universe as our field of labour, solemnly approved it again when the Popes Gregory XVI and Pius IX, by Apostolic Letters, deigned to confirm our Institute. Foreign Missions are consequently to be counted among the holy occupations of our Society. (*Instruction of Our Venerated Founder on Foreign Missions*, Rome, 1936, p. 3-4)

C. Champagne, *Instruction de Monseigneur de Mazenod relative aux missions étrangères*, « Kerygma » 9 (1975), p. 164-177; W. Henkel, *L'esprit et le cœur du Bx E. de Mazenod à la lumière de l'instruction des missions étrangères*, "Vie Oblate Life" 36 (1977), p. 171-185.

October 9

#### THE FIRST LETTER TO TEMPIER

*On October 9, 1814, St. Eugene wrote to the young priest Henri Tempier inviting him to join the group of missionaries that was being formed in Aix.*

My dear friend, read this letter at the foot of your crucifix with a mind to heed only God and what is demanded in the interests of his glory and of the salvation of souls from a priest like yourself. Stifle the voice of cupidity, love of comfort and convenience; dwell deeply on the plight of our country people, their religious situation, the apostasy that daily spreads wider with dreadfully ravaging effects. Look at the

feebleness of the means employed to date to oppose this flood of evil; ask your heart what it fain would do to counter these disasters and then reply to my letter.

Well, dear man, what I say to you, without going fully into details, is that you are necessary for the work which the Lord inspires us to undertake. Since the head of the Church is persuaded that, given the wretched state in which France finds herself, only missions can bring people back to the Faith which they have practically abandoned, good men of the Church from different dioceses are banding together in response to the views of our supreme Pastor. We likewise feel that it is utterly necessary to employ the same remedy in our regions and, full of confidence in the goodness of Providence, have laid down the foundations of an establishment which will steadily furnish our countryside with fervent missionaries. These will ceaselessly engage in destroying the empire of the demon, at the same time as providing the example of a life worthy of the Church in the community which they will form. Indeed, we will live together in one house, that which I have bought, under a Rule we shall adopt with common accord and for which we will draw the elements from the statutes of St. Ignatius, of St. Charles for his Oblates, of St. Philip Neri, of St. Vincent de Paul and of the Blessed Liguori.

Happiness awaits us in this holy Society which will have but one heart and soul. One part of the year will be devoted to the conversion of souls, the other to seclusion, study and our individual sanctification. I say no more for the moment; it suffices to give some intimation of the spiritual delights we will taste together. If, as I hope, you wish to be one of us, you will not find yourself in unknown terrain; you will have *four companions*. If presently we are not more numerous, it means we wish to choose men who have the will and the courage to walk in the footsteps of the apostles. It is important to lay solid foundations. The greatest regularity must be planned and introduced in the house as soon as we enter it. And it is precisely for that reason that you are necessary to me because I know you to be capable of embracing an exemplary rule of life and of persevering in it. For the rest, we will not be bound by vows. But I hope that it will be the same with us as with the disciples of St. Philip Neri who, free as we shall remain, would die before thinking of leaving a congregation for which they have the same affection as for their mother.



When I shall have your reply, I will give you all the details you could wish for. But, dear friend, I conjure you, do not let yourself say no to the greatest good that may possibly be done in the Church. Vicars will easily be found to replace you but it is not so easy to come across men who are dedicated and wish to devote themselves to the glory of God and the salvation of souls with no more reward on earth than much sorrow and all else that the Saviour announced to his true disciples. Your refusal would be incalculably detrimental to our new-born enterprise. I speak with sincerity and reflection. Your modesty will suffer but no matter. I will not hesitate to add that, if I believed it necessary to make the journey to Arles to convince you, I would wing my way there. All depends on how we begin. We need perfect unanimity of sentiments, the same goodwill, the same disinterestedness, the same devotedness. That sums it up.

Keep this a secret. Be sure that confiding in anyone at Arles would only result in being dissuaded from a project of which you will never be able to appreciate the worth until you have begun to execute it. We will have a certain tactic to follow in respect of the vicars who approve so strongly our initiative that they have written to Paris to make it known through the press. We will have to plan the steps necessary to obtain your replacement. The least imprudence would thwart our plans. They would be tempted to think that four of us would be enough when it is certain that we need at least six. They have promised me this number of persons. Who will (not fail to) say that the difficulty is to find them? It is true that we are being difficult because we wish everything to go well and we will succeed if you are one of us. So quickly reply to me affirmatively and I shall be content. Adieu, well beloved brother. (*Ob-late Writings*, 6, p. 6-8)

*October 10*

#### THE DEMANDS OF THE MISSION

Foreign Missions will be considered by us as a means of procuring God's glory, and as most appropriate in promoting the spread of Religion, and in increasing the honour of our Congregation. This ministry is, moreover, the occasion of greater and more abundant

merits. These Missions are in fact a source of spiritual good for many souls converted to, or maintained in the true Faith. At the same time, they are a clear proof of the Church's divinity and of the zeal of the Congregation for God's glory and of its tireless charity towards the most abandoned souls.

An ardent desire of spreading the faith, a magnanimous heart and a strong will, readiness and cheerfulness in action, firmness and constancy in trial, sociable, healthy and a bodily constitution fit to bear the strain of toil and capable of facing the difficulties which life can bring, here, in short, is what must be asked of candidates for this excellent work [...]

To whatever missions in foreign countries they may have been sent, our Fathers will always bear in mind that they must be inflamed with a desire of perfection so much the more ardent the longer they are separated against their will from the company of their brethren, and that they must be faithful to the duties of their religious state and to the exercises of Christian piety with a will so much the more determined the more frequently they are deprived of the benefits of community life. Consequently, they will foster in their hearts the love of prayer and will not neglect the daily exercises of meditation and examination of conscience; they will entertain pious thoughts and good desires by the assiduous reading the Holy Bible and of some ascetic work. They will observe most faithfully the prescriptions of the rule concerning the devotion towards the Holy Eucharist, the daily celebration of Mass and the frequentation of the sacrament of Penance. Every month they will spend a day in spiritual recollection and every year, all together, they will perform the exercises of the holy retreat as it is customary in the Congregation. (*Instruction of Our Venerated Founder on Foreign Missions*, Rome, 1936, p. 4, 5, 8)

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CHARLES ANTOINE DE MAZENOD (1745-1820)  
THE FOUNDER'S FATHER

*October 10, 1820, Charles Antoine de Mazenod died in Marseilles. On the same date his son wrote to Father Tempier at Notre-Dame du Laus: “You know my dear friend, the grief which has come to me lately*

and the circumstances pertaining to it. I will not speak to you thereof so as not to be tempted to expatiate on such a subject which would be inexhaustible. My sole consolation is to think that it is not possible to have on earth greater assurance of the salvation of a soul. I nurture this thought while praying from the depths of my heart for this excellent father who left us a heroic example of faith patience, humility, resignation, confidence in God, devotion to the Blessed Virgin, fortitude, etc. What a fine end to his life! But what martyrdom for the poor son whom God called to be with him to face death!” (*Oblate Writings*, 6, p. 69-70)

*On October 10, 1838, Bishop de Mazenod wrote a similar page on the edifying death of his father. He ended the passage with these words: “One day I shall be able to enter into greater detail. Let me say further, for the edification of those who wish to pass it on, that he confided to me that there had never been a single day when he did not invoke the Blessed Virgin and that he had never read a book contrary to religion, and nevertheless his youth had been quite a stormy one. Oh holy faith! What a treasure you are for the soul that cherishes you!”* (*Oblate Writings*, 19, p. 216)

## *October 11*

### ST. EUGENE RETURNS TO FRANCE FROM EXILE

*October 11, 1802, after eleven years of exile in Italy, Saint Eugene left Palermo to return to France. Even before he arrived in Marseilles his father and his uncle Fortuné wrote to him:*

All of us never stop speaking of our good Zézé; we speak only of your good qualities. When you were here, I sometimes found some small defects. Now it seems that I was wrong and you were perfect. Ah, if you're not, you will become so because you have everything you need for this. But do moderate your sharpness, enhance your frankness with sweetness, take time to think, control your first reaction, be kind and attentive to your grandmother, mother, sister and aunt, be thoughtful and courteous to strangers, especially towards those to whom I am indebted. Think of their bad mood as excusable and that, if I cannot pay

them, I have to at least pacify them with kind words. For the rest, do not worry about my ugly business; take care of your own. (Charles-Antoine to St. Eugene de Mazenod, October 15, 1802)

I too will not cease from begging God each day for your constant perseverance in the honourable and religious sentiments which have always underlain all your actions and earned you everyone's approval in foreign lands. Knowing as I do the sensitivity of your moral code and your outspokenness, I cannot overstress my advice that you tone down your zeal when confronted with a mob of empty-headed and corrupt young people whose principles a dozen years of revolution have quite debased. I can assure you that at your age exemplary behavior and often silence are the best ways to rebuke vice.... Do not waver in your honest ways and exemplary Christian life, and Divine Providence will never desert you. You have seen for yourself how much Providence did for us in our distress and with what tender solicitude God comes to the help of those who place all their confidence in him....” (Fortuné de Mazenod to St. Eugene, October 15, 1802, *Oblate Writings*, 14, p. XV)

## October 12

### ST. EUGENE ENTERS THE ST. SULPICE SEMINARY IN PARIS

*October 12, 1808, St. Eugene entered the seminary of Saint Sulpice in Paris. A few years later he explains to his father, still in Palermo, the reasons that led him to this decision.*

Never was there a vocation more free of self-interest than mine.... I devoted myself to the Church because she was suffering persecution, was abandoned, because, after 25 years, she could no longer confide the divine ministry, which before had been sought after by the highest in the land, to any but poor workers, wretched peasants, because, seeing us heading pell-mell towards a schism that I believed was inevitable, I feared it would find but few generous souls with the capacity to sacrifice their comfort and even their lives to preserve the integrity of the faith, and because it seemed to me that God would give me strength enough to dare to brave all these dangers.

I was so persuaded that it would not be long before we experienced a cruel persecution, that on leaving for the Paris seminary I packed a complete set of lay clothes with the idea that I would have to use them as a priest.

Here you have the motives that moved me, there are no others, no others can even be conceivable given the character God has been pleased to favour me with.... (St. Eugene to his father, December 7, 1814, *Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 76)

*October 13*

#### MISSIONARY DARING

*Reflecting on the missionary expansion of the early years (1841-1853), Fernand Jetté finds the motivation for St. Eugene's daring.*

In a period of ten years, a whole series of foundations in every direction and, humanly speaking, in the case of nearly all of them, each one more imprudent than the other. Natural wisdom would have suggested establishing oneself and taking solid root in France before sending missionaries abroad. Apostolic daring won out over natural wisdom. "We must do everything, we must dare everything to extend the Savior's empire, Father de Mazenod had written. We could even say that he preferred the most difficult areas, places to which others would not go, and this in spite of the numerical and qualitative poverty of his men. For it must be admitted that all were far from being giants and saints. But it was a matter of proclaiming Jesus Christ to those who did not know him and who had no one to proclaim him to them; it was a matter of making the Church present in areas where she did not yet exist. NO considerations of human wisdom could halt the faith of Bishop de Mazenod, who was aware of the weak means at his disposal but was also filled with confidence in God's grace. "I would like to be able to provide (missionaries) for all the missions of the world!" he wrote in his Diary on November 10, 1849.

After the fact we can see that it was this extreme daring which gained his Congregation a rapid and very extensive development. Very quickly his missionaries also became true founders of Churches. (F. Jet-

té, *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate. Addresses and Written Texts, 1975-1985*, General House, Rome 1985, p. 41-42)

October 14

#### ST. EUGENE'S EPISCOPAL ORDINATION

*October 14, 1832, St. Eugene is consecrated a bishop in Rome, in the church of San Silvestro al Quirinale, by Cardinal Odescalchi, Prefect of S.C. for Bishops and Regulars.*

If you knew the depth of my feelings of friendship towards you, you would conceive some idea of the chagrin I am experiencing at not seeing you, and above all in my present circumstances. It is not yet known in Rome, but the Pope has just named me Bishop of Icosia and apostolic visitor of Tripoli and Tunis. I shall be consecrated, unless some unforeseen obstacle arises, on Sunday the 14th of this month. [...] I am all alone here, and I assure you that poor human nature will be well and truly crucified; but I am not counting in vain on God in his goodness making up for all the heart will suffer by way of privations with the most abundant spiritual graces.

I have always viewed the episcopate with a different eye to most; and, now that I am elected and am so close to being invested with the plenitude of the priesthood of Jesus Christ, this profound feeling of veneration, this lofty idea that faith has established in my soul for this great dignity, would crush me and deprive me of all courage, all strength to carry on, if the Lord did not fill me with the sweetest hope and bring me to envisage this new coming of the Holy Spirit in myself as a time of renewal and mercy. It seems to me that this divine Spirit whom I have so grieved since it was communicated to me by the imposition of hands, at the time of my priesthood, is going to put everything right in my soul, establish his dwelling with such power that it will be impossible henceforth to escape from his inspirations. What will I say to you dear friend? I am speaking with you as if I were thinking to myself. For these ideas are familiar to me and I do not feel embarrassed with you. Goodbye, goodbye, I leave you to go and pray a little, for I must learn to acquit myself better of this great duty, the chief one of my future ministry. (Eu-

gene de Mazenod to Mr. Martin de Loirliu, chaplain at St. Louis-des-Français, Rome, October 4, 1832, *Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 198)

\* \* \*

BLESSED JUSTO GONZÁLEZ LORENTE (1915-1936)  
MARTYR OF SPAIN

*He was born on October 14, 1915, in Villaverde de Arcayos, province and diocese of León. His family, known in the village as very Christian, facilitated and cultivated in him the religious vocation, following in the footsteps of several sons and daughters of the village. He seemed somewhat shy and sentimental, but he was cheerful, helpful and a friend to all. Those who knew him describe him as a religious who stood out for his great desire to be a missionary, for which he prepared himself with enthusiasm. At the end of his first year of theology, he was preparing to make his oblation for life. God asked him to make of his life a bloody oblation: martyrdom.*

*The same night of his death, a few hours before, a companion proposed him to escape and he did not do it, convincing him to desist. This is how the other protagonist, the surviving scholastic Antonio Jambrina, tells it: "It was dinner time, as on the previous night, and at noon, Justo González and I, accompanied by a watchman, went to the well to draw fresh water for everyone. The watchman, confident, lets us go alone and waits for us near the entrance door to the convent; from there he thinks he can see us in full view, but he is wrong; I realize this because we are also watching him; I think the time has come to escape. [...] While he is filling the large jars, I try to convince Justo of our escape, and I straddle the wall that faces the outside; from there to the ground, along the street, it is not even two meters high. Justo does not dare to run away. When I am determined to do it alone, he says to me in a cracked voice: "If you leave, they will shoot us all". I thought for a moment and replied: "Well, they won't shoot anyone because of me. Whatever God wants". Quickly, in a sudden reaction, I returned from my purpose, got off, stopped the engine and with the water jugs and the horseshoe full,*

we started back to the dining room. My last attempt at escape was over. Whatever became of my brothers, would become of me”.

*October 15, St. Theresa of Avila*

#### APOSTOLIC HOLINESS

*The birth of the Congregation in a Carmelite convent is a constant call to holiness, the aim of life for Teresa of Avila and Eugene de Mazenod. The typical path to holiness for the Oblate is that of the mission.*

For the Oblate, holiness is constructed in the constant gift of self that the mission demands, in the love and concrete service to the people to whom he is sent. The gift of self to God, oblation, is mediated by the gift of self to the men and women of our times. Such was the oblation of the Son of Man who came to give his life to redeem his brothers. It is in giving his life for his friends that he gave the greatest proof of his love. [...]

All those who, with him and like him, want to work for the building up of the Kingdom of God and to gather mankind into the family of the children of God are called to travel this same path. Also for us Oblates, “the cross of Jesus Christ is central to our mission” (C 4). If we wish to be genuine co-operators with Christ, we too, are called to the mystery of his crucified love. [...] Our death, our “oblation”, just like that of Jesus takes place mainly in the apostolate. The penance we do, the fasting we perform, the vigils we keep are not as characteristic of us as they would be of someone in the monastic life. It is especially in evangelization that we discover the path of asceticism in giving ourselves to others, following the example of Christ whose death flowed from the fact that he gave his life for those he loved. Evangelization means to place all our gifts, our time and talents at the service of the people God has put into our care - without ever holding back. Our oblation becomes real through this concrete practice of the gift of love and of self in the work of evangelization.

Even the Oblate’s “night of the senses” and the “night of the spirit” will bear the imprint of the apostolate. His trials could have their origin



in the sense of failure, the awareness of his ineffectiveness, the lack of self-assurance and weariness. Faced with the new challenges of evangelization, he can feel inadequate, helpless, ill-equipped. He can see his projects, built with such enthusiasm, crumble; he can see the people who used to follow him desert him, fail in their duty. An unexpected obedience could remove him from a field where he was working effectively and with love. He could feel discounted, be tempted to rebel because the good of the souls which had been confided to him seems to come in conflict with this new manifestation of the will of God.... He reaches a certain age when he perceives that his strength is diminishing and he can no longer work as hard as he had done up until then.... Apostolic work purifies itself of all human influence. He becomes aware that “we are only the earthenware jars that hold this treasure, to make it clear that such an overwhelming power comes from God and not from us” (2 Corinthians 4:7). “For it is when I am weak that I am strong”, says St. Paul (2 Corinthians 12:10). And yet again: “It is for this I struggle wearily on, helped only by his power driving me irresistibly” (Colossians 1:29). “There is nothing I cannot master with the help of the One who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13).

All that can become the concrete way of cooperating in Christ’s mission to the point of realizing in one’s flesh “all that still has to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church” (Colossians 1:24). Conformity with Christ, and consequently sanctification, find their fulfillment in our mission: to reach out to the people to whom we are sent and to love them to the point of giving our lives for them and by so doing to contribute to the building up of the body of Christ, the Church. (F. Ciardi, *Holiness*, DOV, p. 394-395)

*October 16*

#### APOSTOLIC URGENCIES

If there is one lesson to draw from this living history, written by the Spirit of God, it is the clear duty for Oblates, by virtue of their charism, not to settle in, not to stop, not to copy complacently what they have done in other times and in other situations, not to lock themselves either in the *status quo*. It is a law of life and of evolution of the world

that what is urgent in one time is no longer so in another time. Because the particular charism of the Oblates directs them to what is happening now, they must, as noted in Rule 2: “Perpetually renew their view of the world and the society of their time.” They have basically to rewrite constantly the *Preface* with the same focus on actuality. What are the major events of today? What are the urgent areas? How can we be present, even if we have to give up the enjoyment of our accomplishments so as to be always available for the ordinary action of the Church? (*Dans une volonté de renouveau. Introduction à une lecture des Constitutions et Règles*, Rome 1968, p. 13)

We will seriously re-evaluate our present commitments in the light of the Gospel and of our missionary charism. Have our institutional works maintained their original missionary fervor? Having made this examination at the Provincial level, we will have the courage to make those concrete decisions demanded of us if we are to remain faithful to the Spirit who speaks to us through the most urgent needs of the poor. With the mobility proper to a group of missionaries, we will be evermore free to commit ourselves to the service of the Church and the world. This was our original charism and is still fundamental to our life as a Congregation. It must be maintained at all costs. (1972 General Chapter, *Missionary Outlook*, p. 23-24)

Finally, to finish identifying the Oblate charism today, we recall how our Founder wanted us to carefully discern the most urgent needs of the Church and the world, without fear of being rushed to heed with holy boldness the actual call that God makes to us for the poor. (Congress on the Charism of the Founder Today, Rome April 26 to May 14, 1976, *Final Declaration of the Congress*, « Vie Oblate Life » 36 [1977], p. 302)

October 17

EMBRACE THE VAST EXPANSE OF THE EARTH

*Right from the beginning, St. Eugene's apostolic horizon was the whole world, as he wrote in the Rule of 1818, and as he repeated in Rome at the time of the approbation of the Congregation.*

Even though because of their present small number and the more urgent needs of the people around them, they have to limit the scope of their zeal, for the time being, to the poor of our countryside and others; their ambition should, in its holy aspirations, embrace the vast expanse of the whole earth. (Eugene de Mazenod, Preface, Rule of 1818)

One of the main reasons prompting us to seek the approbation of the Holy See was precisely our ardent desire to spread abroad in all parts of the Catholic world, the benefits of the ministries to which the members of our Society are dedicated. And this, on the invitation of the common Father of all the faithful as well as at the request of the bishops of various dioceses.... Several members of the Congregation would willingly go and preach the gospel to non-believers; when they will be more numerous it is possible that the superiors will send them to America, either to be of assistance to poor Catholics who are bereft of every spiritual benefit, or to win new members to the faith. (Eugene de Mazenod to Cardinal Pedicini, January 2, 1826, *Oblate Writings*, 13, p. 72)

They first thought we were only asking for France and the Cardinal *ponent* said to me: "Take that now, the rest will come after". I was not of his opinion and the matter was resolved as we desired. I ought to say that it sufficed for me to make the observation that our Congregation would not limit her charity to a small corner of the earth and that all abandoned souls, wherever they were, would always be the object of her zeal and would have the right to her services, for them to accede to my views. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Tempier, March 20, 1826, *Oblate Writings*, 7, p. 64)

BIBLE STUDY, THE FOOD OF LIFE

*The feast of St. Luke, the evangelist, is an opportunity to recall the centrality of the Word in the life and mission of the Oblate. One powerful voice is that of Father Léo Deschâtelets, who referred repeatedly to the need of studying the Holy Scriptures.*

In his report to the 1953 Chapter, he called for “a return to the spiritual sources which should slake our thirst and encourage us: The Holy Bible, the Holy Rule, the spiritual teaching of all the saints, the teaching of Holy Mother the Church.” In presenting the Chapter deliberations, he said: “Let the professors at the scholasticate become specialists in the subjects they are teaching, as much as possible, taking a degree in that field... especially in Sacred Scripture [...] to spend a period of time in the Holy Land.” A majority of the provinces responded to this call as Father Daniel Albers pointed out in his report to the Chapter of 1959: “As for academic preparation, it is good and getting better due to the effort being made everywhere these last few years”.

At the Chapter of 1959, Father Deschâtelets emphasized: “We still notice in our midst an emerging movement, a more in-depth study of the Bible considered as sustenance for the spiritual life. [...] We notice a hunger for Holy Scripture, a thirst for this living water that in the past did not appear in such a well-defined way. In this way, Article 255, written into the Rule in 1818, rediscovers the integral dynamism it contains for the present generation of Oblates, more desirous than others were perhaps of a return to the more authentic, more living sources of spirituality.”

He broaches this topic once again in his report to the 1966 Chapter. He wants to stress a point he has alluded to several times before: “[...] one point which deals with the actual movement of Biblical theology. As Oblates and as missionaries, we cannot ignore this return to Sacred Scripture. We should be specialists of the Word of God. We should cherish this duty all the more so since it reflects the thinking of the Sovereign Pontiffs and that of the Church in Council.” (R. Motte, *Sacred Scripture*, DVO, p. 836)

BLESSED JUSTO GIL PARDO (1910-1936)  
MARTYR OF SPAIN

*He was born in Lukin (or Luquin), province of Navarra and diocese of Pamplona-Tudela, on October 18, 1910, son of a humble bricklayer. Like Gregorio Escobar, it was a diocesan priest, Fr. José María Sola, who guided him and helped him so that he could go to the Oblates. Justo was of good character, docile, hardworking, pious, enthusiastic, ingenious, cordial with everyone and a good student. He distinguished himself for his love of music, playing the harmonium and organ quite well, and for his love of the missions.*

*He was ordained a deacon in Madrid on June 6, 1936, at the end of his third year of theology, and expected to be ordained to the priesthood during the following year. His sisters were already making his vestments.*

*The devotion to Jesus in the Eucharist and to the Blessed Virgin, which had been nurtured in her family, grew during her years of religious formation. Joaquín Martínez, tells us what he heard in Lukin from the lips of one of Justo's sisters: "During the vacations he tried to recompose the possible tensions in the family. He was very devoted to the Eucharist which he tried not to miss a single day". He said that "joy was not incompatible with holiness".*

*After the expulsion of the community of Pozuelo, he took refuge in the house of his brother Raimundo, married, resident in Madrid. As the neighbors became suspicious, his sister-in-law accompanied him to the Oblate house of Diego de León, where he was received and stayed for 24 hours. On August 4, he went to live in a boarding house that his brother knew. Finally, he was arrested on October 15 and imprisoned.*

*In one of the "sacas" that left the San Anton Prison during the night of November 27 to the morning of November 28, 1936, he was part, with several of his brother Oblates, of the list of those who, under the appearance of being released, were taken to Paracuellos del Jarama to be executed.*

October 19, St. Paul of the Cross

BEATIFICATION OF EUGENE DE MAZENOD

*October 19, 1975, in St Peter's Square in Rome, Pope Paul VI proclaimed Eugene de Mazenod blessed. In preparation for that event, the Superior General wrote to all Oblates.*

For us this beatification is both a grace and a challenge. It is a grace which confirms and invites us to joy... a challenge which tests our fidelity: fidelity to the mission among the poor; fidelity to that quality of being which the Founder wanted for the Oblates.

In today's world are we still the kind of missionaries to the poor envisaged by Father de Mazenod? Do we still go to the poor with the same preference, the same zeal, the same boldness, the same spirit of solidarity, the same love of the Church...? Do we still have the same deep attachment to Jesus Christ, the same concern for self-denial, the same inner thirst for holiness, the same conviction that the quality of our being is as important for the welfare of people as is the intensity of our activity...?

The beatification ceremony will be over quickly. And what will remain? Will there be the grace of conversion... new strength... a renewed thrust toward the poor? [...]

To all of you I repeat what I told the 1974 Chapter: In the name of God be strong! Be strong in faith and in obedience to the mission you have received. Be strong in your love. Be capable of holding on and going ahead, out of love for the poor and fidelity to Jesus Christ – to Jesus Christ in his poor!

Through the intercession of the Immaculate Virgin, “who is victorious over all evil” (1966 *Constitutions*, art. 6) and “the perfect model of our response to God” (1966 *Constitutions*, art. 61), may Bishop de Mazenod's beatification be for us the occasion of an authentic inner renewal! (F. Jetté, June 6, 1975, *Letters to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, Rome 1984, p. 21-26)

## ST. PAUL OF THE CROSS

*Liturgical memorial of Paul of the Cross, a saint particularly dear to St. Eugene. The Founder often visited the convent of the Passionists at the Church of Saints John and Paul in Rome, where he would go to pray to their holy founder for the approval of his own Rules.*

February 12, 1826. Went out late to adore the Blessed Sacrament at the Forty Hours Devotion. They were in the church of Saints John and Paul beyond the Coliseum.... I had the good inspiration to knock at the door of the monastery where the Passionist Fathers live; those Fathers were kind enough to show me the small interior gallery of their house, from where I was able to make my adoration at leisure. When I had finished, a brother most graciously went with me to see the whole house which I found very neat, inspiring piety and recollection.... (Diary, *Oblate Writings*, 17, p. 100-101)

April 20, 1826. I made a second pilgrimage to Saints John and Paul of the Cross to say Mass in the rooms of the Venerable Paul of the Cross, and on the same altar used by that great servant of God. In his room, they carefully preserve things he used during his lifetime. I made my thanksgiving in front of the crucifix he carried on his missions, and I leaned on the same small table on which they say he himself leaned when he was praying. Out of respect, I did not dare sit on the two chairs he used, but was satisfied to touch my lips to the place where he rested his hands. You can see in a glass-doored cabinet some of the things that belonged to him: a bible, breviaries, the Imitation of Christ, his hair shirt, shoes, clothes, his bend and even his blood kept in a bottle. (Diary, *Oblate Writings*, 17, p. 143)

December 1, 1854. We headed for the church of Saint Gregory, and stopped at the Passionists, at Saints John and Paul.... I saw again the chapel where he said holy mass. I myself had celebrated on this altar during my first trip to Rome, when I was so interested in invoking all

the saints to obtain what I had come to ask. We went down to the church again to venerate his body, situated under the Blessed Sacrament altar. (Diary, *Oblate Writings*, 17, p. 216)

October 20

## THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

The communion of saints, one of the articles of the Creed, consists in participation of all the faithful in the same spiritual goods and the same merits shared with one another. It is a kind of community of goods in the order of grace. Although the bonds that form are not visible and they extend to all distances, even beyond the limits of this world, there is, however, a vivid and touching image of the possession of the same goods and that mysterious unity of all God’s children when they gather at the altar, where with one voice, they sing the same praises, raising up to heaven the same prayers and participating at the same time in the same sacrifice. As in the early Church there was one heart and soul, they all have the same sentiment, the same word and the same voice. (Eugene de Mazenod, “On the Communion of Saints”, *Oblate Writings*, 14, p. 86).

October 21, *St. Gaspar Del Bufalo*

## TWO FOUNDERS MEET

*During his second stay in Rome, St. Eugene met with St. Gaspar del Bufalo, founder of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood. Together they talked about the possibility of a “merger” between the two groups. This was something about which St. Eugene may have been thinking for some time, since already in 1826 he had visited St. Gaspar to get to know the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, who were founded in the same period as the Oblates (August 15, 1815). The benefits of such a merger were the same as those which St. Eugene had seen in the two previous attempts at union with Bruno Lanteri’s Oblates of the Virgin Mary, and with the missionary community of Abbé Favre, in Chambéry: broaden the field of action of the Congregation and reinforce it with*



*other priests dedicated to the same ministry. St. Eugene said he was moved by the “inspiration of the Lord”, by “a true desire to increase the good of the Church of God”, so that “the Church (is) better served, and souls better helped in their spiritual needs.” The unification project did not go ahead because the Missionaries of the Precious Blood did not intend to be bound by religious vows, a crucial difference between the two institutions. The following letter from St. Eugene to Gaspar Del Bufalo is presumed to be in October 1832.*

I have carefully read the summary and other letters from the Very Rev. Canon del Buffalo, and I was very edified. Seeing so many good priests dedicated to such a holy life and elevated ministry, I regret all the more that my views could not be accepted.

When I proposed to the Venerable Confraternity of the Most Precious Blood to unite with our small Congregation of the Immaculate Conception I was moved by a true desire to increase the good the Church of God does, and if on one hand I considered acquiring many excellent priests as a blessing to our Congregation, be assured that, in the sincerity of zeal that God gives me to see the completion of his holy work, I thought it would be a great advantage for the pious Union of the Confraternity of the Precious Blood to merge with a Society that had been elevated to the rank of a religious Congregation in the Church, in which the Pious Union would have found the same spirit, the same ministry and almost the same rule, and of which she would have immediately constituted the major and most certainly not the least interesting portion. It seemed that the Confraternity would gain in perfection and stability and that if by the proposed union the Congregation acquired a new splendor and greater extension, God would accordingly be more glorified, the Church better served, and souls would receive more help in their spiritual needs.

Such were my thoughts. I still think the same way, leaving God to make known to all these very worthy priests who form the Pious Union and the Confraternity of the Precious Blood, the great value of the vows that unfortunately scare some. Moreover, by making this step I obeyed the inspiration that the Lord showed me as being for his glory and I leave the review and responsibility to the one who has greater insight and graces than I, and I rest in the peace of a heart which, no mat-

ter what happens, will always say with confidence “particeps ego sum omnium timentium te.”

+ Charles-Jos. Eugène, Bishop of Icosia, s.g. o.m.i.

F. Ciardi, *Un projet de fusion avec les Missionnaires du Précieux Sang*, “Vie Oblate Life” 37 (1978), p. 65-71.

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#### BEGINNING OF THE MISSION IN CEYLON

*The first group of four Missionary Oblates left Marseilles for Ceylon on October 21, 1847. Frs. Etienne Semeria, Joseph-Alexandre Ciamin, Louis Keating and Bro. Gaspard de Steffanis, after 37 days of travel, arrived on the island, at Jaffna, on November 28. Thus began the presence of the Congregation in Asia.*

*Bishop Orazio Bettachini, coadjutor of the Apostolic Vicar of Colombo, had arrived in Europe in 1845 in search of missionaries. He met Mgr. Berteaud, Bishop of Tulle, who told him: “Go to Marseilles: there is a bishop who is founder of a small congregation, but has a heart as big as that of St. Paul: as big as the world. Go there and tell him that it is to save poor souls, the poorest souls, and insist on this, it is an irresistible word.” The Founder of the Oblates responded enthusiastically to the request. On August 12, 1847 he explained the reasons for this to Fr. Vincens:*

What a mission field is opening up before us! One million five hundred thousand Gentiles to convert in the most beautiful country in the world, one hundred fifty thousand Christians to instruct. This immense population is disposed by its gentleness of character and a certain trait of religiosity to listen with docility to the voices of the Lord’s envoys and will receive those who bring them the Good News. On the other hand, there is heresy to thwart.... How can we resist so many pressing motives and not answer with gratitude to the invitation to cooperate powerfully in such a great good work? I have therefore accepted this new mission, one of the most beautiful in the world. I foresee that this

great island will one day become an endowment our Congregation will sanctify entirely. (*Oblate Writings*, 10, p. 167)

October 22

## PROCLAIMING THE WORD

If the aspect that characterizes our apostolate [...] is mission, our special vocation is that of being missionary; but what especially constitutes being a missionary is preaching. Listen to our model: “God sent me to evangelize the poor.” – “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me and sent me to preach.” – “And Jesus went about the cities, towns, preaching and teaching. He preached in the synagogues.” Similarly, the apostles, who are also our models, said, “Jesus commanded us to preach;” And, in fact, “they continued to preach every day in the temple and in the houses, teaching and proclaiming the good news of Christ Jesus.” They carried out the commitment they had made: “For us, we will be diligent in the ministry of preaching.” As St. Paul says to all missionaries in the person of Timothy, “Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in truth.”

Preaching is the greatest and main tool for the mission. No doubt it will be surrounded by many other holy activities to attract, move, and touch the crowds, but ultimately, it is preaching that is the necessary and divine means, the only one that has the possibility generating faith in souls and converting them.

Woe to the missionary who, relying on the human resources of his zeal, neglects this powerful engine, who would not make every effort to put his preaching on the level where our Lord himself has placed it. Make apostolic visits, put up beautiful altars, organize spirited songs, be gracious to attract the hearts; all that is good and in the traditions of our family; but remember that our Lord told us: *Mitto vos... docete!* I make you my missionaries..., preach, teach.

So, my reverend and dear Fathers, the necessity of preaching is revealed with full force. Let our whole life turn to this sacred function that has become our most urgent duty, and let us become ever more worthy to fulfil it in a way that brings solace to God, the Church and souls. (L.

Soullier, *Circular Letter* No. 59, February 17, 1895, *Circulaires administratives*, 2, p. 13-14)

\* \* \*

*On October 22, 1920, the General Chapter consecrated the Congregation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.*

*October 23*

#### A HISTORY BRIMMING WITH DARING

In 1859, Father Henry Grollier established the mission of Good Hope near the Arctic Circle. In 1872, following in the footsteps of Father Louis Babel, Father Charles Arnaud came into contact with the Inuit of Labrador. In 1917, Father Arsène Turquetil baptized the first Inuit of Hudson's Bay.

In October 1865, Father Joseph Gérard performed his first baptisms at the Village of the Mother of God in Basutoland (Lesotho). In Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Bishop Bonjean dedicated himself to the development of Catholic schools. In 1876, he launched a newspaper published in English and Tamil. That same year, he ordained the first native priest trained in the seminary he had founded.

This was the era of the Cavalry of Christ in Texas along the Rio Grande. Father Yves Kéralum and several others lost their lives there. At the beginning of our century, in what is today Namibia, after three or four abortive attempts, the mission of Okavango was founded under the direction of Father Josef Gotthardt.

To this we must add the apostolic work done in Christian countries from the chaplaincies at Sacré-Coeur in Montmartre in Paris – in whose history the role played by Cardinal Hippolyte Guibert is well known – right up to the University of Ottawa. In 1868, the Oblates made a foundation in Lowell. From 1932 on, the first United States province addressed itself to pastoral care of the Blacks.

We need only bring to mind foundations in Pilcomayo in 1925, the Belgian Congo in 1931, Laos in 1935, the Philippines in 1939, Haiti in 1943, Brazil in 1945.

This marshalling of past events can only be brief. Each one of these decisions showed that the missionaries, fathers and brothers, and their superiors made the choice to move forward, even to the ends of the earth to leave nothing undared. Two expressions capture the life and missionary work of the Oblates of this period. The expression “specialists of difficult missions” has been attributed to Pope Pius XI. *Apôtres inconcus* authored by Father Pierre Duchaussois indicates the place held by the brothers in this missionary expansion. The Oblates brim with daring; their life declares it, but they do not know how to express it, or they do not dare. (M. Courvoisier, *Daring*, DVO, p. 227)

*October 24*

#### THE FIRST GENERAL CHAPTER

*After St. Eugene had written the Rule, on October 24, 1818 he gathered the community at the house in Aix to give a reading of the Rule and to start its implementation. That meeting has come to be known as the first General Chapter of the Society. In 1826 Fr. Suzanne drew up the Acts.*

On October 24 of the year one thousand eight hundred eighteen, the priests, Missionaries of Provence in Aix, established as a community through the efforts of our Very Reverend Father General Charles Joseph Eugene de Mazenod, met in the choir of the church of our house in the said town of Aix, and after having sung the *Veni Creator* to implore the light of the Holy Spirit, all went into a room of our aforementioned house in Aix in order to gather in a general meeting after having been convened by their superior, our Very Rev. Fr. General who wanted to have them deliberate on important proposals relative to the establishment of the Society. It was the first regular meeting to have been held concerning the government and the continuation of the said Society, and it was a matter of agreeing on the basics of what it would be in the future.

The Very Rev. Fr. General read the Rules that, according to the wish of all the priests, he had drawn up and brought together under the title Rules and Constitutions of the Society of the Missionaries of Provence.

[...] All accepted the Rules as proposed by the Very Rev. Fr. General, with the exception of Messrs. Deblieux and Aubert; the first declared that he was not willing for now to make vows of obedience, chastity and perpetual perseverance, as the Rules prescribed them, but he insisted that he would always be united in heart and soul with the Society, according to his own expression; the second did not want perpetual vows, but only vows for one year. [...]

At this point, the other community members, who were not priests, were called to come to read the Rules under which they would have to live. They were three in number, namely: Misters Dupuy, Courtès and Suzanne, all three acolytes. When they heard the reading of the Rules, they unanimously promised to accept them, and assured the others, as they had done in private to the Superior General, that they were willing to make the proposed vows.

It was in this last session, the only one which the members who were not priests attended, and when everyone had made known his feeling, that the assembly recognized itself as having been constituted as a Society, and gathered in General Chapter according to the Rules which had been accepted. (“Missions OMI” 72 [1952], p. 44-46)

*October 25*

#### IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE APOSTLES

I said to myself while meditating on our Rules that we would never be able sufficiently to thank the divine bounty for having given them to us, for God alone indisputably is their author.... I am no longer astonished at the *saluberrimi operis* [Expression used by Pope Leo XII in the Apostolic Letters approving the Rule on March 21, 1826] when I consider that the end of our Institute is the same as Our Lord proposed to himself when he came into the world. I come across I don't know how many passages which are proof again and again of the perfection of our Institute and the excellence of the means it puts at our disposal to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and his apostles. I could go on for ever on this subject. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Hyppolite Courtès, November 4, 1831, *Oblate Writings*, 8, p. 43)

All we ask God is to send us priests after his heart, who, filled with the holy desire for the joy of living in conformity with the divine Master's counsels, wish to travel the same path the Apostles and the favoured disciples who followed them had trod. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Vincens, November 12, 1840, *Oblate Writings*, 9, p. 154)

Note that you did not enter the Carthusians who make a novitiate in order to accustom themselves to a perpetual solitude. On the contrary, you have been admitted amongst those who, in imitation of the Apostles in whose footsteps they are called to walk, spend only a few months in retreat and that to become more fitting for the very active life of a missionary, for the most varied ministry, fruitful in blessings that are truly miraculous. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Jean-Louis Grandin, December 4, 1855, *Oblate Writings*, 11, p. 296)

October 26

FR. JOSEPH FABRE (1824-1892)  
SECOND SUPERIOR GENERAL (1861-1892)

*Born in 1824, he entered the seminary of Marseilles in 1842 and two years later decided to become an Oblate. Ordained by St. Eugene in 1847, he became a professor and later rector of the Major Seminary of Marseilles, working closely with St. Eugene and Tempier. He was unanimously elected Superior General in 1861. His main task was to keep the family united in continuity with the spirit of the Founder and in fidelity to the Rule. After the period of foundation, Fabre's would be one of organization. He founded the magazine "Missions OMI" to collect and circulate the reports from the missions. He wrote 34 circular letters and 134 profiles of deceased Oblates. He also had to face the difficulties with the diocese of Marseilles after the death of the Founder and oversee the transfer of the General House to Paris and the scholasticate to Autun. He died on October 26, 1892. This is what he wrote when launching "Missions OMI".*

May the Lord continue to bless our ministry. In France and abroad our Fathers are dedicated to the hard work of the apostolate with a zeal

that God crowns with the most abundant fruit. Knowledge of this dedication and blessings was the source of the sweetest joys for our venerated Father; he was happy to see his own zeal animate all his children, and their work, which while reminding him of his own work, reminded him also of the consolation that God had poured out on his works. It was a day of holy joy for him when one of his children, whom he loved with such tenderness, would come to share with his heart the consolations provided by a duty done selflessly, the return of souls to the Lord. He would share this happiness with us. We listened with emotion to the accounts he would give us. [...] How often have we not heard with regret his pain at not being able to communicate to the whole Congregation the feelings that he held in his heart. He often planned not to keep so secret what he thought could be useful to all. [...].

To implement the will of our beloved Father we need your help, all you who, under the banner of Mary Immaculate, fight so valiantly with so much happiness and success the holy battles of the Lord. As you did to our venerated Founder, you will tell us of your struggles and the triumphs of grace. [...]

Yes, my dear Fathers and Brothers, hearing the accounts we receive from our missionaries, we will all thank God and our Immaculate Mother, we will love even more the family in which God creates such beautiful dedication, together we will strive to be not too far below our brothers in religious virtues, and those who are preparing for the fight will be even more zealous to become worthy to support the cause of God and the honor of the Congregation to which they have the good fortune of belonging.

To accomplish this most ardent wish of our revered Founder, every three months we will print a booklet containing some of the reports or letters we will have received. (J. Fabre, *Lettre du Supérieur-Général à tous les membres de la Congrégation, N.-D. de Montolivet, le 3 avril 1862*, “Missions OMI » 1 [1862], p. 1-5)

R. Boudens, *Le centenaire de l'élection du T.R.P. Fabre*, “Études oblates” 20 (1961), p. 309-313; Y. Beaudoin, *L'élu du chapitre de 1861 et la joie des Oblats*, “Études oblates” 21 (1962), p. 97-120; B. Favero, *P. J. Fabre, o.m.i. Trent'anni di generalato alla luce delle sue Circolari amministrative (1861-1892)*, Università Gregoriana, Roma 1989.



October 27

COUNT ON ME COMPLETELY

*October 27, 1815, Father Tempier answers the letter which St. Eugene had sent him on October 9 inviting him to join his missionary project.*

May God be praised for inspiring you with the plan to prepare a house of missionaries to announce the truths of salvation to the poor, our country people, to those who are in greatest need of religious instruction. I am in complete agreement with your views, my dear confrere, and far from waiting for further insistence to enter into this holy work which is so in line with my desires, I assure you, to the contrary, that if I had known of your plan, I would have been the first to ask to be received into your society. So, I have to thank you for judging me worthy to work for God's glory and the salvation of souls.

It is true that I do not see in myself the speaking ability required of a missionary, but *alius quidem sic alius vero sic*. [One of one kind and one of another, 1 Cor. 7:7] What I cannot do in outstanding speeches, I will do in catechetical classes, conferences, in the confessional and by all other means that are apt to establish the kingdom of Jesus Christ in souls. I find nothing humiliating or distasteful in that. In the meantime, practice will give me a greater facility than I have now. Moreover, I see what you are looking for most in choosing your collaborators: you want priests who do not follow routine and humdrum, as the predecessor of Father Charles used to say; who are ready to follow in the footsteps of the apostles, to work for the salvation of souls without expecting any other reward here on earth than a lot of suffering and fatigue. By the grace of God, I feel this desire in me, or if I do not have it, I want to have it very much; and together with you, everything will become even more easy for me. So, count on me completely. (*Oblate Writings*, II, 2, p. 19-20)

October 28, Saints Simon and Jude

EXTENDING THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST LIKE THE APOSTLES

*The feast of the Apostles Simon and Jude is an invitation to meditate further on the call to follow in their footsteps, with a text addressed to the missionaries in Ceylon by St. Eugene.*

Not being able to write to you individually, I address myself to all of you, my dear sons, who have been called by God to such a wonderful mission. Do honour to your ministry by practicing all the religious virtues. Be faithful in observance of your holy Rules, live in the most perfect union, and conduct yourselves always in accord with obedience. Should any cloud appear, and I pray God to preserve you from that, be careful never to complain to any stranger, for you will regret it later on and you will soon realize that you have done grave damage to the family, an irremediable evil that will weigh on your conscience throughout your life. Moreover, instead of the consolation that you were looking for, be sure that you will have nothing but bitterness and disappointment.

Love one another, show due deference to one another and you will avoid this unhappiness, God will bless all your undertakings, and you will be rewarded even in this life as you await your coronation in heaven.

Even though there are few of you as yet, while you are together do all your exercises in common as if you were a large community. Who can say how much good will be done by the good example that you will be giving? Do not allow yourselves to be weakened by the heat of the climate. God must be served everywhere with fervour. If I could believe that you would degenerate in that land which you are to soak with the sweat of your brows to recall some to their duties, and to bring the light to others who do not know the true God, I would declare you unworthy of your great vocation and I would regret having chosen you in preference to so many others for your wonderful mission of making Jesus Christ known and extending his kingdom as you walk in the footsteps of the Apostles. But no, you will never cause me that pain. On the contrary, I will have only to congratulate myself on having entrusted to you

the glory of God and the honour of our dear Congregation. So, I bless you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and place you under the motherly protection of Mary Immaculate. (To Fr. Semeria, January 25, 1848, *Oblate Writings*, 4, p. 8-9)

October 29

THOMAS BENJAMIN COORAY (1901-1988)  
CARDINAL, ARCHBISHOP OF COLOMBO, SRI LANKA

*October 29, 1988, the Servant of God Thomas Cooray died. He was born in Periyamulla Negombo (Sri Lanka) on December 29, 1901. After his perpetual vows (1928) he was ordained a priest in Rome, where he had gone to complete his studies at the Angelicum. In 1947 he was appointed Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Colombo. "To serve, not be served" was his motto. In 1950 he founded the minor seminary, dedicating himself to the missionary formation of young seminarians. Under his leadership the Church in Sri Lanka began to find ways and means to bring religious education into the schools. In 1940, at the beginning of World War II, Archbishop Jean Marie Masson had made a vow to build a shrine in honor of Our Lady in Tewatta, if the country was spared from the ravages of war. Card. Cooray kept the vow and built the National Basilica of Our Lady of Lanka, where he is buried. He is the first Sinhalese for whom a cause of beatification has been opened.*

*September 24, 1966, on the eve of the General Chapter which was to draw up the new Constitutions and Rules, he writes to the Superior General, expressing concern that Mary will not have a fitting place in them.*

Dear Father General,

This letter comes to you when you must be buried beneath a volume of correspondence. However, please read this and see if something could be done on the lines suggested: We must have more on Mary in our New Constitutions: it must be a Marian Constitution.

It was only the other day that the Provincial held a "get-together" of the Fathers of our District here to reflect together as what should be the spirit or "charism" of our Congregation. "Evangelizare Pauperibus"

came out as the special feature of our Congregation. I think this will be sufficiently stressed in the New Constitution. But a point that may be toned down is “Devotion to Our Lady”. That will be a calamity. Our Congregation, bearing the special title of the “Immaculate Conception” must have Our Divine Mother honoured in a very special way: to form missionaries to be like Jesus, how can we find a better guide than Mary who watched over the formation of our Model, the High Priest, Jesus Christ, for 30 years. I need not develop this point in writing to you. [...]

The Canon Law itself says that the traditions must be preserved as a “Patrimony”. And what tradition can be more a part of and intrinsic to our “Patrimony” than the Marian Spirit? We should always consider Mary as our Mother and Model. [...]

Our Rules and Constitutions must be pregnant with Mary. May her spirit, her charism, embodied in our Constitutions and Rules and emanating therefrom, attract more solid vocations to our dear Congregation, and make her flourish with even greater vigour in the future

Invoking the Holy Spirit to guide the deliberations on the Chapter and pleading with Our Immaculate Mother to make her presence felt in the company of the Capitulants, and wishing the Chapter the success we all look- forward to in reference to our New Constitutions, I remain, dear and beloved Father General

Yours devotedly in Christ & MI.

*October 30*

JEAN-BAPTISTE ROUVIÈRE (1881-1913)

GUILLAUME LE ROUX (1885-1913)

MARTYRS IN CANADA

*Fr. Guillaume Le Roux and Fr. Jean-Baptist Rouvière, both born in France, were Missionaries to the Inuit in the Northwest Territories of Canada. In October, 1913, both Oblates were sent out on dog sleds to move north to the Polar Sea. They were accompanied by two Inuit, Sinisiak and Uluksuk, who following some misunderstanding murdered both missionaries near the Bloody Falls of the Coppermine River. After killing both, the two men then cut them open, to eat some of their*

*entrails. The two murderers were tried, found guilty and condemned to death. But, the Vicar Apostolic of Mackenzie, Bishop Gabriel Joseph Élie Breynat, OMI, appealed so that their sentence would be commuted to “a great act of piety and charity”.*

Red River, July 1, 1913

To my dear friends Daniel, Marianne, and Maria,

Dear friends, studying a language without a master and without books is a hard task. The Eskimos we have met, having had virtually no relationship with white people, do not know any languages other than their own. You can imagine how difficult it is sometime to get the meaning of words that one only hears. [...]

I write to you from Red River. I have been here for three weeks and you should know that during my stay here the sun never went below the horizon. Here I am indeed in the land of the midnight sun.

I came here to see some members of an Eskimo tribe that is different from the one I met last summer or fall. I found a few Eskimo families here and I was able to pick up a few words of the language they speak. [...] I cannot say that I know well people whom I have just met. I must say however that the Eskimos I met last fall did not seem very repulsive to me. Indeed, even if they were, I would still love them out of love for Jesus Christ.

These Eskimos are savages and pagan. However, they are always very friendly to us and they have always been hospitable. They always greet us with a gracious smile; they helped us set up our tent, went to get wood, water, offered us beautiful pieces of caribou meat when they returned. Yet they still do not know who we are, we could not tell them not knowing well enough their language. They notice that we pray and they saw Fr. Rouvière say mass. [...]

We have had many trials, it is true. We were often tired when evening came, but never in these “deserts”, did we or our dogs go hungry. God was watching over us every day and let us find even abundance.

Very dear friends, pray for me and I will also ask you to pray for my companion Fr. Rouvière. Though you do not know him, I’m sure you will think of him when I tell you that we live here, far from civilization, happy because we love each other like brothers.

In a few days I will leave the Red River to go back to Fort Norman. From there I will go by canoe to rejoin my dear companion at the northeast end of Bear Lake; then we will both travel the deserts together in search of souls. Your prayers, I am sure, will help us in our holy expedition.

Pray for me, I remain yours, G. Le Roux.

*Les Révérends Pères J.B. Rouvière et Guillaume Le Roux. A l'occasion du 25<sup>me</sup> anniversaire de leur martyre*, “Missions OMI” 72 (1938), p. 245-261; R. Buliard, *Inuk, au dos de la terre*, Paris, 1949, 356 p. (English, Italian, German, Dutch, Spanish, Polish translations); P. Croidys, *Dans l'épouvante du Grand Nord. La vie esquimaude et le martyre des PP. Rouvière et Le Roux*, Editions Spes, Paris 1950; McKay Jenkins, *Bloody Falls of the Coppermine. Madness, Murder, and the Collision of Cultures in the Arctic, 1913*, Random House, New York 2005.

October 31

#### THE APOSTLE IS MORE PERFECT THAN THE MONK

In his circular letter of February 28, 1848, the Bishop of Marseilles wrote: “The apostle is more perfect than the monk. The virtues of those who preach the truth, says Pope Saint Gregory, are heaven’s adornment. It can happen that the apostle under the inspiration of a lofty charity may forget himself on occasion and wholly renounce everything that is his to dedicate himself entirely to the task of saving his brothers....

Often enough Bishop de Mazenod used the word Apostle in the broader sense of a great missionary of the Gospel. A first usage is found in two places in the *Nota bene* of the 1818 Rule: “Since these causes are known, it becomes easier to apply the remedy. To do this, we must form apostles [...]”. “What must we do [...]? To follow courageously in the footsteps of so many apostles who have left us such splendid examples [...]”. In 1819, in a letter to Father Tempier and his confreres preaching a mission at Rognac, he wrote: “God be praised, my dear friends and true apostles” or yet again at the beginning of 1826: “Recommend to our fathers who are preaching the jubilee that they conduct themselves like saints, like real apostles”. In the month of February of 1848, he

wrote to Father Louis Toussaint Dassy in Nancy giving him news of the fathers and brothers in Ceylon and Oregon. He ends his letter by saying, “Let none among us complain anymore of anything, for we have so generous an advanced contingent that makes conquests for Jesus Christ by so many sacrifices, and what merits do they not acquire in the eyes of the Lord and of the Church. Dear Brothers, how admirable they are! Let us pray much for them, and let us be proud to be one with such apostles of the Lord”. The same thought is found in a letter to Father Charles Baret in 1852: “You will not find anywhere a group of wiser and more fervent youngsters [young fathers] .... We have never had such a large number of them in the Congregation. We encompass the whole world with our apostles whose zeal and devotedness wring from me tears of joy and tenderness”.

The Oblates have always been animated by the ardent zeal that burned in the heart of the Apostles and of Bishop de Mazenod. The latter often rejoiced at their dedication and their apostolic successes. The secretary of the 1837 Chapter tells us that in the report of the first session the Founder spoke to the capitulants in fatherly fashion. “In his address, he could not, at first, contain his deep-felt emotion which was shared by all, as he saw gathered around him his children whom he had seen born before his very eyes, had formed with his own hands, and now saw as apostles, conquerors, men of miracles, since by an outstanding protection shown by the Lord, wonders appeared as they passed by [...]”

Upon his return from a trip to America in 1895, Superior General Father Louis Souiller issued a circular letter in which he wrote: “Yes, our missionaries have walked in the footsteps of the Apostles; with the cross and the divine Word, they have converted entire nations and through the Mother of Mercy have brought them to Jesus, the Son of God” (Y. Beaudoin, *Apostles*, DOV, p. 30, 34)





# November

**T**he choice of texts for the month of November will be inspired by the Feast of All Saints and All Souls Day. So, it will be devoted primarily to holiness and to the “community in heaven”. In the latter part of the month, we will meditate on the theme of mortification and self-denial.

*November 1*

IN THE NAME OF GOD, LET US BE SAINTS!

*Eugene de Mazenod had a growing desire for holiness. He desired it for himself and for all those to whom his ministry was directed: he wanted to lead people to act like humans first, then like Christians and finally help them become saints (Cf. Preface). He desired it for the Oblates, pleading: “In the name of God, let us be saints.” (February 18, 1826). He created the Oblate community as a place of sanctification, he embraced religious life as an effective means of sanctification, he chose the mission as a ministry in which one could be sanctified and sanctify. He understood and constantly emphasized the intrinsic link between holiness and mission. He lived in a way to attain holiness.*

*On November 1, 1818, at the end of a seven-day retreat following the first General Chapter, which took place on October 24, the Missionaries of Provence took their vows for the first time: oblation was a concrete way to attain holiness. The General Chapter of 1826 decided that every year, on the same date, a renewal of vows be made.*

*The report prepared by Suzanne and Moreau describes the memorable day of November 1, 1818.*

At three in the morning the Chapter members are already up. Before four they are already in the chapel, prostrate before the altar, preparing for the most beautiful, the most lovable of all the sacrifices.

After invoking the light of the Holy Spirit with the singing of the *Veni Creator*, the superior gave a moving exhortation to the assembly. It was touching, and we shed tears of joy listening to those words that seemed to be addressed to us directly by Our Lord Jesus Christ through the lips of our beloved father.

When the exhortation was over, the father, clad in priestly vestments, prostrates himself before the altar, takes a candle in his right hand, and says in a loud and clear voice: “In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the presence of the Blessed Trinity, the Holy Virgin Mary, all the angels and all the saints, and of all my brothers gathered here, I, Charles Joseph Eugene de Mazenod, profess, promise to God and make a perpetual vow of chastity and obedience. I also vow to persevere until death in the holy institute and Society of the Missionaries of Provence. So help me God. Amen.”

Then the Mass began [...]. At the moment of communion, while the superior was holding the adorable Body of our Divine Saviour in his hands, we came forward one by one, holding a lighted candle, and pronounced our holy vows with a feeling of indescribable joy. [...]

It was like one of those assemblies of the first faithful who used to gather in the catacombs, by candlelight, in the darkness of the night, to sing the praises of God, far from the idolaters.

After the Mass, the Superior General intoned the hymn *Te Deum* in thanksgiving. Then all the members of the community went to the altar of the Blessed Virgin to place under her protection the holy commitments they had just made. They also put themselves under the protection of all the saints by reciting the litany of the saints.

With what enthusiasm did we embrace each other, once back in the sacristy! What an outpouring of the heart! What tenderness! What moving affection! Now, we were saying, we are brothers. Now we are one! Now we truly love each other! (*Mémoires* of Frs. Moreau and Suzanne, in Rambert, I, p. 290-291)

November 2, 1927

CASSIEN AUGIER (1845-1906)  
FOURTH SUPERIOR GENERAL (1898-1906)

*Cassien Augier was born in 1845 in the diocese of Nice. His formation was at the scholasticate of Autun following in the steps of his brother, Célestin, who was already an Oblate. After ordination (1869), he worked in the major seminary of Ajaccio, in Aix-en-Provence, and in the Montmartre communities. In 1881 he was sent to Rome as Procurator General and supervisor of the construction of the scholasticate in Via San Pietro in Vincoli (later Via Vittorino da Feltre). Elected Assistant General in 1890, he visited the Congregation in Asia, Africa, and Australia. On May 19, 1898 he was elected the fourth superior general. He continued to set an example of humility and fraternal kindness. Eight years later, after having resigned following serious financial difficulties, he retired to Santa Maria a Vico and then to Naples, where he died on November 2, 1927.*

I feel all the weight [of the office]. But one thought reassures and supports me: it is that in accepting it, I simply made an act of obedience and that bearing the burden I am without a doubt doing the holy will of God. The holy will of God! That's all we wanted, asked for, sought before the Chapter meeting and especially during the three days immediately preceding the election, and it manifested itself in such a clear and touching way. [...]

I do not consider my unworthiness, my weakness, nor my inability. I want to seek only the divine will. The words of St. Paul have been realized again: *Infirma mundi elegi*. God chose what is weakest.... It seems to me that God has made a commitment to supplement my helplessness.... It is Our Lord who will govern you, I want only to be his voice, the instrument of his dedication and love for your souls. [...]

If I am allowed to boast, I can boast of having loved and of loving my brothers, all my brothers; of having loved and of loving the Congregation.... I received so much from it! It took me the day after my first communion and raised me as a mother. I grew up, wrapped and warmed

by her tenderness. I can say, like Cardinal Guibert, but more truly than he: “If there is anything good in me, I owe it to the Congregation.”

Dedication will become my law. [...] I do have one interest, one concern: to help and support you to the best of my ability to work for the good of your souls, to find and use the most appropriate means to maintain and develop among us the religious spirit, the spirit of our venerable Founder. That is what is important. The rest will come as needed. Let’s be good Oblates and we will be good missionaries. Sanctify ourselves and we will be more able to sanctify others. (C. Augier, *Circular Letter* No. 66, June 1, 1898, *Circulaires administratives*, 2, p. 323-327)

\* \* \*

BLESSED JUSTO FERNÁNDEZ GONZÁLEZ (1916-1936)  
MARTYR OF SPAIN

*He was born on November 2, 1916, in Huelde (León). He was the youngest of 12 siblings, a humble and simple family of farmers, deeply religious, a seedbed of vocations: of the 12 siblings, 8 responded to the call of Christ by consecrating their lives to God: two diocesan priests, two Oblates, one Franciscan and three sisters of the Holy Family of Bordeaux.*

*They were part of the youngest course of scholastics, who had professed first vows in the summer of 1935, and had finished the first year of philosophy.*

*After two days of imprisonment in the scholasticate-turned-prison, he was taken with his companions to the General Directorate of Security in Madrid. The next day he was free, but disoriented, in the Spanish capital, not knowing where to go. He took refuge with a cousin of his in a family’s house, until he was arrested. When the militiamen arrived at the house, they asked him what his profession was, to which he answered that he was a student. They asked him again what he was studying, and he answered that he was a religious seminarian. His cousin Alfredo answered to those who were doing the search that if for being a religious seminarian they were going to take him away, which also*

meant that they took him away. Alfredo's girlfriend, a few days later, found out that he had been killed at the walls of the Almudena. The murder of Justo's cousin shows us the courage of the families who hid the Oblates and those who defended them, risking their lives to do so. A simple comment in favor of the most elementary justice was enough to seek death.

Justo was taken to the San Anton Prison. From here he was "taken out" with twelve other Oblates on November 28, 1936, to be martyred at Paracuellos del Jarama. He had just turned 20 years old.

Witnesses describe him as generous, regular, responsible, peaceful and pacifying. Olegario Domínguez, who lived with him in the minor seminary, tells how he was impressed by him: "I always admired those who were my companions for their regularity, generosity and fidelity in what was asked of us, especially Justo, who was put by the superiors in charge of the little ones. I remember that with great delicacy he would call our attention and, likewise, he prevented conflicts".

*November 3, Commemoration of Oblates who have died*

#### TO DIE AS A SON OF MARY

*According to tradition, on November 3, the commemoration of all deceased Oblates is celebrated. Today's meditation is taken from a letter written by St. Eugene to Fr. Joseph-Alexandre Ciamin, who was seriously ill, inviting him to accept with confidence the will of God and to be ready to die in the Congregation.*

I do hope that you will recover your health although your doctors, from what you tell me, have decided that it will be otherwise, but if it were part of the decrees of Divine Providence that your exile on earth should be shortened so that you might more early enjoy the blessed possession of God, an early reward for your apostolic labours, and yet the end of all our hopes and a faithful accomplishment of the promise that the Lord made to the faithful servants who, like you, have obeyed his voice and carried out the task that he has imposed on them, well, if the good Lord did wish to call you to himself, would it not be a mark of predestination if you were to die in the arms of the Congregation? We

shall never be able to thank the Lord enough for having preferred us above all others in granting us such a grace. This is a miracle of which we have been witnesses ever since the Congregation came into being. All who have died in her bosom have died like the predestined, and the good Lord seems to have wished to make them aware of this privilege by making them feel it in their souls. All of them without exception said they knew no terms to express the happiness they felt in dying as sons of Mary in the Congregation to which the mercy of God had called them.

The last subject we lost, a young Irish Oblate [Bro. William Winter, who died on January 15, 1853] for whom we had the greatest hopes, did not cease to repeat this with holy joy, like those who had gone before him into glory. There is nobody, even down to the lay-brothers, who does not share in this consolation. We have lost three of them in a row [Jean Plotiers (February 1852), Joseph Favier (February 29, 1852), Joseph Boyoud (April 8, 1852)], and they have confirmed all our members in this sweet conviction. And so, my dear Fr. Ciamin, whatever happens, you will live and die as a child of Mary in the Congregation in which you made your vows *in aeternum*. (April 9, 1853, *Oblate Writings*, 4, p. 110-111)

\* \* \*

NELSON JAVELLANA (1941-1971)  
MARTYR IN THE PHILIPPINES

*Fr. Nelson Javellana, Director of the Notre Dame school in Ampatuan, Philippines, and a group of Citizens National Electoral Assembly (CNEA) volunteers, believed that clean and credible elections were possible in Ampatuan. Riding back home in a mini bus after a seminar on the conduct of elections in Cotabato City, they were ambushed somewhere in Tambunan on November 3, 1971.*

As we remember our martyred confrères, in many ways, we are forced to re-think the meaning of ‘martyrdom’. This does not mean that everything in our world has changed, but the actual situation pro-

vides new examples and trends of martyrdom. In the re-thinking of martyrdom, two prominent theologians, Johann-Baptist Metz and Edward Schillebeeckx, have offered three points by way of appreciating this phenomenon. (One of these points is that of) responsive mercy in a cruel world. The situation of injustice and poverty produces people, albeit few in number, who respond with mercy to defend the victims of the economic order, and for this reason they are violently and unjustly killed without being able to mount any defense. And there are also those who, in the midst of ethnic conflicts, work and struggle to overcome differences and to defend the human rights of the most oppressed... Many people go to the length of giving up their own lives for the weakest... an expression of love for the poor and the victims, and their exceptional nature stems from this love. Even if we do not give such people a particular title, they are responsively merciful to the end.

In many ways, the brutal killings of Bishop Ben, Frs. Nelson, Benjie and Rey give platforms to these nameless deaths, in society, a sort of giving one's life to bring these crucified peoples down from the cross. The martyrs teach us a great lesson that living is learning to suffer with grace, with elegance; to struggle, certainly, but at the same accepting suffering and tragedy without hatred or loss of hope. In a similar vein, a liberation theologian, Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga, tells us that re-thinking martyrdom communicates, in our contemporary times, what he has seen, thought, and experienced over the course of many years. 'Martyrs die with no trace of masochism or 'sacrificialism'. They die with the joy of giving life to all, even to one's enemies, and not taking it from anyone, with commitment, gratitude, and hope. (Eliseo Mercado, *Rethinking martyrdom*, "GMA News Online", January 26, 2011)

*November 4, Saint Charles Borromeo*

#### A PATRON SAINT AND A MODEL

*Saint Charles Borromeo was the patron saint of St. Eugene, and also of the whole de Mazenod family, in which the first name of each male was Charles. Even his sister, Eugenie, was called Charlotte. St. Eugene celebrated with special joy his name day and after he became*

*the founder; he was pleased when the Oblates would offer him best wishes on this day, accompanied by some presents.*

*In his trip to Milan in 1826 he visited the saint's tomb (Cf. Letter to Tempier, May 14, 1826). He venerated him with affection and prayed to him regularly. The comparison between his own life and the life of his holy protector would always be there and would be an encouragement. “The great accomplishments of a Charles Borromeo – he said with sincerity – have always caused me more satisfaction and joy than admiration” (August 1, 1830). The saint is also a reference point for his episcopate.*

*Saint Charles Borromeo is not only his protector and that of his family, but also of his missionaries, as he wrote to his uncle Fortuné: “We will take St. Charles and St. Francis de Sales as patrons and models; our house will be a seminary in its regularity; your life, an example to your priests.” (November 17, 1817) When he decides to go to the Pope for papal approval, he changes the name of “Missionaries of Provence” to “Oblates of St. Charles.”*

*In his diary of the Marignane mission (1816) he says that he talked to the people about: “the need for a generous expiation, following the example of Our Lord, of a number of saints, Saint Charles Borromeo among others, who, in less calamitous circumstances, since they sought to avert merely temporal scourges while we were seeking to destroy the hideous sickness that devours and damns the soul, had done what the missionaries were about to imitate.”*

*November 5*

## THE COMMUNITY IN HEAVEN

*The first four Oblates to leave for heaven were Fr. Jourdan (04/20/1823), Fr. Marcou (08/20/1826), Bro. Dumolard (07/09/1828) and Fr. Arnoux (07/13/1828).*

Now we have four in Heaven; this is already a nice community.<sup>3</sup> They are the first stones, the foundation stones of the edifice which must be built in the celestial Jerusalem; they are before God with the sign, the kind of character proper to our Society, the common vows of



all her members, the practice of the same virtues. We are attached to them by the bonds of a particular charity, they are still our brothers, and we are theirs; they dwell in our mother house, our headquarters; their prayers, the love which they keep for us, will draw us one day to them so as to dwell with them in the place of our rest. I presume that our community above must be placed quite close to our Patron; I see them at the side of Mary Immaculate and, consequently, close to our Lord Jesus Christ, whom they have followed on earth and whom they contemplate with delight; we will receive our part of this fullness if we render ourselves worthy of them by our fidelity in practising constantly this Rule which has helped them to arrive where they are. Their holy death is, in my opinion a great sanctioning of our Rules; they have received thereby a new seal of divine approbation. The gate of Heaven is at the end of the path along which we walk. Just to reflect on all that gives us enough to be ecstatic about. Speak thereof to your community; make it the subject of your conversations with Fr. Suzanne who ought to be in Aix today; may efficacious and lasting resolutions result therefrom. (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Courtès, July 22, 1828, *Oblate Writings*, 7, p. 163-164)

Our blessed Father Arnoux, model of all the virtues, heroic in observance of the Rules, as spiritual as he was holy, has gone to take possession of Heaven at the age of twenty-four years and five months, leaving us as desolate over his loss as we are edified by his coming amongst us.

I do not know which sentiment predominates but I am now afflicted, now consoled, sad and serene. To be separated from one's own costs more than one thinks, but to have the certitude that they are in Heaven, and that they have arrived there by the path which we march, oh! what a sweet thought!

You know the details of the very holy death of this blessed brother; I have given orders that they write his life; if you remember some edifying particulars, put them in writing and get them to me. I have learned yesterday that he had worked a miracle; I do not know yet the details. I am in no way surprised because canonized saints have not been more perfect than he. Invoke him then, my dear Father, and ask of him, amongst other things, to be able to live according to the spirit of

our Rules.... (Eugene de Mazenod to Fr. Guibert, July 29, 1828, *Oblate Writings*, 7, p. 164-165)

November 6

FERNAND JETTÉ (1921-2000)  
NINTH SUPERIOR GENERAL (1974-1986)

November 6, 2000, *Fr. Fernand Jetté died in Ottawa. He was born near Montreal in 1921 and entered the Oblates in 1940. Ordained in 1947, he continued his studies and became a professor of spirituality and missiology in Ottawa, working in formation and as superior of the scholasticate. In 1965 he was appointed Vice Rector of Saint Paul University and in 1968 Vicar of the Canadian Province of St. Joseph. At the General Chapter of 1972 he was elected Vicar General and in 1974 Superior General; elected to a second term at the next General Chapter he served in that position until 1986.*

*He was, as the title of his biography by Fr. Yvon Beaudoin states, "A Wise Guide in a Time of Crisis", a point of reference not only for his Congregation, but also for many other religious men and women who had to face the renewal asked for by the Second Vatican Council. His spiritual teaching will remain a source of inspiration for present and future generations.*

*The night of his first election he wrote in his diary:*

I was elected Superior General November 26, on the fifth ballot. I accepted out of love for the Congregation and fidelity to the Lord. Deep in myself, I long for tranquility and peace. But I feel that I no longer belong to myself and I will belong to myself less and less. Any attachment, any infidelity, however small, seems inconsistent with what God asks of me. I trust him and ask him to help me. I also count on the prayer and affection of my friends. (*Journal 1973-1974*, p. 306-307).

*In a 1995 interview he shared the following about his election:*

Father Deschâtelets wrote in his diary: "When I was elected General, I hardly slept all night. I felt like I was hanging between heaven and

earth. [...]” I did not feel anything like that! I said to myself, “If I am it, I am it, and I will try to be it my way. If I’m not, I will not be it.”

*After his re-election, he thanked the members of the General Chapter saying:*

We must go forward with confidence and unity, keeping our eyes well fixed on Jesus Christ and the poor of today to whom he sends us. In the Church, we are essentially missionaries and we are surrounded by “mission lands”: the working world is a mission land, the world of migrants is a mission land, the world of youth and the family itself have become mission lands. There are the “poor with their many faces whose condition cries out for a hope and salvation that only Christ can bring fully.” We have to go to all of these, never forgetting that other mission land which we call mission *ad gentes*, that brought us so many blessings in the past and that made us leave our country to go far away to witness to Jesus Christ and be witnesses and beneficiaries also of the human and religious values that too often we ourselves in our so-called Christian countries are lacking. (“OMI Information”, 168/1980, p. 5-8)

*Fernand Jetté, o.m.i. (1921-2000), “Vie Oblate Life” 60 (2001), p. 281-472; Y. Beaudoin, Fernand Jetté. Un guide sage dans un temps de crise, Rome 2012; E. Lapointe, Fernand Jetté, OMI, Introduction à ses écrits spirituels inédits, “Oblatio” II (2013), p. 247-256.*

November 7

#### TROUBLED AND TRUSTING BEFORE DEATH

*St. Eugene was always deeply touched at the news of the death of one of his Oblates. He writes to Hippolyte Courtès: The more one of our men is of good calibre, the more troubled I am, because death chooses its victims among the elite. The only thing he could do was to bow before God’s plan: “There is nothing to do but to prostrate oneself and, as always, adore the holy will of God”. (Letter to Fr. E. Semeria, September 19, 1851)*

The last post from Ceylon brought me the sad news of the death of good Bro. Byrne. I was far from expecting this new misfortune to which we must submit as to all the trials the good Lord sends us. How bitter death is when it takes away from us those whom we have so many reasons to regret. Do you imagine I have accustomed myself to the thought that I have for example lost our Fr. Aubert who was so good, so kind, so admirable? I groan several times a day over this irreparable loss. The void he leaves around me is an abyss which nothing can bridge. He is a loss to my heart, he is a daily loss to the service of the Congregation, he is a loss to all those whom he edified, whom he helped, whom he encouraged and whom he carried with him by his advice and most of all by his example. It is something one cannot console oneself about, however subject one is to the impenetrable will of God. (Eugene de Mazenod to Bishop Étienne Semeria, July 8, 1860, *Oblate Writings*, 4, p. 153)

### *November 8*

#### WE SHALL NOT FORGET THEM WHEN THEY LEAVE US

sad news of the death of Fr. Genin. The Superior of Talence, who had informed me of his hopeless condition in his first letter, announces his holy death today. All his confreres were present when he renewed his vows and could not withhold their tears when they heard him say he rejoiced to be dying in the Congregation and renewing his vows, in a way, in my presence, before my picture which he had beside his bed. He showed heroic patience and gentleness in the midst of cruel suffering which he experienced during the last fifteen days of his life.

That is how our little militant family on earth nourishes our already numerous community in heaven. May these dear brothers whom God has successively called to himself not lose sight of us in their supreme happiness. We have a great need of help and increase to keep up with the work which is being offered to us from all sides. On our side, we shall not forget them once they have left us. Fearing that there might be some obstacle to prevent their prompt entry into heaven, we accompany them with our sorrow no doubt, but also with our suffrages. The whole Congregation joins in prayer, and the indulgences and good works and

the Holy Sacrifice offered several times by each one of us, will open the gates of heaven to them, if it should happen that their holy death in the bosom of the Congregation and the renewal of their profession before leaving this earth was not sufficient to erase all their indebtedness to God. (Eugene de Mazenod, Diary 1849-1860, *Oblate Writings*, 22, p. 207-208)

*November 9, Dedication of the Lateran Basilica*

DEDICATION OF THE LATERAN BASILICA

*The Lateran Basilica, built by Constantine in honor of Christ the Savior as the seat of the bishops of Rome, is called “the mother-church of all the churches of the city and the world”. The feast commemorates the service of the Successor of Peter. St. Eugene, in the conference on the day of ordination as sub-deacon, December 23, 1809, proclaimed his fidelity to the See of Rome during the period in which Napoleon had banished the Pope to Savona.*

How could we not be moved with sympathy for the condition of abandonment she [the Church] is in. [...] Could we refrain from mingling our tears with hers?

No, no, these deeds that rend our Mother have penetrated deep into our souls [...]. Bent beneath the yoke of the nations, her own children have become her cruelest enemies.... Pressed on all sides they lay snares for her, surround her with pitfalls to fall into [...].

Ah, what has become of generous hearts! [...] The Church at bay cries aloud to her children for help in her distress, and does no one respond?

No, no, tender dear Mother, not all your children desert you in the days of your affliction; a group, small it is true, but precious for the feelings that move it, draws close around you and wipes away the tears that men's ingratitude provokes in the bitterness of your sorrow. Look, we are here, fix your gaze on us. [...]

Issue your orders, there is nothing that the prospect of your needs will not move us to undertake. We know, and if we should be unaware of it, our faults and the example of our forerunners in the faith would

soon apprise us of it, that strength does not consist in numbers, but in unity. Yes, united by the bonds of the same charity, anointed by the same spirit, tending to the same end, we will form that sacred Legion, that mystical phalanx that the world and hell cannot crush, we will march ahead carrying on high the standard of the cross, this divine sign around which we rally and which will emerge always victorious from every combat where battle is joined, and which by an unheard of privilege, has the virtue of procuring the immortal palm of victory for those who fall in its defense.

Animated by this heavenly Spirit, which you have just called down upon us, alone we will have the courage to combat your numerous enemies, to brave all dangers, face every spirit, form with our bodies an impenetrable barrier to your cruelest persecutors, die, yes die if needs be, to preserve you intact. (*Oblate Writings*, 14, p. 149-150)

*November 10*

MICHAEL RODRIGO (1927-1987)

MARTYR IN SRI LANKA

*Michael Rodrigo, a Sri Lankan, became an Oblate in 1948. He was ordained a priest in Roviano (Italy) after seven years of study in Rome. He taught at the National Seminary in Kandy (Sri Lanka). In 1959, he returned to Rome for a doctorate in Philosophy. In 1973, he went to Paris to obtain a doctorate in theology. In 1975 he was sent to the Diocese of Badulla in Sri Lanka. His consuming interest in Buddhism and his innate love of national culture led him, in 1980, to found Suba Seth Gedara, a Christian-Buddhist Fellowship and Dialog Centre, in Buttala. Together with Buddhist monks and lay people he worked towards bettering the lot of the peasants, awakening the poor to a consciousness of their worth and the possibility of growth. He had been threatened several times. He was assassinated while celebrating an evening Mass in his little chapel, on November 10, 1987. From a window behind the altar, an unknown gunman shot him dead at point-blank range.*

*Let us meditate on some of his thoughts:*

I am Buddhist by culture and a Christian by religion.

My mother died when I was very young. I did not know what to do. I was just going around. I felt lost without my mother. At this time a priest introduced me to the devotion to Our Lady. From that time on Our Lady has become my mother and this is one reason why I became an Oblate.

I have learnt at the feet of the people, the poor masses, and at the feet of the Gurus of the village whom I always revere – the Buddhist Monks who slowly but surely try in many places in Sri Lanka to lead the people to the living out of the Dhamma in practice. Every day I learn from the people, farmers and, peasants specially, patience, renunciation, acceptance of their lot, suffering, hope in solidarity and what are generally called the Saradharma, virtues of sharing, brotherhood, rejection of greed (thanha, or animalness, avarice).

Never fear studying and reflecting the culture of other religions. Dip into other religious strongly attached to Jesus.

Love all equally and each one more than the other.

There should be constant renewal in life. Like the river – the same river but not the same.

Jesus went to death because of his position in life. Our constant question should be: “Why did he die?”

Whatever you do, ask yourself how this is going to help the coming of the Kingdom.

Jesus had compassion for the people. Compassion does not come from the mind or the heart. It comes from our very bowels.

The cross is not something you hang on the wall or wear around your neck. Jesus was hung first.... We must be ready to die for our people, if the hour comes, and in the moment it comes. Jesus died at age of 33 because he was devoted to his people, the poor, the abandoned, the oppressed. (To his sister Hilda, September 28, 1987)

S. Jayawardena, *Michael Rodrigo, omi (1927-1987)*, in *Oblación y Martirio, Actas de la Conferencia, Pozuelo, 4-5 de mayo 2019*, (Oblatio Studia, 8), Rome 2019, p. 273-278.

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#### THE INTERNATIONAL ROMAN SCHOLASTICATE

*November 10, 1881, 15 scholastics arrive in Rome to attend courses at the Gregorian. That was the beginning of the Roman Scholasticate. On the centenary of its foundation, Fr. Fernand Jetté explained the reasons for this institution.*

This institution has an important role, indeed, an irreplaceable role to play in the Congregation today. In fact, within an international family such as ours, and in a time of decentralization and of more pronounced growth of legitimate diversity, it is essential that we maintain and, if possible, even multiply, such meeting points and centers of dialogue and exchange as are most likely to further unity among ourselves. [...] The *raison d'être* of the Roman Scholasticate is therefore first to develop a spirit, and a spirit that is a leaven of unity throughout the Institute. The Congregation is universal. It is involved in more than 50 countries and its heart is as big as the world. Some young people in the Congregation need to experience this international dimension more intensely.

Furthermore, the Congregation lives from the Church, not only from the local Church but from the universal Church. It has been approved by the Pope and receives the mission from the Pope to go all over the world to preach the Gospel to the poor and to work for the extension of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. The stay in Rome, the life at the International Scholasticate should develop in the young Oblates a sense of the Church and a steadfast loyalty to its Head.

The Congregation is also a family, a big family, which has a soul, which has a past, which has a Founder and saints, and which is moving towards the future with faith and courage, despite its weaknesses. All this can be witnessed in Rome. (F. Jetté, Centenary of the International Scholasticate, Homily, Rome, October 24, 1981)



REBUILDING THE BASILICA OF ST. MARTIN

*In 1857 Joseph Guibert was transferred to Tours and raised to the rank of Archbishop. Among the works accomplished during his tenure in Tours we must give first place to the initiative taken in conjunction with Mr. Dupont for the reconstruction of the famous National Basilica of Saint-Martin, almost entirely destroyed during the French Revolution. In 1860, Saint Martin's tomb was rediscovered under the ruins. A provisional chapel was erected and entrusted to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in 1867. In 1870, the Bishop had already collected more than a million francs and was able to launch the construction of the basilica.*

October 2, 1867, Feast of the Holy Guardian Angels, Rev. Fr. de L'Hermite, recently appointed Provincial of the North [Province], and the one who addresses you these lines were leaving Paris, after having received the day before at Royaumont, your paternal blessing; they were going to take possession of the residence that the Archbishop of Tours had offered to the Congregation near the tomb of Saint Martin. You chose this day in order to place the Tours foundation under the special protection of the Holy Angels. We had, in fact, need of the assistance of those blessed spirits to accomplish the mission entrusted us. It is a beautiful mission; the entire family is honored. The Archbishop of Tours, always so devoted to our dear Congregation, could not have entrusted us with a more glorious place. All the aims of our institute can be fulfilled in this vast field, and the future will further extend the sphere where already at Taise the zeal of an Oblate of Mary Immaculate can be deployed. (A. Rey, Tours, le 5 novembre 1868, Rapport sur l'année 1867-1868, "Missions OMI" 7 [1868], p. 423)

## JEAN DROUART (1911-1989)

## PASSIONATE LOVE FOR THE FOUNDER AND ANIMATOR OF THE CONGREGATION

*Jean Drouart was born on August 16, 1911 in France. After entering the novitiate in Coigny, in August 14, 1928, he did his military service in Syria. Ordained a priest in 1935, he then taught in the minor seminary in Pontmain and studied literature at the University of Angers. He was drafted during World War II and then interned in Germany. In 1947, Father Léo Deschatelets, Superior General, called him to Rome as superior of the International Scholasticate, and he then basically spent the rest of his life in the service of the General Administration: Superior of the scholasticate (1947-1954), Assistant General (1953-1966), Secretary of the Information secretariat (1967-1972). He was novice master in Sarita, Texas (1972-1973) then spent the rest of his life traveling, as an animator of "De Mazenod Retreats," study sessions and retreats, particularly in the novitiates and scholasticates of the Congregation. He was a great animator thanks to his love for the Founder, his vast knowledge of the history of the Congregation, the many travels throughout the Oblate world and his multilingual talent. He died in Rome on November 11, 1989.*

*His numerous letters testify to his love for the Congregation. Let us quote one of May 13, 1962, addressed to Father Walter Verzeletti, an Italian Oblate missionary in Laos.*

These past few weeks I have re-read your two long and beautiful letters of February 13, 1961, from Sriracha and April 4, 1961 from Vientiane, and I do so again now, that the tranquility of Sunday afternoon allows me finally to answer. But, in the context of the sad news from Laos this last week, this reading has deeply moved me. The newspapers announced yesterday morning that Houei Saj has been taken. The Very Rev. Father General, who often speaks to me about it, is deeply troubled by the thought of his children there and I do not need to tell you how much I share his feelings. I hope that you, with your companions, have been able to get to safety in Thailand, as was foreseen, but

I can only imagine how heartbroken they are to have to leave this nascent but already so promising mission.... Now it is Luang-Prabang that is directly threatened. Our thoughts turn continually to Laos and sensing our human inability to help you directly, in this month of Our Lady, we often recommend to our sweet heavenly mother her dear children of Laos. She alone can protect them and save them: her Oblates and their first Christians. Our Lady herself has known such hours of anxiety when, humanly speaking, there is no hope.... But her faith in the word of Jesus, the Resurrection and the final triumph, never faltered. With her presence and prayer, she helped the first Christian community through contradictions and persecutions. After her Assumption, throughout the whole history of the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, she has continued to be more present than ever to all her children who suffer, and still today she continues her maternal mission. Although now we cannot see a way out, from a human standpoint, let us keep unshakeable faith in the word of Jesus: "Have faith in God: I have overcome the world." Every day, we look with anxiety for news from you.

*November 12*

#### VIRTUES TO IMITATE AND EXAMPLES TO FOLLOW

Since [the last General Chapter] we had the misfortune of losing fifty [Oblates] priests and brothers. The Lord has called them to himself. I cannot name them all. But there is one who is often spoken of: Father Tempier. This is the first General Chapter in which this most revered friend of many fathers does not participate. We had the sweet hope of having with us for a long time this faithful witness of the early days of our family; God has decided otherwise. We had the consolation of receiving his last breath. The Lord wanted to reward his good servant, and to save his Catholic and French heart the heartbreaking anguish that he would have felt at seeing the Pope a prisoner in Rome, and our enemies enter Paris as victors!

Along with this name that will be revered forever, let me also mention that of Bishop Semeria, of sweet and holy memory, snatched from our affection in a manner as sudden as it was unexpected. These two dear names are followed by another fifty; the list of the dead is long! All

our fathers have died in the peace of the Lord, leaving a rich legacy of virtue to imitate and examples to follow. Now they are in the presence of God with our beloved Father. They loved their religious family on earth, now they love it in heaven, where they pray for us who remain in exile. May their prayers bring abundant blessings on this Chapter and upon the whole family. (J. Fabre, *Circular Letter* No. 25, September 8, 1873, *Circulaires administratives*, 1, p. 282-283)

\* \* \*

BLESSED PUBLIO RODRÍGUEZ MOSLARES (1912-1936)  
MARTYR OF SPAIN

*He was born in Tiedra, province and diocese of Valladolid, on November 12, 1912. Being the youngest of his siblings, he grew up a bit “spoiled”. His mother and he were very close. For this reason, it was difficult for him to tell his mother about his decision to enter the Oblates. She herself recounts: «One day when I was reprimanding him for the reluctance with which he was studying, he said to me: ‘I am studying reluctantly because this is not going to do me any good and I am wasting my time’: I told him: “Well, tell me what you want [...]”, but he kept quiet, became sad and sometimes cried, but he did not decide on anything, that is, he did not dare to tell me [...] At home we had been reading La Purísima for a long time and many times he had heard me say: “How sad it would be to have a son in those Missions that the Oblates have... Poor mothers! Poor mothers, how are they going to live, knowing that their children are dragging such great dangers out there among the ice or the hot lands, exposed to die as so many poor children have died or killed by the savages? That is why he did not dare to say anything to me, thinking that I would not let him be an Oblate. [I was very sorry to think that when he sang Mass, they might send him to some mission, and I would never see him again. So before taking him myself, I tried to convince him to become a priest. But no matter how hard I tried to persuade him, I could not succeed. I even tried to appeal to his good feelings, saying to him, “As much as you love me, don’t you think that someday your brothers will marry, and I will be left alone?”*

And she would reply, “My brothers are better than me, they love you very much and will never leave you alone. It is God who wants it, Mom, don’t suffer and don’t make me suffer. I have struggled enough for more than a year. Be generous and give God gladly what is His before it is yours”. Finally I took him to Urnieta and, when I said goodbye to him at the station, (although while I was there I tried to be cheerful) when I parted from him I could not take it anymore and tears came to my eyes, he made me laugh with his jokes: “You will see how happy you will be when you see your missionary Bishop son with a beard like that” (and he pointed to his waist)».

*His companions say that “Publio was the minstrel of the Scholasticate: he sang, laughed, made verses and told anecdotes sprinkled with proverbs and popular sayings”. One of his teachers, Fr. Mariano Martín, writes: “He had a friendly, open, fighting, proselytizing, frank, good character”. He adds: “He truly had a missionary spirit and longed for the missions, a spirit that he knew how to instill in his house, especially in his sister, the national teacher”. He made his perpetual profession on August 28, 1935. He was imprisoned and died with his companions on November 28, 1936, in Paracuellos.*

*María de los Ángeles Primo, in whose house Publio took refuge, has left us a moving testimony: «At the end of the war, when I was twelve years old, Publio’s mother, Catalina, came to Madrid. She had heard that her son Publio had been in the Modelo Prison and wanted to go there. My father tried to dissuade her because in the last period of the war the prison had been right on the front line between the cross-fire of Franco’s troops and those of the Republicans. However, since she was determined to go, my father wanted my sister Isabel and me to accompany her. Among those ruins, she searched among the various cells and corridors. Suddenly, she began to shout: “Here, here” and she entered a cell that was a small room. We went in with her and saw a whole wall of writing, and I could see how towards one corner there were some words that stood out more than the others because they were written in red, and they said: “Mother, they are taking me to kill me, I die for God”. There was a farewell that at this moment I cannot tell if it was “Do not cry, I am going with God” or if it was “Long live Christ the King”. And it was signed by Publio. To my mind it is very strange that there was another Publio, an uncommon name, and that the mother*

went so directly to the cell where these writings were. She knelt down, kissed the wall and, with a kind of knife, cut a piece of the wall where the inscription was».

\* \* \*

# PIERRE YVES KÉRALUM (1817-1872)

*According to the Necrologium O.M.I., Fr. Pierre Yves Kéralum died November 12, 1872. Born in Quimper, Brittany, France, on March 2, 1817, he arrived in Brownsville from Galveston in March 1853. From then until his death, he was a circuit rider and church architect along the lower Rio Grande. He was known among the Mexican people as el Santo Padre Pedrito for his piety, humility, generosity, and dedication to visiting the scattered Mexican ranches. Since he was not a good preacher, he was rarely in the pulpit at Brownsville, but rather often on his horse touring the countryside. At least three times a year he made missionary circuits over a vast territory of some seventy to 120 ranches, where he preached, catechized, baptized, confessed, and married the people. Along with an Oblate companion, he also preached missions on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande.*

*He began his final tour on November 9, 1872. He never arrived at his scheduled destination. The mystery of his disappearance was finally resolved ten years later, when some cowhands came across his remains in a remote section of the brush country, identifiable by his undisturbed missionary belongings. He had become lost rather than a victim of violence. In this dramatic death bespeaking arduous journeys and unflagging service to the poor and abandoned, the "Cavalry of Christ" found its spirit epitomized.*

P. Horgan, *The Devil in the Desert*, Longmans, Green, 1952; B. Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ on the Rio Grand (1849-1883)*, Milwaukee, 1956.

# SOLEMNITY OF THE DEDICATION OF OBLATE CHURCHES

*On November 10, 1950, the chapel of the General House in Rome was consecrated, and it was decreed that the celebration of the dedication be held on November 12. By decree of the Congregation for Worship, every chapel or Oblate church, if it does not have its own date, can celebrate the solemnity of its dedication on this day.*

November 13

## BLESSED JOSÉ GUERRA ANDRÉS (1914-1936) MARTYR OF SPAIN

*He was born on November 13, 1914, in the city of León, the second of 12 siblings. From a very young age he was enthusiastic about the missionary vocation. He made his first vows on September 14, 1932.*

*Affectionately called by his companions “the little big Guerra” or “Guerrita”, because of his short stature, he was a peaceful, docile, responsible, pleasant and friendly young man. He was distinguished by his love for painting and every time a poster or a landscape was needed to decorate a stage, Guerrita was there with his brushes with great dedication and tireless dedication.*

*He had already finished the second year of theology and was moving towards perpetual oblation. On July 22, 1936, he was arrested with the whole religious community and taken prisoner in the same scholasticate. He took refuge in Madrid in the house of a family known to Father José Vega. When the latter was recognized in the street by a maid from Pozuelo, he was arrested, and the family was also taken away. The hidden scholastics were able to escape by miracle as Porfirio Fernández, a survivor, recounts: «We were left alone in the house, Guerra and I, Escobar and Caballero. We had to flee before they returned. When the militias took someone out of his house, they used to leave a guard at the door, until they searched or looted everything. So, I said to Escobar and Caballero: “You go out, and if they ask you what you were doing*

here, you had come to visit Carmen; let's see if, at least, you can save yourselves. If there is no guard at the door, go to the opposite sidewalk, and make a deep bow of the head, as a sign that there is no guard". How anxiously Guerra and I waited for the password, looking out the window; and as soon as we saw the nod, like a cat [fleeing] from the fire, without turning off the lights or closing the door, and jumping down the stairs, we went to join them and took the subway at Quevedo. At the mouth of the subway, we met Calleja, who brought the message that there was no room either in San Jerónimo or in Gómez Baquero; to see if we could return to Don José's house. At that point there was no option, so we went with them to Carrera San Jerónimo, we told them what had happened, and they received us for the night. Early the next morning, Calleja took us to Gómez Baquero, at Sastre's house, where we met with twelve scholastics».

*On October 15 he was arrested again with the other Oblates and imprisoned. On November 28 he was taken out of prison with twelve of his confreres and immolated at Paracuellos del Jarama. He was 22 years old.*

\* \* \*

FRIEDRICH LORENZ (1897-1944)  
MARTYR OF NAZISM

*Born June 10, 1897, he entered the novitiate August 14, 1916, but was not able to finish it: September 21 of the same year he was drafted. Sent to the front, he was wounded twice. He was decorated with the Iron Cross. After the war he began his novitiate in Engelpport and made his first oblation on July 20, 1920. Ordained a priest on July 6, 1924, he was assigned to the community of Nikolauskloster, dedicating himself to preaching missions in the lower Rhineland. Later he went on to Stettin, in the north east region of Germany, which is now part of Poland. On August 26, 1939 Fr. Lorenz was enlisted as chaplain of an infantry division. In 1940, like all other religious, he was stripped of the rank of officer and remained free for the ministry. Thus he went back to pastoral work among the workers of the Stettin area. On the night of February*



4, 1943 the Gestapo arrested him with 40 other people. He was transferred to a military prison on July 28 where he was beheaded on November 13, 1944, at four in the afternoon. Three hours before his death, Fr. Lorenz wrote the following Testament:

May the Holy Will of God be done! It was his will that my life should not last more than 48 years, and that I should not be a priest for more than 20 years. I recommend my soul to the mercy, the kindness and love of God. I give my body back to the earth from where it was taken. Blood was shed on the cross: blood is shed on our altars at the renewal of the sacrifice of the cross. To this blood I unite my own poor drops of blood in adoration, worship and glorification of God whom I have served in thanksgiving for all the graces and benefits I have received, especially the grace of birth, of holy baptism, of my first holy communion, of my oblation and ordination; in atonement for my sins and the sins of the whole world, particularly those sins which I have not prevented, or for which I may even be responsible; in prayer for all who are near and dear to me. I die as a Catholic priest, and as an Oblate of Mary Immaculate. In the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen! Praised be Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate. Amen!

A. Schrodi, *Friedrich Lorenz, O.M.I.*, Rome 1992.

November 14

#### SAYINGS OF ST. EUGENE ON HOLINESS

Oh! Do not doubt that we will become saints in our Congregation, free but united by bonds of the most tender charity.... (To Hilaire Aubert, 1815, *Oblate Writings*, 6, p. 5)

We must be truly saints ourselves. In saying that, we include all that can possibly be said. (To Fr. Tempier, December 13, 1815, *Oblate Writings*, 6, p. 13)

The missionaries... working at their own sanctification in conformity with their vocation. (Request for Authorization to the Capitular Vicars General of Aix, January 25, 1816, *Oblate Writings*, 13, p. 3)

The missionary, being specifically called to the apostolic ministry, should aim at perfection.... So he ought to do everything to arrive at this desirable holiness which is to produce such great effects. (To Joseph Augustin Viguier, January 6, 1819, *Oblate Writings*, 6, p. 55)

They must strive to be saints... seeking at all times to reach the very summit of perfection. (*Preface*)

Have an ardent desire of his own perfection. (*Rule*, art. 697)

What holiness does not come within the apostolic vocation; I mean that which dedicates me to work unremittingly for the sanctification of souls with the means employed by the Apostles. (Examination of Conscience, October 1826, *Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 175)

Holy priests, this is our wealth! (To Fr. Honorat, August 18, 1825, *Oblate Writings*, 6, p. 183)

Recommend that they conduct themselves like saints, like real apostles. (To Fr. Tempier, March 30, 1826, *Oblate Writings*, 7, p. 73)

*November 15*

#### SAYINGS OF ST. EUGENE ON HOLINESS

[We belong to a Society] in which all the members work to become saints in the exercise of the same ministry and the exact practice of the same Rules. (To Fr. Courtès, March 13, 1830, *Oblate Writings*, 7, p. 196)

In the matter of perfection, one should never say “enough!”. (Act of Visitation, Billens, August 26, 1831)

I do not want any smoking wicks in the society, may they burn, give heat, light the way or leave. (Diary, July 19, 1846, *Oblate Writings*, 21)

It is decided: get rid of those who do not strive for perfection. (*Un devoir de famille*, “Missions OMI” 44 [1906], p. 225)

My prayer is that the scholastics be really imbued with what the Church expects of them; a mediocre virtue will not be an adequate response to the demands of their holy vocation.... They have to realize that their ministry is the continuation of the apostolic ministry.... So let them lose no time in becoming saints, if they have not done so already.... (To Fr. Mouchette, December 2, 1854, *Oblate Writings*, 11, p. 253)

Never allow yourself to be crushed by the difficulties and the sufferings that are inseparable from our life here below, whatever the position in which Providence has placed us. Wisdom consists in taking advantage of everything for our sanctification. When we love God, everything that happens enriches our souls with merits. *Diligentibus Deum omnia cooperantur in bonum*. I have such a high view of your vocation that I cannot bear the thought of the tiniest imperfection and it troubles me as if it were a serious infidelity. Every day I pray that his grace will keep you all in great holiness. I cannot think in other terms of the life of sublime devotion which is the life of our missionaries. (To Fr. Végreville, April 17, 1860, *Oblate Writings*, 2, p. 228-229)

November 16

#### CALLED TO BE SAINTS

To what are we called, my dear Brothers? To become saints, to effectively work for the sanctification of the most abandoned souls. This is our vocation.... We must work actively and generously for our own sanctification, that is to meditate every day more seriously and thoroughly on the duties of our state, know better the virtues that God de-

mands of our soul, so that by an increasingly religious conduct we will be able to carry out our holy obligations.

To work for the sanctification of others by doing external ministry is a beautiful mission, but this is only part of our holy vocation; it presumes the first as the principle and source of its fruitfulness. Indeed, can we effectively and supernaturally respond to the grace of the ministry of souls, if we do not already have a clear idea and a deep sense of the need for our own sanctification?

Our negligence by depriving us of fervor and holiness, will deprive those souls of the fruit and reward of this fervor and holiness. (J. Fabre, *Circular Letter* No. 11, March 21, 1862, *Circulaires administratives*, 1, p. 70-71, 73)

November 17

#### SAYINGS OF THE SUPERIORS GENERAL ON HOLINESS

We are happy to see that we encounter some model religious in our ranks. They love and practice the Rule with complete and constant fidelity. Concerned above all for their own sanctification, they find delight in poverty, humility, mortification, and obedience. Their life exudes the fragrance of the life of Our Lord, and when they pass by, they are greeted with a word that says it all: He is a saint! (C. Augier, *Circular Letter* No. 84, July 1905, *Circulaires administratives*, 3, p. 27-28)

*Noblesse oblige*: Sons and brothers of saints, we must strive to be saints ourselves. (A. Dontenwill, *Circular Letter* No. 113, December 25, 1915, *Circulaires administratives*, 3, p. 287).

These Rules [...] that have helped to sanctify so many Oblates! (A. Dontenwill, *Circular Letter* No. 132, December 25, 1925, *Circulaires administratives*, 4, p. 20)

The Rules: Let us observe them. They are holy, and shall sanctify us. (A. Dontenwill, *Circular Letter* No. 137, March 19, 1927, *Circulaires administratives*, 4, p. 91)

No limits to personal holiness. (L. Deschâtelets, *Circular Letter* No. 191, August 15, 1951, *Circulaires administratives*, 5, p. 320)

How can we claim to be the dispensers of the mysteries of God if we do not know from personal experience what the Trinity is, its indwelling, who Christ is, the Most Holy Virgin? (L. Deschâtelets, *Circular Letter* No. 208, September 1, 1959, *Circulaires administratives*, 6, p. 64)

As religious, we must strive for holiness; the Founder expressly demanded it. We are religious to become saints. (L. Deschâtelets, *Circular Letter* No. 222, January 25, 1966, *Circulaires administratives*, 7, p. 33)

*November 18, Dedication of the Basilicas of St. Peter and Paul*

#### CHRISTIAN ROME

*The feast of the dedication of the basilicas of Saints Peter and Paul recalls the centrality of the city of Rome in the Christian world. The many and prolonged stays of St. Eugene in Rome led him to discover the rich heritage of the city's faith. On his first visit to the "capital of the Christian world" he wrote:*

I am not resisting the desire to write to you and to date my epistle from the capital of the Christian world. This title is due to this beautiful city of Rome, not only because she is the seat of the Vicar of Jesus Christ, visible head of the Church, but also because she is, as it were, a *Compendium* of Christianity. It is only here, I believe, that they have understood how a dwelling should be built for God on earth. One has no idea of the magnificence of the temples found at every step. There are as many as five or six in the same place, each more beautiful, more rich, more imposing than the others. One truly conceives how in heaven one shall never tire of praising God and of loving him while contemplating his infinite perfections, when one feels, at the sight of this beauty, work of feeble creatures, the sentiment of admiration grow without ceasing

instead of becoming exhausted, when one would think one has reached one's limit.

And what food for devotion is provided at the sight of so many monuments which attest the victory of the martyrs who have drowned idolatry in their blood. Their bodies still exist and their memory, so to say, is still fresh after eighteen and nineteen centuries which have destroyed both their persecutors and their works which seemed established for all eternity; the ruins which are trod underfoot still stagger the imagination, so vast they are in conception and in their details. The baths, for instance, as vast as a great city, were the work under Diocletian of forty thousand Christians who received as salary martyrdom in frightful torments. These baths were adorned with statues, porticoes, colonnades; there were fountains, shady groves, and even lakes which had been artistically designed within their enclosure. The works of architecture of the best masters, the priceless tableaux, the marbles that are only to be seen here, porphyry, alabaster and even exquisite libraries; nothing was spared. There no longer exists anything but the site and the broken masonry, while the poor slaves, the vile Christians as they were looked upon by their sacrilegious tyrants, are still the object of veneration of peoples, and their remains are precious kept in the neighbouring catacombs where one kisses the ground and tears flow.

All is holy here for him who comes as a true Christian pilgrim. As for me, I only see the apostles, the martyrs, the holy confessors of all ages. There is not a corner of Rome which is not a monument of faith or piety. (To Fr. Courtès, December 6, 1825, *Oblate Writings*, 6, p. 205-206)

\* \* \*

BLESSED JUAN ANTONIO PÉREZ MAYO (1907-1936)  
MARTYR OF SPAIN

*He was born on November 18, 1907, in Santa Marina del Rey (León). Doctor of Philosophy and Licentiate in Theology at the "Angelicum" in Rome, he was ordained priest on June 26, 1932. In 1935 he was assigned to Pozuelo as a professor of Philosophy.*

*He was attentive, helpful and austere with himself. His students valued him not only for his qualities as a good teacher, but also for his dedication, closeness and clarity in his classes. Knowledgeable about the works of the Congregation, he was distinguished by his devotion to the Immaculate Conception.*

*He was arrested with all his brothers of the Community on July 22, 1936 and taken prisoner in the same scholasticate. Two days later, in the early morning of July 24, he was taken with six other Oblates, all students, and with the layman Cándido Castán San José and was martyred that same day in the Casa de Campo, a place located between Pozuelo de Alarcón and Madrid. He was 28 years old.*

November 19

#### SAYINGS OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL ON HOLINESS

The [Founder] certainly wants zeal; he knows that it makes missionaries and apostles; the virtue of the apostle is zeal. But he also knows that there are two kinds of zeal. First, the one that has nothing in common with true zeal but the name, which is only a need of nature, a need for movement and action. This zeal is not good. The real and efficient zeal, the one that stirs souls, that touches them, that converts them is the zeal that comes from holiness. This is a result, a consequence of holiness. So, our Founder puts holiness as the foundation of our spiritual building – *Serio sanctitati suae incumbere habent.* – and zeal as the crowning, as the result, as the fruit of holiness. (A. Dontenwill, *Circular Letter* No. 137, March 19, 1927, *Circulaires administratives*, 4, p. 90)

The first prophetic mark of a religious family, no matter how missionary it is, will always be the quality of its being and the holiness of its members. The Church needs our action, but she needs our holiness even more. (F. Jetté, Report to the 30th General Chapter, September 8, 1980, “Acta Administrationis Generalis” V [1980], p. 16).

Today more than ever the Lord calls us in our being and not only in our action. The needs of salvation of humanity today not only pres-

ent us with new missionary challenges, but they call for holiness and a new lifestyle at both the personal and community level. One Oblate, shortly before dying of cancer, wrote me: "The real challenge today for the Oblates is not evangelization but holiness." In today's secularized world it is the quality of one's personal being that makes us authentic missionaries, witnesses of the Transcendence and spiritual guides. (M. Zago, To the Oblates of the European Region, March 8, 1991, "Acta Administrationis Generalis" XIV [1991], p. 16)

November 20

OVIDE CHARLEBOIS (1862-1933)  
MISSIONARY BISHOP, SERVANT OF GOD

*The Servant of God Ovide Charlebois was born in Oka, in the Province of Quebec, February 17, 1829. He entered the novitiate in 1862. Ordained in 1887, he devoted himself to the ministry of evangelization among the native peoples in the west of Canada. He was appointed the first Vicar Apostolic of Keewatin and ordained a bishop in 1910. Facing extreme difficulties, he organized his immense Vicariate, giving an example of patience and humility. He promoted the proclamation by Pope Pius IX of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus as patron saint of the missions. He died a holy death in Le Pas November 20, 1933. His episcopal motto was: "To Jesus through Mary." He was saying: "These two loves form one love."*

My dear brothers and fathers, [faced with what is called civilization that is coming with the construction of the railway] a missionary, an apostle must show more zeal and bravery. The devil and the world join hands to lead our [Indians] to perdition; our duty is to get together and put up a vigorous and sustained struggle. Our enemy is powerful, but what have we to fear? Have we not God on our side? Let us therefore be true soldiers of Christ. The enemy deploys more evil, well, let us deploy more zeal. The routine and the *status quo* of the past is no longer sufficient. We must stir up new courage and deploy new ardor.

First of all, my very dear brothers and fathers, let us be zealous towards ourselves. Work with renewed energy for our own sanctifica-



tion. If evil increases, our holiness will increase proportionally. Let us use the principle of opposites. Are we seeing the spirit of prayer diminishing in our population? Pray more and better. Is there a decrease of faith? Live with a greater spirit of faith and love for our perfection. The love of enjoyments and pleasures seems to increase? Love and practice mortification more ardently. Does an increase of intemperance and licentious life call for our response? Let us be on our guard, fearing even to show any interest in liquor. Our purity especially must be blameless. With such sentiments and such behavior we will be strong and powerful. Our struggle against the destructive spirit that attacks our Christians will be more effective. Our words will have a salutary power to convert and save.

We must then consider our faithful. Since they are exposed to greater perils of evil and destruction, it is our duty to provide them with new ways of preservation and salvation. What once was enough will not be enough in the future. The first of these ways is a more perfect instruction. Ignorance is the source of all evil ... (Circular, September 23, 1912)

J.M. Penard, *Mgr Charlebois. Notes et souvenirs*, Montréal, 1938, 244 p.; G. Carrière, *Le père du Keewatin, Mgr O. Charlebois, omi, (1862-1933)*, Montréal 1962, 240 p.; M. Lajeunesse, *Vertus de Mgr Charlebois*, Le Pas 1951, 306 p.; Y. Beaudoin, *Comment le Serviteur de Dieu Ovide Charlebois a-t-il illustré le charisme oblat par sa vie et son ministère?*, “Vie Oblate Life” 62 (2003), p. 7-33.

*November 21, Presentation of the B.V. Mary*

#### THE OBLATES' MARIAN TITLES

*Fernand Jetté has collected a series of Marian titles given to the Oblates by St. Eugene and to Mary herself. The many references can be found in an article published by him in “Études oblates”.*

Our titles are those of sons of Mary, children of Mary Immaculate, members of the family of Mary. These first titles refer first of all to our person, without excluding, however, our apostolic zeal. They are based

on the consecration we make of ourselves to Mary Immaculate by our oblation. This consecration signs us, marks us with a distinctive character, to which corresponds what we can call a "grace of predilection", a guarantee, a contract, or simply a sign of predestination. *Servatis servandi*, according to the constant thought of the Founder our salvation is assured definitely by our entrance into the Congregation.

This guarantee is based on the titles and the duties that she assumes towards us because of our religious consecration. She becomes, in a special way, "our Mother", "our dear Mother", "our Patron", "our Advocate", "our Queen". She has a duty to assist us at our death, to welcome us to heaven, to place us "at the feet of his Throne", since because of the sign, that character proper to our Society... we deserve to be placed "very close to our Patron."

Mary's duty will be fulfilled if we fulfill our duties towards her, that is to say, to the extent that we put ourselves totally in her hands, being constantly with her in the presence of our good Master, putting "all our trust" in her, after God, "praying to her and invoking her frequently", "imitating her virtues", "carrying her banner", "wearing her livery", giving her "the care of our health when sick", "the safety of our vocation in desperate cases", and finally entrusting our entire being to her, so that at the hour of death she herself will come to get us. [...].

So, for Mgr. de Mazenod to become an Oblate of Mary Immaculate means, in a certain sense, on the one hand, to be joined with Mary in giving birth to Jesus in souls, teaching by word and example who Jesus Christ is; on the other hand, it means to involve Mary in our apostolic life, to force her, we could say, to make this life fruitful, helping us with all her power to continue the redemptive work of Jesus. From this we can see that we are under the patronage and protection of Mary so as to be better priests and apostles, just as we are religious to be better priests. (F. Jetté, *Essai sur le caractère marial de notre spiritualité*, "Études oblates" 7 [1948], p. 39-40, 43)

BLESSING THE CHAPEL OF THE MISSION IN AIX

In the Archdiocese of Aix, the feast of the Immaculate Conception was celebrated on November 21. On that date, in 1814, according to the rescript received from Pope Pius VII, the Youth Association, or Congregation, as it was called, was officially installed. The following year, again on that same day, the choir of the old Carmelite chapel was opened. It was the place where the youth gathered and prayed; later it would be used by the missionaries.

The choir that must serve as chapel for the Congregation was so profaned during the Revolution that it has been necessary to have it blessed. This blessing took place today very solemnly in the presence of the whole Congregation. Rev. Father Beylot, Capitular Vicar General, then celebrated the first Mass there at which a very large number of congregants had the happiness of receiving communion. The Blessed Sacrament remained the whole day in the tabernacle, and that will be the rule every Sunday. There was perpetual adoration all day long. The congregants changed places every half-hour before the Blessed Sacrament. In the evening we said solemn Vespers. Then the Blessed Sacrament was exposed, the litanies of the Blessed Virgin and some other prayers were sung. Before giving the blessing, the Rev. Director delivered a short colloquy in the name of the Congregation which had the customary effect of this pious exercise, a felt increase of fervour in every heart. It seems at these times, short as they always seem, that Our Lord Jesus Christ responds promptly with an abundance of graces and consolations that he pours out in the souls of those who address him by the mouth of his minister, to the requests they make him through his instrument. One always emerges from this exercise, and in general from all the solemnities which are held in Congregation, with a feeling of the truth of this word of Scripture: *melius est dies una in atriis tuis, Domine, super millia* (Ps. 83: 11). (St. Eugene, Diary of the Aix Youth Congregation, November 21, 1815, *Oblate Writings*, 16, p. 169)

## THE WAY OF HOLINESS

The present Constitutions and Rules present the dynamism of holiness. We read that the unconditional gift of our oblation must be ceaselessly *renewed* (see C 2); Oblates are called to *grow* “in faith, hope and love” (C 11); “we are pilgrims, walking with Jesus in faith, hope and love” (C 31).

Formation is seen in the light of this dynamic. Indeed, “the goal of the formation process is that each of us become [*de faire grandir*] an apostolic man” (C 46) in such a way as to attain “maturity in faith based on a personal decision for Christ” (R 52) [R 65a in CCRR 2000]. “Jesus calls to total [*devenir pleinement*] discipleship” (C 50). Constitution 47 speaks in the same vein, expressing itself with equal clarity: “Formation is a process which aims at the integral *growth* of a person and lasts a lifetime. It enables us to accept ourselves as we are and *develop* into the persons we are called to be. Formation involves us in an *ever-renewed conversion* to the Gospel and a readiness *to learn and to change* in response to new demands”.

This dynamism, constantly demanded of the spiritual life, has serious consequences, even on the apostolic life since it is called to a sustained renewal. “Faithfulness to our Oblate vocation must guide us [...] in establishing [...] priorities and in determining which ministries to accept. [...] The same concern will also serve as a criterion in the periodic re-evaluation of our apostolic commitments” (R 4) [R 7d in CCRR 2000]. The requirement is for a “creative and ongoing fidelity” (C 46). “We are instruments of that Word. We have thus to be open and flexible, learning how to find answers to new questions” (C 68).

The building up of the interior man in us is a never-ending task. Its goal is to reach the adult stature of Christ, a journeying which will continue “until the day of the Lord comes”. The Spirit alone can bring this work to completion. He alone can bring about that our being, our time, our work, and our love can be interiorly molded by Christ and turned toward him. Eugene de Mazenod wrote: “It is that divine Spirit who must henceforth be absolute master of my soul, the only mover of my thoughts, desires, affections my whole entire will”. Sanctification is the

work of the Spirit who, by his nature, is always creative and always offers an open invitation to march resolutely forward on the road of life. Armed with this knowledge, every Oblate is “[...] throughout life’s various stages [...] called to respond generously to the promptings of the Spirit” (C 49). (F. Ciardi, *Holiness*, DOV, p. 397)

*November 23*

#### THOUGHTS ON MORTIFICATION

Ministers of the Gospel must hold in highest regard Christian mortification if they wish to reap abundant fruits from their labors. Consequently, the members of our Society will earnestly wage war upon their internal inclinations, their passions, and in all things seek to deny their own will. In imitation of the Apostle, they will seek to glory in their sufferings, reproaches, and humiliations for Christ’s sake. (*The Rule of St. Eugene*...., Woestman, ed., p. 58)

I will try above all to mortify my spirit, to stifle the disorderly desires of my heart, bring this will of mine into submission; I will do all I can to overcome my temperament, to this end I will make use of every occasion that presents itself. (Eugene de Mazenod, Resolutions taken during the retreat made on entering the seminary in October 1808, *Oblate Writings*, 14, p. 57)

General resolution to be wholly God’s and for all, to flee the world and all it may offer as sops, etc., to seek only the cross of J.C. and the penance due to my sins, to seize every opportunity that arises to mortify myself, trample nature underfoot and deny it without letting up. As St. Peter says, I will not set my heart on any earthly thing: “I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.” [1 Peter 2:11]. (Eugene de Mazenod, General Resolution, End of December 1811, *Oblate Writings*, 14, p. 231)

To try to obtain that the Lord will hear my prayers, I will join to the most exact observance of his Law the practice of mortification in such wise that it flows through all my actions, and into every circumstance

of my life, reminding me that the whole life of Jesus my model was a perpetual cross and a continual martyrdom. (Eugene de Mazenod, December 1812, *Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 14)

November 24

# ST. EUGENE'S AUSTERITY

The whole life of Jesus my model was a perpetual cross and a continual martyrdom.... I will act in such a way that this spirit of penance be so impressed on my soul, that I seize with joy every occasion of practicing it. It must flow into everything, both exterior and interior. Interiorly, by making me renounce my own mind, by subjecting my will and my tastes, by holding me continually in humility, by patience in contradictions and by joy in being despised. Exteriorly, by holding captive my senses and punishing my body, both by privation of the things that it likes most.... (Eugene de Mazenod, December 1812, *Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 14-15)

The intensity and depth of Bishop de Mazenod's spiritual life could not go unnoticed by the people of his diocese. His austerity especially impressed them. His intransigence in the matter of abstinence was *common* knowledge, even at official receptions, including those of His Imperial Majesty. Whenever meat was served at these receptions on days of abstinence, the bishop refused every course, and even refused to unfold his napkin. It was commonly known that he increased his fasts and observed them so strictly that his evening collation on days of fast became restricted to a glass of water and a few mouthfuls of bread. Even in his old age, the prelate refused to reduce either the number or the rigor of his fasts and to those who cited his old age as a justification for lessening or mitigating them, he replied: "My eighty years might dispense me from fasting, but they do not dispense me from doing penance for my sins." As for his corporal chastisements, he never ceased inflicting them on himself from the days of his seminary training. (Leflon, IV, p. 319)

November 25

#### TO COMBAT SELF-LOVE

One must work at it each instant of the day. To continually stamp out those passions that would be reborn from their embers, to calm the first movements of a heart susceptible to a number of disordered affections, to combat especially that self-love, eternal enemy of our every action that it corrupts.... (Eugene de Mazenod, Retreat notes, December 1814, *Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 101)

The scholastic who wants to sacrifice himself will find occasions everywhere: an exam to prepare, a boring course to accept joyfully, an outing to be sacrificed, a *dolce far niente* [one sweet is nothing] replaced by research work [...]. Sometimes we want so much to show the life of perfection as fully consistent with nature and culture that we may tone down or soften the demands of Christian and religious asceticism.

Like any religious, the scholastic must not shrink from sacrifice, never step aside to dodge the cross. But above all he should apply himself to the asceticism that his life as a religious student requires, the death to so many activities and tendencies, which perhaps may be good in themselves, but that he must renounce to adapt himself perfectly for the service of Christ. (M. Gilbert *La vie spirituelle du scolastique et le règle*, “Études oblates” 12 [1953], p. 49)

November 26, St. Leonard of Port Maurice

#### A MODEL OF A MISSIONARY PREACHER

*The name of Saint Leonard is in the Congregation's litany of the saints. St. Eugene considered him a model of a missionary preacher.*

*When Forbin-Janson was in Rome, he asked him to bring him the Life of the Bl. Leonard of Port Maurice, his Discorso mistico or other writings for the use of confessors and another brochure in Italian, “whose title I do not quite remember, and which was composed, I think, for young missionaries: Istruzione per gli novelli confessori” (July 19, 1814). He made the same request to Tempier when he was in Rome in*

1832: "If you find a life of Blessed Leonard of Port Maurice, get it for me." (June 25, 1832).

*In his May 1818 retreat notes we read:* "The thought that engaged and beguiled me throughout my thanksgiving [*after Mass*], is that I must be a saint, and what is surprising, this seemed so easy to me that I did not doubt that it had to be; a glance at the saints of our time like Blessed Leonard of Port Maurice and Blessed Alphonsus Liguori, seemed to give me encouragement and strength".

*February 28, 1826, while he was in Rome for the approval of the Rules, St. Eugene visited the convent of St. Bonaventure near the Colosseum, and he went back again on March 15:*

I went to say Mass at Saint Bonaventure's retreat house, run by the Franciscan Fathers. Blessed Leonard of Port Maurice died in this holy house. [...] I said Mass at the main altar under which the body of Blessed Leonard rests, dressed in religious garb. [...] The sight of this holy body inspired deep veneration in me; I recalled all he had suffered in difficult mission ministry, and recommended myself to the saint that he obtain for me, and for all of ours, a full share in the spirit which inspired him all his life. [...] After that we went to see the room where the saint rendered his soul to God; it has been changed into a chapel. [...] The good Father Vicar spoke emotionally to me about some traits in the life of this great servant of God. (*Diary, Oblate Writings*, 17, p. 108-109)

*November 22, 1854, while he is in Rome for the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, Saint Eugene writes to Templier:*

The very same day I had been to visit the cell where Blessed Leonard of Port-Maurice lived and from where he went up to heaven. How much at home I felt in that narrow sanctuary, I had to tear myself away, I was so much at home there. When I left that place and made my way again into the church to revere the Blessed's saintly remains, I reflected to myself: soon you will have to put in an appearance in the fine rooms at the Quirinal and see all that human greatness has to show. What does it amount to in comparison with what I taste here? Such were my sentiments in fact when the moment came. (*Oblate Writings*, 11, p. 251)



*On November 16 he had noted in his diary:*

During the visit I made three days ago to the Saint Bonaventure ritiro... I prayed as fervently as possible, in the cell and in the very place where the Blessed Leonard of Port Maurice rendered his holy soul to God. I scarcely was able to tear myself away from the holy place, whereas I longed to get away from the fine halls of the Quirinal. I am taking away with me the newly printed writings of the Blessed and some small pieces of his relics. (*Oblate Writings*, 17, p. 202-203)

\* \* \*

*On November 26, 1881, Fr. Martelet installed the new community of the Procurator to the Holy See and the International Scholasticate in Rome, in a house in Piazza San Ignazio 152, in front of St. Ignatius Church. Fifteen scholastics had arrived in Rome a few days earlier, on November 10. The courses were held at the Germanic College, where the Roman Jesuit College had been temporarily transferred.*

*November 27*

#### MADONNA OF THE MIRACULOUS MEDAL

*November 27, 1830, the Virgin Mary appeared to Catherine Labouré. She was dressed in a white silk dress, enclosed in an oval frame, almost as if outlining a sketch of a medal and surrounded by an inscription in gold letters: "O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you." This was an unusual invocation at the time. When Pius IX defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854, acknowledging that "it was a truth tenaciously guarded in the hearts of the faithful", he was also able to base it on the fact that there were already at least ten million Christians who wore the miraculous medal.*

*Just a few years after the appearance to Catherine Labouré, the Directory for Novices of the Missionary Oblates, already recommended: "They do well to always wear a little miraculous medal of the Immaculate Conception, taking care to occasionally kiss it and recite the prayer printed on it."*

Everyone will have a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin and consider her their patroness and mother; they will show unmistakable signs of their filial piety, not just by imitating her virtues, but also by praising her privileges and trying to spread her cult. They will gladly speak of the titles given her for our confidence and our love; they will not let a day pass without a visit to the chapel dedicated to her, celebrating her feasts with devotion, preceding them with some act of mortification to prepare more fervently. (Regulations of the Major Seminary of Marseilles, around 1825, Art. 45)

*In October 1831, St. Eugene copies the text of the Rule into his private notes:*

Devotion to Mary should characterize us. At least once a day they will pay a visit of adoration to Christ the Lord. They will also make a visit to a statue or altar of the Blessed Virgin, towards whom all the members of the Society will cultivate a special devotion, and to whom they will always look up as to their beloved Mother. They will recite the rosary every day, and will leave nothing undone to make the faithful most fervently and trustfully devout to this Immaculate Virgin, the Most Holy Mother of God. (Art. 257-258)

*November 28*

#### OBLATE MARTYRS OF SPAIN

*The martyrdom of 22 Oblates, priests, brothers and scholastics, in Pozuelo de Alarcón (Madrid), happened during the period of the great religious persecution in Spain, in the three years 1936-1939, when thousands of Christians were killed for belonging to the Church.*

*The first seven Oblates were taken from the scholasticate on July 24, 1936, to be shot:*

Juan Antonio Pérez Mayo, priest, professor, 29.

Manuel Gutiérrez Martín, student, sub-deacon, 23.

Cecilio Vega Dominguez, student, sub-deacon, 23.

Francisco Polvorinos Gómez, student, 26.

Juan Pedro Cotillo Fernández, student, 22.

Pascual, Aláez Medina, student, 19.

Justo González Lorente, student, 21.  
With them Cándido Castán, layman, father with 2 children.

*November 7:*

Fr. José Vega Riaño, priest and formator, 32.

*November 8:*

Serviliano Riaño Herrero, student, 30.

*November 28, 1936 it was the turn of the others:*

Francisco Esteban Lacal, Provincial Superior, 48.

Vicente Blanco Guadilla, local superior, 54.

Gregorio Escobar García, priest, recently ordained, 24.

Justo Gil Pardo, student, deacon, 26.

Juan José Caballero Rodríguez, student, sub-deacon, 24.

Angel Francisco Bocos Hernández, lay brother, 53.

Marcelino Sánchez Fernández, lay brother, 26.

Publio Rodríguez Moslares, student, 24.

José Guerra Andrés, student, 22.

Daniel Gómez Lucas, student, 20.

Eleuterio Prado Villarroel, lay brother, 21.

Justo Fernández González, student, 18.

Clemente Rodríguez Tejerina, student, 18.

*Despite the psychological torture during the cruel captivity no one apostatized, nor lost faith, nor complained of having embraced a religious vocation. We have the direct testimony of the massacre from those who buried the bodies:*

I am completely convinced that November 28, 1936 a priest or a religious who asked the militia to let him say goodbye to all his companions and give them absolution, was granted that favor. Once he had finished, he shouted loudly: “We know that you are killing us because we are Catholics and religious; we are that. I and my companions forgive you from our hearts. Long live Christ the King.”

*The new priest Gregorio Escobar had written to his family: “I have always been profoundly moved by the stories of the martyrs. Whenever*

I have read about them, I have felt a secret desire to have the same fate. This would be the greatest priesthood to which a Christian could aspire: to offer to God one's own body and blood in sacrifice for the faith. What a blessing it would be to die as a martyr."

*The Superior General, Fr. Louis Lougen, wrote this about them:*

These young men knew what was happening in Spain at the time. They were threatened publicly with people shouting at them, "Kill those Brothers!" In the streets, people made gestures with knives cutting throats to indicate what should be done to religious men. From their residence, the Oblates could see the smoke of burning churches and convents destroyed by those who hated the Church. Among themselves, the Oblates talked about how they would escape from their residence if it were set on fire. Even in this climate of hostility, they went on faithfully with their prayers, studies and work right up to the time of imprisonment.

In the jail, they were treated mercilessly with scant food, humiliations, physical beatings, bitter cold, poor hygienic conditions for toilet needs and lice. Crowded conditions and the bitter cold forced them to sleep standing up at times.

The response of these men was unfailing courage and strength. They endured the conditions in the jail with a spirit of prayer. They remained closely united, caring for each other and encouraging one another and they maintained spirits of serenity and even joy, trusting in God.

The exact words of Clemente Rodriguez Tejerina, 18 years old, were recounted by his sister: "We are in danger, and we fear that we will be separated; we encourage each other. But even if we have to die, I am ready, and I am sure that God will give us the strength that we need to be faithful." [...]

These men were Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. The word "Oblate" means an oblation, an offering. Through our way of life we Oblates strive to offer our lives to God through Mary, the Mother of Jesus. We make a gift of ourselves to serve God's people, especially the poor. The passion and death of these 22 Oblates of Mary Immaculate, was the total gift of their lives for Jesus Christ, their Lord; it was the gift of their lives for the good of the people of Spain; it was the gift of

their lives for the good of the mission of the Church and of the Oblates all over the world. Many of them were filled with Oblate zeal preparing to head to the missions that the Province of Spain had in Argentina and Uruguay. They did not reach their missionary destinations, but their violent execution was the complete oblation, the total gift of self, offered to God for the good of Christ's mission. [...]

The young Oblate martyrs of Spain teach us that our life has its deepest and most beautiful meaning when we live for others and make our life a gift, an offering, an oblation. (L. Lougen, *Witnesses in the World*, Malaga, August 13, 2011)

*Oblación y Martirio, Actas de la Conferencia, Pozuelo, 4-5 de mayo 2019*, F. Ciardi - A. Ruiz González (editores), (Oblatio Studia, 8), Missionarii OMI, Rome 2019; D. Lopez, *El sueño de las espigas. Historia de los mártires oblatos de Pozuelo*, (Oblatio Studia, 8), Missionarii OMI, Rome 2020.

November 29

VICTOR LELIÈVRE (1876-1956)  
APOSTLE OF THE SACRED HEART

*He was born in Brittany (France) March 4, 1876 and died in Quebec on November 29, 1956. Upon arriving in Canada, in 1903, he devoted himself to preaching the Gospel "in a season and out of season." In Québec City, every first Friday of the month for 25 years, he met for an hour of adoration with about 2000 workers in overalls. In 1923 he founded the Jesus the Worker retreat house where, until his death, he gathered many men and young people. He had the gift not only of winning them to Christ, but often of making them true apostles. He was instrumental in the vocation of 80 priests, and about thirty men and more than one hundred women religious. His cause of beatification was introduced in Rome on March 10, 2006.*

We can understand that if Father Lelièvre had always the Sacred Heart "on his lips and in his heart", and if "it was talk of the Sacred Heart of Jesus that opened each of his homilies," it was from the Gospel that he drew his teaching. Father Grelaud, his superior, had told him,

"to evangelize, you must take your Gospel." This is what he did. He meditated, learned by heart the text of the Gospel of Weber [The Four Gospels in One] and preached it throughout his life. "Day and night, he fed on the sweet bread of the gospel." "He knew his Gospel by heart." The theme, the source of his preaching, say his contemporaries, "was the Sacred Heart and the Gospel." "It was the Word of God, it was the gospel." "The Gospel, the spirit of the Gospel, filled him," says Father Paquin, a witness at the trial. "With the Gospel, he made the adorable person of the Savior alive and active." "He speaks of the Gospel as gospel," wrote Father Ubald Villeneuve to R. Emond, December 30, 1933.

Preaching the Gospel is his "best remedy", he wrote in 1927 (*Letter to S.-C. Committee February 22, 1927*). He never stopped boasting of its greatness. "The Gospel is not a book, it is the Savior, alive, talking to us and providing the omnipotence of his light and mercy." (*Leaflet for the members in 1925*) In a Lenten talk on the radio, April 4, 1947, he said: "Faith was spread throughout the world with the Gospel and it still bears fruit in souls by preaching the Word of God [...] The Gospel is a mirror, a ciborium and a monstrance where Jesus shows himself to us and photographs each of us...." (Testimonies from *Victor Lelièvre, Informatio*, Rome 2006, p. lxx-lxxvi)

E. Nadeau, *Victor Lelièvre, pêcher d'hommes*, Cape-de-laMadeleine, Québec 1964; L.-M. Parent, *Victor Lelièvre, un homme branché sur le Sacré-Cœur (1876-1956)*, Collection Volontaires de Dieu, Trois-Rivières (Québec) 1993.

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#### IMMACULATE CONCEPTION NOVENA BEGINS

*On October 3, 1855, St. Eugene, when giving the Imprimatur for publication of a novena of the Immaculate composed by Father Lagier (The first edition was in 1849), writes that it is "for our diocese and for all the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate." The custom of celebrating the novena had already existed for some years.*

November 30

AUGUSTIN DONTENWILL (1857-1931)  
FIFTH SUPERIOR GENERAL (1908-1931)

*On November 30, 1931, Archbishop Augustin Dontenwill, the fifth Superior General, died in Rome. Born in 1857 in France he migrated to United States at the age of 15 and later completed his education at the University of Ottawa, joining the Oblates in 1880. He was ordained a priest in 1885 and in 1897 he became the Coadjutor of the bishop of New Westminster, Paul Durieu, succeeding him in 1899. In 1908 the diocese of New Westminster was elevated to the rank of the Archdiocese of Vancouver and Mgr. Dontenwill became its first Archbishop (appointed on September 19<sup>th</sup>). A day after this appointment, on September 20<sup>th</sup>, he was elected the Superior General of the Oblates and thus had to resign as the Archbishop of Vancouver. He led the Congregation methodically, carefully and firmly, both during the difficult period of the First World War, and during the subsequent period of rebuilding.*

*On the occasion of the first centenary of our foundation, he wrote a letter to the whole Congregation:*

The Foundation of Father de Mazenod, a small mustard seed thrown into the ground in 1816, grew, flourished, and developed into a large tree, because it was inspired, it was fueled and maintained by a great compassion for sinners and a tireless zeal for their salvation.

Christians, and especially priests, assembled to honor and console Our Lord, are never more closely united than when working to stoke the fire of divine love that he came in person to light himself, and which his Heart would like to see embrace the whole world.

Zeal is for religious Societies a principle of constantly growing vitality, and let's say it, of universality and immortality. As long as the apostolate is directed to the poor, the ignorant and the most abandoned sinners, it produces men burning with such ardor that they are ready, according to the energetic expression of our holy Founder, "to sacrifice their fortune, talents, ease, even their lives for the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the good of the Church, and the sanctification of their brethren" [...]. The zeal of Father de Mazenod and his disciples was increas-

ingly fruitful and blessed the more it vividly reproduced the zeal of which our Lord during His public ministry had set an example for his twelve apostles. [...]

The Lord has done much for us. Let us then respond generously to this good action. He did a lot for our Congregation, let us be devoutly thankful; let us be united by a holy zeal to keep the religious spirit that our revered Father has given us, that our older fathers knew so well how to receive and retain. Let us stir up the love of our beloved family, the love of our brothers, in an affectionate submission to our superiors and our Rules, so that the wishes of our beloved Father when dying may be fulfilled: "*Zeal for souls ... Charity ... Charity ... Charity ...*"

But, on the occasion of the first centenary of the Congregation, if we need to remind ourselves that *noblesse oblige* and that as sons and brothers of the saints, we must work to be saints ourselves, we also no less imperatively must kneel before Our Lord, first to thank Him for the graces he has showered on the Congregation and ourselves through it; then we must ask forgiveness for any negligence that may have marred our life and grieved his Heart; finally we must beg him to continue to be as generous to us as he has been up to this day. [...] Humbly prostrate before the Divine Heart, let us repeat with all the fervor of our souls: "Remember our Congregation which from its inception was your possession." Let us go to him, under the auspices of His Holy Mother who deigned to adopt us as her sons and who honors our name, since it proclaims forever the first of her privileges. (*Circular Letter* No. 113, December 23, 1915, *Circulaires administratives*, 3, p. 268-269, 287-288)



# December

**T**he month of December is full of anniversaries, starting with the priestly ordination of St. Eugene and the beginning of his episcopal ministry in the Diocese of Marseilles. It is therefore not possible to stop and meditate on particular aspects of the spirituality of the Oblate charism, except briefly on the importance of God's will. The texts chosen for each day therefore will follow the various events which are being commemorated.

## December 1

### MEDITATION ON THE LOVE OF GOD

God deserves to be loved because he is infinitely lovable.

Because he loved us infinitely.

We feel in ourselves a tendency, a need to love.

If we direct this love to creatures, we miss our goal because they cannot satisfy our insatiable desires. The emptiness, the remorse one experiences after trying to see if they are made to bring us happiness, proves sufficiently that it must be sought elsewhere.

If I address myself to the stars: their beauty, their harmony, the sublime spectacle they present me in their rapid and majestic course together, would that suffice to fix and fill my heart? Alas, no! This magnificent concert shows me something else, but will it be difficult to find the object of all my desires, the one who alone can satisfy them? [...] How blind! Do not all creatures celebrate a God creator? It is this God who should be loved; this God always old and always new whose name makes the angels exult with joy, the God who is older than time, more majestic than the heavens, deeper than the sea, more unshakable than the foundations of the earth. This God who unites in himself all imag-

inable perfections. This God will make us enjoy a happiness whose source is inexhaustible, that fills us and gives us yet more....

What has this God, essentially happy in himself, not done for us? He created us, and showered us with gifts, so that even if he had not given us a commandment to love (Oh, sweet and lovely precept!), recognition alone would have led us to pay him an absolute tribute with our entire being....

But I have not yet said anything.

He was so jealous of the love of his creatures, that seeing how man tended to love only what is flesh, he became flesh himself. *Et Verbum caro factum est*. It was not the only reason for his Incarnation. He wanted to redeem us, but how much such an undertaking would cost him. (Eugene de Mazenod, *Sujets de méditations et instructions* [1808-1811])

## December 2

### THE BEGINNING OF THE MISSION IN CANADA

*On December 2, 1841, Fr. Jean-Baptiste Honorat, together with four other Oblates, arrived at the house of Bishop Bourget in Montreal. Thus began the presence of the Congregation in Canada. From there in just a few years, the Oblates travelled across all of North America settling in western Canada in 1845, on the Pacific coast in 1847, in Texas and northern Mexico in 1849-52, on the banks of the Mackenzie and the Arctic Ocean from 1858 on.*

*In the letter of Obedience to Fr. Honorat St. Eugene wrote:*

God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has chosen and predestined us for the praise of the glory of his grace, has established us so that we may go and gather fruit and our fruit may remain. You know that from the moment the Father sent us, his little flock, at the last hour to work in his vineyard, we returned from our modest labours with abundant fruit; that on beginning to proclaim his Word, God accomplished great things through us though unworthy and that many were the wayward brought back to the right path as we went through the regions about us to seek sheep in peril. But here is a road that leads afar

and a field more vast that unfolds. A gateway is wide open to us. We are now sent not only to those who are close and who are brothers in the faith but to others who are far afield and outside the faith, we who, being so few, were unequal to the task of gathering the abundant harvest lying before us.

Wherefore the Illustrious and most Reverend Lord Ignace Bourget, Bishop of Montreal in Lower Canada in the province of North America, while on his way to Rome to perform his duty *ad limina apostolorum* and pausing to visit our house, confided to us that he wished to take some members of our Society to his diocese. At first surprised by his quite spontaneous proposal, then welcoming it truly as pleasing to God, we have consented wholeheartedly to send four priests of the Congregation.

Wherefore we choose first yourself, Rev. Fr. Honorat (Jean-Baptiste), fourth of our assistants, for this work with Rev. Frs. Pierre Antoine Adrien Telmon, Jean Fleury Baudrand and Lucien Lagier. We grant you herewith faculties and rights according to the laws of our Institute for constituting a house of our Congregation in whatever place of his diocese the said Prelate wills; he, being solely appointed by the Supreme Pastor to feed his flock, will send you likewise when and where he wills to exercise your ministry under his full and in every way entire authority. Above all, however, not only do we prescribe that you revere him as your Lord; we exhort you also to love him as a father, him in whom we have perceived so great a piety and such excellent merit and of whom also, if you conduct yourselves worthily, you will experience, we promise you, love and benevolence. [...]

For the rest, brothers, take comfort in the Lord and in the might of His power. Put on the armour of God, hold yourselves erect, loins girded with truth, wearing the breastplate of justice and your feet shod in readiness to evangelize; so that the Lord may help you to announce the Word mightily, to withdraw from sin the sons of the Church and lead them to holiness; and that He may open your mouth to make known with assurance the mystery of the Gospel to those ignorant of it.

Therefore, be mutually encouraging and edify one another. Be united in the same spirit, working together for the faith of the Gospel. You especially whom we have appointed to lead and direct your brothers, excel more in merit and virtue rather than in being elevated as the

one in charge; endeavour more to endear the hearts of those under you by charity and mildness than to lead them by authority. Strive by the observance of our Rules and the practice of piety towards God to show yourself such that your companions may seek avidly to follow you step by step and to emulate you. As for you whom Our Saviour has deigned to call, rather than your fellows, to so great a work, endeavour with all your strength to respond to this holy vocation of God and moreover seek carefully to lighten the burden imposed on your Superior by humility, by the practice of mortification, zeal for perfection, assiduity in prayer, respecting him truly for God's sake, joyous obedience and especially a sincere love.

As for me, I give thanks to God each time I think of you, in all my prayers, supplicating him with joy for you all because of your communion in the Gospel; confident also in that He who has begun a good work in you will bring it to completion, until the day of Christ Jesus, as is rightful for me to believe as well as for you whom I bear in my heart. God indeed is my witness how I pursue you all with my affection in the tenderness of Christ; and I ask that your charity may abound more and more in knowledge and in every sentiment through Jesus Christ, to the glory and the praise of God.

Go then forth upon your journey with a light and willing heart. May God our Father himself and Our Lord Jesus Christ guide your steps. The benevolent protection of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, conceived without stain, be with you and the attentive care of the holy Angel of God. (*Oblate Writings*, 1, p. 12-14)

*December 3, St. Francis Xavier*

#### CANONIZATION OF EUGENE DE MAZENOD

*On December 3, 1995, the first Sunday of Advent, John Paul II proclaimed Eugene de Mazenod a saint. From the homily of the Pope:*

The coming of the *Son of Man is the theme of Advent*. The new Liturgical Year begins with it. We look already towards the night of Bethlehem. We think of the coming of the Son of God who now belongs to our history, indeed *in a wonderful way he made it a history of individu-*

als, of nations and of humanity. We also know for certain that, after that coming, *we always have before us* a second coming of the Son of Man, Christ. We are living in the second Advent, the Advent of the world's history, the Church's history, and in the Eucharistic celebration we repeat every day our confident expectation of his coming.

Blessed *Eugene de Mazenod*, whom the Church proclaims a saint today, was a man of Advent, a man of the Coming. He not only looked forward to that Coming, but as Bishop and Founder of the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate he dedicated his whole life to preparing for it. He was one of those apostles who prepared the modern age, our age [...]. Eugene de Mazenod was aware that *the mandate of every bishop and every local Church is in itself missionary*, and he made sure that even the ancient Church of Marseilles, whose beginnings date back to sub-apostolic period, could fulfill in an exemplary manner its missionary vocation, under the leadership of its pastor. This was St. Eugene's commitment, regarding the second coming of Christ, that all await with great hope. [...]

Today *the Church gives thanks to God for St. Eugene de Mazenod*, an apostle of his time, who, putting on the Lord Jesus Christ, spent his life in service to the Gospel of God. We give thanks to God for *the great transformation* accomplished through the work of this bishop. His influence is not limited to the time when he lived, but also continues in our time. In fact, the good accomplished by the Holy Spirit does not perish, but endures in every "now" of history. [...]

The universality of the Church's mission was, in fact, deeply felt by Eugene de Mazenod. He knew that Christ wanted to unite to his own person the whole human race and for this reason throughout his entire life he gave particular attention to the evangelization of the poor, wherever they were. [...]

It was not long before the Congregation spread "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1: 8), and by means of preaching based on the meditation of the word of God, heeded the exhortations of St. Paul: "And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?" (Rom 10:14). For Eugene de Mazenod to proclaim Christ meant to become a true apostolic man, one filled with that missionary fervor and zeal that gradually configures him to the risen Christ, one that every age needs.

Through patient work on himself, he knew how to discipline a difficult character and direct his diocese with enlightened wisdom and firm goodness. Bishop de Mazenod led the faithful to welcome Christ with an ever more generous faith so that they could live fully their vocation as children of God. The motivation of his every action was the belief, which he expressed this way: "To love the Church is to love Christ and to love Christ is to love the Church". [...]

*December 4*

#### COME ASIDE TO REST AWHILE

*Mgr. Vital Grandin, a great missionary of Northern Canada, considered prayer essential to carry out his apostolate.*

"Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." (Mk 6:31) If the Apostles needed this invitation from Jesus, they who were at the school of the Master, who saw his miracles, who listened to his words, how much more does not the poor missionary priest, who lives in the midst of a world of pagan and weak Christians. (Pentecost 1896)

We need to pray especially in times of difficulty. It is obvious: when faced with scandals, and among the immense needs of the Congregation, I have to completely take refuge in the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of the maternal arms of our sweet Mother, Refuge of Sinners, *humiliter et confidenter*. (February 17, 1905)

Prayer is intimacy with Christ. "*Ducam eam in solitudinem et loquar ad cor eius*" (Hos 2: 14). It is the Lord who speaks to our souls. What a great grace. Yes, in the retreat, the Lord speaks heart to heart with all of us. What intimacy! How many things the Good of our souls, the true friend of our souls, has to tell us. He will speak to us of our difficulties, sorrows, and needs; he will show us the mistakes we have made, inspire us with good intentions, will speak of prayer, of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, of the Rosary. As we said, of how we have treated him in the Eucharist. It is important to continue listening to his voice.

He will speak of our salvation and the salvation of the souls that He has entrusted to us. He will want each of them to pass before our eyes, children, adults, and the elderly. He will ask me how much I care for them, if in catechesis I nourish them with the milk of doctrine, if I encourage them, if I have endeavoured to make them pure and holy, if I healed them through the sacrament of penance, if I nourished them with the Eucharist, if my solicitude extends to all: the weak, the strong, to those far and near. (February 14, 1890)

## *December 5*

### ELECTION OF ST. EUGENE'S SUCCESSOR

*On December 5, 1861 the General Chapter unanimously elected the first successor of St. Eugene to head the Congregation: Fr. Fabre. At a time of great difficulty for the religious family, the election of the new Superior General marked a positive turn and was the cause of great joy for the Oblates.*

*By the end of the second session in which the new General had been elected Mgr Guibert was the first to express this sentiment:*

... A society that [gives] through its representatives such a beautiful show of unity and devotion cannot but attract God's blessings and be assured of a glorious future. I believe, he added, in the immortality of a Congregation that can offer such examples.

*The Secretary of the Chapter concluded the minutes of the second session with these words:*

Thus was concluded this solemn and memorable session that will leave in the heart of all who were fortunate enough to attend, ineffable emotions, unforgettable memories and a perfect example of the fraternal union that our holy and beloved Founder recommended and bequeathed to us before dying.

*On December 8, the last day of the Chapter, Bishop Taché wrote to the Fathers in Saint Boniface:*

Details on the Chapter will be given in the General's circular letter.... But who is he? [...] It is the Rev. Fr. Fabre.... The choice was so obviously right that all the votes were for him. Not a single exception, no difference of thought in a measure of such gravity.... The admirable

conduct of our older Fathers in this circumstance impressed all of us. The conduct of all the members of our noble assembly did not waiver a single moment. I am extremely edified and my heart will keep a fond memory of the entire event and of all the details of these proceedings. I love the Congregation more than ever and my journey has been very good for me.

*A year after the Chapter, December 5, 1862, Fr. Balain, who had been the delegate of the first province, recalled the event:*

Oh! How many times, my Very Rev. Father, we have thanked our good Mother for the visible assistance she gave us then! How many times I have remembered with joy those days in the Upper Room! What beautiful memories the 5th and 8th of December bring to all of us! A year ago in the morning of December 5th, we were still in sorrow and tears like poor orphans, and at night, our tears still flowed, but they were tears of thanksgiving that fell at the feet of our Father. It is a year ago this day that the Congregation, in the person of its representatives was at your feet, moved and comforted, to recognize your authority and kiss your hand, that hand which was to lead us on the path of religious life, like the hand of our venerated Founder did with such wisdom, dedication and love....

Y. Beaudoin, *L'élú du chapitre de 1861 et la joie des Oblats*, "Études oblates", 21 (1962), 97-120.

*December 6*

LUDWIK WRODARCZYK (1907-1943)

MARTYR IN UKRAINE

*Born August 25, 1907, in Radzionków (Silesia) into the family of a miner, he entered the minor seminary of the Oblates in 1921 and was ordained on June 10, 1933. He served at the Mother of God parish in Koden; from 1936, in Markowice. In 1939 he was sent to the newly created parish in Okopy, on the border with the Ukrainian SSR, and was there at the time of the Soviet occupation. He devoted himself to all in need: he served as priest and made missionary trips to territories beyond the former Polish border, where he often served as a doctor for*



*many, knowing full well what awaited him if he were to fall into the hands of Ukrainian nationalists, but he openly continued his pastoral ministry. December 6, 1943, he was kidnapped at night during Mass in the church in Okopy.*

*After his arrest, they brought him to Pauki when he was presumably killed on 8 December. Before being put to death, Father Wrodarczyk asked his tormentors permission to pray a while; this was granted. Kneeling in the grass, he prayed fervently, then got up and said, "I'm ready." He was firmly tied to a wooden beam that was placed on a wood-cutting stand. Then twelve Ukrainian women in red skirts approached and taking a large saw took turns cutting him like a common tree trunk. For more satisfaction, some fired bullets at him. His agony lasted several hours. He was thirty-six, and had been a priest for ten and a half years. Father Ludwik is a candidate for beatification.*

This morning I got up at 6:30. I celebrated Mass and made a short thanksgiving. I was called to the confessional. I return to the sacristy to register a child for baptism. I hear the children making noise, a sign to go to the school. I returned at 10 o'clock. Breakfast at 10:30. Still some business to attend to and at noon I was off to the school for two hours of religious education. I returned at 2:30 p.m. There were people waiting for me for marriage preparation. My stomach is screaming, but lunch is over and it is already 5:00 p.m. At 7:00 p.m. I have two hours with the choir. Now I'm really tired, but I must finish my breviary, complete a thing or two, and it will be midnight. Of course, every day is not so full, but still! [...]

The more I assist the poor people, the more I encounter thirsty souls who ask me for help, the more I see hearts that make me even more fervent in my apostolic work. My dear brother, we do too little for Christ. We must pray more, and sacrifice ourselves even to annihilation, to become true Oblates, offered, according to the will of our Founder. [...]

I went beyond the old border and stayed two weeks. There were risks, but thanks be to God I am safe. This is surely because of the prayers. (From his writings.)

A. Miodek, *Ludwik Wrodarczyk, o.m.i. 1907-1943*, (Héritage Oblat, 6), Rome 1992.

*December 7*

PRAYER TO MARY IMMACULATE

O good and most loving Immaculate Mother, in my fears and my concern for the eternal salvation of the dear souls of this Mission, seeing so much misery and so many needs, I entrust them to you today. I commend everyone: children and adults. I consecrate them. I give them to you. Since you are the Mother of the Good Shepherd, defend them against the enemies of their salvation: paganism, heresy, the demons of evil customs. Pray for those who have deviated, for the apostates. I myself a poor sinner, place myself under your protection. My end is near; the Good Lord is going to call me. Very soon I will say: "Jesus, Mary, Joseph, I give you my heart, my soul and my life." Obtain for me from the Most Sacred Heart of our good Master the ultimate grace of perseverance.

Ah, Lord, cast your eyes on the Divine Mother, who is also my Mother. It is she who presents to you this oblation; It is her immaculate heart that I give you. Ah, take me from the arms of my dear Mother. O Holy Virgin, what happiness. I am your privileged son, your Oblate! O my Mother, I come to consecrate myself entirely to your service! Yes, Mother, I promise not to neglect anything to make you loved and respected by men. O my Mother, receive me in the bosom of your merciful goodness. All my life, I swear to love, respect, and trust you like my mother. Oh! Do not abandon me in trouble, in pain, and especially at the hour of death. You know my nothingness, my evil, so, pray incessantly for me, a poor sinner. (Vital Grandin, February 14 and 15, 1906)

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*On December 7, 1825, St. Eugene participated in the closing of the novena of the Immaculate in the Church of the Holy Apostles in Rome. Here is what he wrote in his diary:*

I ended the day with a visit to the Church of the Holy Apostles for the last day of the novena for the Immaculate Conception. Ordinarily the Pope gives the blessing but the Cardinal Dean replaced him. The Church of the Twelve Apostles was constructed by Constantine near one of his palaces. It has been renovated through the interest of several cardinals and Sovereign Pontiffs. *The next day he wrote:* During the day, I was busy preparing the petition to present to the Pope on the day he grants me an audience.

*In the petition he asked to change the name of Oblates of St. Charles to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Had he received this inspiration during the novena of the Immaculate?*

### *December 8: Mary Immaculate, Patroness of the Congregation*

#### ST. EUGENE ASSISTS AT THE DEFINITION OF THE DOGMA OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

*On the eve of the proclamation of the dogma, St. Eugene wrote two letters to the Pope in which he encouraged him not let himself be influenced by those who opposed a definition, finding it inconvenient....*

“So, I beg you on both my knees, Most Holy Father, to be just as explicit in Your pronouncement. It is only by following Your own inspirations, which are those of the Holy Spirit, that You will stop the Blessed Virgin from being lowered in the eyes of the faithful, which is what would happen now through an indirect or incomplete decision.” (December 5, 1854)

*His joy at the time of the proclamation is indescribable, like a child who wants his mother's birthday party to be perfect. He was 72 years old:*

“It rained hard all day long; it is still raining at eleven o'clock at night. It is cloudy all around.... It will be nice tomorrow.... It will be beautiful tomorrow!” (Diary, December 7, 1854) “Well! Did I not say so? Was my trust in Mary Immaculate misplaced? It was a superb day.” (December 8, 1854)

After the Gospel, the moment arrived to hear the Supreme Pastor's voice, pronouncing truly *ex cathedra* the solemn decree. [...]

Then, the Supreme Pontiff, raising his melodious and beautiful voice, called down the light of the Holy Spirit by intoning the *Veni Creator*. The same cry rose from every heart, and without leaving to the cantors, as is customary, the role of continuing the hymn, every voice in tune with the Pontiff responded mightily to the Pope's intoning. Nothing was ever seen like it. Already emotion was spreading through the assembly of the faithful. There was something supernatural about that movement. I forgot to mention that, before the intoning of the *Veni Creator*, the Deans of the Cardinals, Archbishops, and Bishops presented themselves at the foot of the throne and requested on their knees, in the name of the Church, the decree that the whole world was awaiting. That request, given in Latin by the Cardinal Dean, and the Pope's reply did not reach my ears; but I shared in it from the depths of my heart; especially in the name of my diocese and our Congregation. Then, the Supreme Pontiff, truly the *Summus Pontifex*, *afflante Spiritu Sancto*, standing up, pronounced the infallible decree, which declared and defined that it is a dogma of faith that the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, from the first instant of her conception, by a special privilege and grace of God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Saviour of the human race, had been preserved and exempt from every stain of original sin.

Tears muffled the Pontiff's voice at the moment when he pronounced the infallible words that the Holy Spirit placed on his lips. I leave it to your thoughts whether I shared in that fitting emotion. It seemed to me at that moment that the heavens opened over our heads and showed us openly the joy of the entire Church Triumphant, joining the enthusiasm of the Church Militant, to celebrate with us its Queen and ours, and all the saints called closer and higher, at this moment, in glory by God's inexhaustible munificence. I thought I saw Jesus Christ Our Saviour congratulating his Divine Mother, and my great patron, Saint Joseph, especially rejoicing at the happiness of his spouse, to whom he is so close in heaven. I also thought that the Church Suffering was enlightened at that moment by a divine illumination, that the sufferings of those souls was suspended; I would almost say that Purgatory was emptied, whether by the great number of plenary indulgences that were applying for their release, or even more by the clemency of the Supreme Judge who, at the moment of glorification of his Mother, and to have that dear portion of his great family share in the general joy of

the Church, granted them pardon for all their debts and called them to the feet of the throne of their Mother, to thank her for their deliverance and to unite their enthusiastic joy to those of the angelic choirs and all the saints. (Eugene de Mazenod, *Diary*, December 8, 1854, *Oblate Writings*, 17, p. 228-229)

F. Hoffet, *Mgr. De Mazenod et la définition du dogme de l'Immaculée Conception*, "Missions OMI" (1904), p. 225-351; R. Boudens, *Mgr de Mazenod et la définition du dogme de l'Immaculée Conception*, "Études oblates" 15 (1955), p. 10-24; J. Morabito, *L'Immaculée dans la spiritualité du Fondateur*, "Études oblates" 15 (1955), p. 125-172.

December 9

RICHARD HANLEY (1931-2004)  
EIGHTH SUPERIOR GENERAL (1972-1974)

*Father Richard Hanley was elected Superior General of the Congregation, on May 9, 1972 for a term of six years, the first Superior General to be elected for a term. He succeeded Father Léo Deschâtelets. Born in Jamaica, in the diocese of Brooklyn, USA, on February 22, 1931, he studied at the International Scholasticate in Rome, and was ordained a priest in Roviano, Italy, on July 13, 1958. While a professor at the scholasticate in Washington, DC, in June 1969 he was appointed Provincial of the Western Province of the United States, an office he held until he was elected Superior General. He put his dedication, sincerity, ease of contact and encouragement at the service of the Congregation. He exercised his office in keeping with the directives recommended by the General Chapter that elected him. "One of the traits of his two years as General was the almost superhuman feat of personal contact with the 6500 Oblates of the Congregation spread in 46 countries of the world." He resigned for personal reasons in June 1974.*

Wherever I go in the Oblate world, I have the joy of finding missionaries who are really at the service of the poor, proud to be recognized as friends of the poor and in whom the poor place their trust. I have the impression that our Oblates are always ready to get rich hu-

manly thanks to the poor, in whom they see the God that no one has ever seen (Jn 1:10) and who is revealed in the Cree, the Métis, the Inuit, the Zulu, the Basoto, the Laotian, in the old as in the young. He sends us “to bring good news to the poor... to free the oppressed”, and in this aim our humanity is liberated and made capable of growing. Announcing that Christ is present among them, we are evangelized ourselves, and the Gospel is proclaimed and discovered in the best way possible by our own transformation.

But I do not think that we, the Oblates of 1973, can sit on our laurels. Our missionary vision urges us to question the order of our priorities in the distribution of our limited and rather old personnel and our resources. Do we have to continue doing and being for the next 10, 50, 100 years, what we have done and we have been for the past 10, 30 and 100 years? [...] How can we truly make the Gospel message indigenous, according to the cultural sensitivity of the people we serve? What is the best way to re-evangelize the old churches before it's too late? How can we make ourselves more significant in a technocratic society, the urban world, to the lonely and the marginalized, etc.?

At Christmas we remember the birth and rebirth of our Savior in our mind and heart. This is what St. Paul said: For me to live is Christ. My prayer for each of us is that Mary, model of our faith, may help us to believe a little more in the presence of her Son in each of us and those we serve, to have more and more mutual trust, to love each other more, in a word to improve as persons, thanks to the fellow Oblates with whom we share our life and ideals, so that the world may believe that God has sent us as his missionaries. (R. Hanley, *Circular Letter*, December 20, 1972, *Acta Administrationis Generalis O.M.I.*, I, p. 32-36)

*December 10, Blessed Virgin Mary of Loreto*

#### VISITING THE SHRINE OF LORETO

*The Shrine of Loreto is built on the site where, according to tradition, the home of the Virgin Mary was miraculously transported by angels. This shrine dates back to the fourth century, and is one of the oldest. Even today the basilica is the destination of many pilgrimages.*

*Eugene went there from Rome on his way back to France after the approval of the Rule.*

This morning I had the happiness to offer the Holy Sacrifice in the revered house where the Son of God became incarnate; it is not a palace but nonetheless it inspires sentiments that one does not experience in the palaces of the earth's great ones. When one celebrates in this holy place, one keenly welcomes the moment when our Lord comes again into the house in which he dwelt during his sojourn on this earth. [...]

All our friends will not be surprised that I kept them in mind yesterday evening in the holy chapel, uttering a little prayer for each of them in particular. I did not come out until forced to do so by fatigue. The piety of the faithful who come and go in the chapel, and who do not leave until they have kissed the walls several times, with an effusion of affection that is very touching, inspires me with inexpressible tenderness and causes me to be at one with them.

The *Santa Casa* is situated in the middle of the church. The interior is the same as when carried by the Angels; so one sees walls of brick on three sides of the House; the back, behind the altar, arranged in a kind of small sanctuary, is entirely walled with what once were silver panels; today, alas! I think they are only of shiny brass. There is to be found the hearth where the Mother of God prepared the modest and meagre repast of the Holy Family. The holy House is enclosed, I would say cloaked with marble, that is to say, the exterior wall seen from the church is entirely incrustated with marbles and statues of prophets and sibyls, as well as bas-relief representing several episodes of the life of the holy Virgin, such as the Presentation in the temple, etc. (To Fr. Tempier from Our Lady of Loreto, May 7, 1826, *Oblate Writings*, 7, p. 93-94)

*December 11*

#### A FILIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH MARY

[From 1854, the year of the proclamation of the dogma] not only the name of Mary, but also of Mary Immaculate, comes back often in the Founder's writings. Already in 1838 he expressed his regret for not having asked the Pope to define the dogma. This fervor would not fail.

On the eve of the definition of the dogma he writes boldly two letters to the Pope to not let himself be influenced by those who would not want a definition, finding it untimely.... *So, I beg you on both my knees, Most Holy Father, to be just as explicit in Your pronouncement. It is only by following Your own inspirations, which are those of the Holy Spirit, that you will step the Blessed Virgin from being lowered in the eyes of the faithful, which is what would happen now through an indirect or incomplete decision.* (Letter to Pius IX, December 5, 1854)

The Founder's joy at the time of the proclamation is indescribable. It is the joy of a child who wants his Mom's celebration to be complete: *It rained hard all day long; it is still raining at eleven o'clock at night. It is cloudy all around.... It will be nice tomorrow.... It will be beautiful tomorrow.* (Diary, December 7, 1854) *Well! Did I not say so? Was my trust in Mary Immaculate misplaced? ... It was a superb day.* (Diary, December 8, 1854)

The Founder was 72 years old. The December of 1854 and of the following years were his great earthly celebration, both as Pastor of the Church of Marseilles, and as the son of Mary, and especially as Father of the Congregation: *It is certainly not my idea to place myself in the forefront, but I see it as a duty to do everything I can to contribute in some way to the glory that will accrue to the Blessed Virgin by this definition, if it is done as the Holy Father has always wished. As these notes are destined for those whom the dear Lord has given me as sons, I want them to know the thinking and action taken by their Father in these circumstances, so glorious for our Immaculate Mother.* (Diary, December 5, 1854)

For him, Mary and Mary Immaculate remains always the mother and the mediator par excellence. *"Mary's name is invoked with such confidence because she begs her divine Son for us, and she is recognized for this very reason as the author of all graces. One cannot ever do too much in honor of the Holy Virgin, as long as her cult is spread and practiced within the limits due to a Creature, no matter how great or elevated."* (Pastoral Letter, December 21, 1855)

As Bishop of Marseilles, in addition to the Sanctuary of N. D. de la Garde, he erected a memorial to the Immaculate Conception and invited the faithful to be *deeply attached to this divine truth, inspired with the sentiments of the Church to honor, celebrate and invoke the Virgin*



*Mary conceived without sin, and make efforts to recover from their falls and remain in the purity of life by the perseverance of their prayers entrusted to the intercession of Her who the holy Fathers have called the co-redeemer of mankind.* (Pastoral Letter on the Definition of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception for Lent, February 8, 1855)

As Superior General he prescribed the recitation of the *Tota Pulchra* after Compline, asked the Pope to grant the Congregation the faculty to impose the scapular of the Immaculate Conception, since one of the ends of the Congregation was to spread and propagate the cult of the Blessed and Immaculate Mother of God “*especially her privilege of the Immaculate Conception.*” (Circular No. 2, February 2, 1857).

He repeatedly reminded the newly professed to congratulate yourselves for the happiness you have experienced in consecrating yourselves to God in the Congregation which has Mary Immaculate as its Mother... soldiering under the banner of Mary Immaculate. This is a grace of predilection, a true guarantee of your predestination to eternal bliss. (To the novices July 24, 1858; to Fr. Bovis, October 29, 1859). (F. Jetté, *Essai sur le caractère marial de notre spiritualité*, “Études oblates” 7 [1948], p. 30-32)

## December 12

ALBERT LACOMBE (1827-1916)  
PEACEMAKER OF PEOPLES

*On December 12, 1916, Fr. Albert Lacombe died at the age of 89. He was one of the legendary missionaries of the Canadian West: a pioneer, a peacemaker between fighting tribes, the mediator in the insurrections of the Amerindians, the facilitator of the Trans-Canadian railroad, an evangelizer in the front lines. In 1885 the Chief of the Blackfoot described Father Lacombe with these words in Parliament: “This man is our brother, – not only our Father, as the Whites call him – but our brother. He is one of our nation. When we cry, he grieves with us; when we laugh, he rejoices with us. We love him. He is our brother.” Provinces, cities, and lakes are named after him in gratitude and esteem. He was almost thirty years old and already a priest when he entered the*

*Oblates whom he had come to know during his early missionary initiatives.*

*We could read a page of his Memoirs, but perhaps it would be nice to know how his octogenarian mother followed her son. After this letter she lived for seven more years:*

Assumption, December 4, 1882

My dear Albert,

I received your affectionate letter of October 20, which, like all the others, was very welcome. [...]

So you are again with your Indians. I'm happy for you, because I know that all your longings have been directed there for a long time. I have no sweeter satisfaction during my prayers or at other times than to follow you in the miserable huts of the savages, where you make God known to those poor helpless beings! ... I know and I feel that you do not forget your old mother who is not far from the grave!

However, my dear son, can you believe it? Despite my 80 years, I still hope to see you again. And if God does not give us this happiness here below, I have the sweet confidence that up there we will meet and never be separated again!

Do not be afraid, my son, to let me know your labors and concerns. I am happy to share your joys and your sufferings. The good God tests me, too, because I just lost my left eye, but I hope to keep the right one which will be worth two; and I will be able to see you as clearly as 66 years ago, when I rocked you on my lap. I am very happy here with the good Sisters of Providence where I hope to end my days. My time is spent between reading, prayer and a little work, sewing and knitting. I knitted winter socks for you that I will send at the next opportunity.

My dear son, often think of your old mother in your Masses, and recommend me to Him before whom I will appear soon, so that he may receive me in his beautiful paradise, that I expect from His mercy. (A Sister of Providence, *Father Lacombe ...*, Montreal 1916, p. 328)

K. Hughes, *Father Lacombe, the black-robe voyageur, omi*, Toronto, 1911, 466 p.; *Le p. Lacombe, l'homme au bon cœur, d'après ses mémoires et souvenirs*, Montréal, 1916, 548 p.; Schafer, *Der Schwarze Waldläufer... A Lacombe, omi*, Paderborn, 1932, 328 p.; P.E., Breton, *Le*

*grand chef des prairies, le R.P. A. Lacombe (1827-1916)*, Editions de l'Ermitage, Edmonton 1954 (trad., anglaise, 1955); J. Phelan, *The bold heart. The story of F. Lacombe, omi*, New York, 1956, 182 p.

December 13

## WE WILL HELP EACH OTHER

*December 13, 1815, St. Eugene wrote his third letter to Father Tempier, explaining once again that his presence was essential to the birth of the new community of missionaries.*

My heart felt a presentiment, my dear, good friend and brother, that you were the man the good God had set aside to be my consolation. How can I show you all the happiness conferred on me by the holy state of resolve at which you have arrived? How great the promise I have made to myself to do all that depends on me to contribute to yours! Let me say that as soon as I read your first letter, I surrendered to the sweetest of hopes: that I had found the man who lays hold of good, latches on thereto and consequently with the help of grace, succeeds perfectly in effecting it. Your second and third letters confirmed me in the opinion that I had formed and now the thought that we shall succeed, in spite of obstacles, in working together for the glory of God and for our sanctification, sustains me in the midst of all the sorrows that hell has brought upon me since I have positioned strong batteries to destroy its empire. Be as humble as you wish but know, just the same, that you are *necessary* for this mission work. I speak to you before God and openly from my heart. Were it a question of going out to preach more or less well the word of God, mingled with much alloy of self, of going far and wide for the purpose, if you wish, of winning souls for God without taking much trouble to be men of interior life, truly apostolic men, I think it would not be difficult to replace you. But can you believe I want merchandise of that sort?

We must be truly saints ourselves. In saying that, we include all that can possibly be said. Now are there many priests who thus wish to be saints? Only by not knowing them could we believe that they do. I myself know the contrary. Most wish to go to heaven by a road other

than that of abnegation, renunciation, forgetfulness of self, poverty, fatigue, etc. [...]

The second reason, which made me regard it as a present from heaven the resolution to join us at which you have arrived, is the need we have of a priest who thinks as you do about the interior life of our community. [...] I am so convinced of this that I said yesterday evening to the Grand Vicar that I would not undertake to form this community if you took no part in it. I am so assured that we will always agree that I would not fear to promise never to think otherwise than you on all that has to do with the interior life and its obligations, more extensive than one ordinarily believes, of the priest who wishes to live as his state requires. [...] I would wish, rather, that you would be one of the first to enter the house, which is quite ready to receive missionaries. This first step is, in my opinion, of the highest importance.

At this meeting we will draw up the Rule which we will have to follow. We will confer on the manner in which we will carry out our good work. We will help each other mutually with advice and with all that the good God will inspire in each of us for our common sanctification. We will then issue our first declaration for the edification of the Church and of the people. This will be a decisive step. I count on having you then. That is what I have not yet obtained. [...] Adieu, very dear and good brother, I embrace you with all my heart and long for the happy moment of our reunion. (*Oblate Writings*, 5, p. 12-14)

*December 14*

#### THOUGHTS ON THE WILL OF GOD

*On the eve of his ordination to the priesthood, St. Eugene aims decisively to always follow God's will:*

My God, that is all over henceforth and for my whole life. You, you alone will be the sole object to which will tend all my affections and my every action. To please you, act for your glory, will be my daily task, the task of every moment of my life. I wish to live only for you, I wish to love you alone and all else in you and through you.... You are my all, replacing all else. My God, my love and my all.... (December 1811 retreat)

*Trials, like the illness of his niece which would lead quickly to her death, do not prevent St. Eugene from always seeing the presence of God:*

When will my anguish end? Since All Saints 1828, I have not spent a day that has not been steeped in bitterness. The past, the present, the future are alike in weighing down my heart; I do not conceive how I can exist. [...] Ah! if the good God had wished to permit that I die when all accounts had been settled, how much grief he might have spared me, but may his holy will be done, I say this with entire submission, in spite of all the revolting of a nature deprived of all its most legitimate affections. (To Fr. Jeancard, September 26, 1829, *Oblate Writings*, 7, p. 190)

*The awareness of God's mercy, so evident during his life, invites him to still rely on his divine will:*

My good God! If you had not accustomed me to the traits of your infinite mercy, if already you had not inspired in my heart a gentle trust, there would be every reason to draw back with horror. But no, you are my Father, it is you who since the tenderest days of my infancy have led me as it were by the hand. Everything you have done for me in the course of my life is too present to my memory, I feel again still today too vividly the effects not to count on your infinite goodness, not to throw myself with total abandon into your paternal bosom, fully resolved to do this time and always everything you demand of me, were it to cost me my life. Too happy to devote the few days left me to spend on earth to do your holy Will in bad times as in good, with the world's approval or condemnation, amidst consolations or overwhelmed with griefs. For I do not know what is awaiting me in the new ministry I am about to begin. As always, nothing happens to me that you have not willed, and my happiness and my joy will be always to do your Will.

That is where things stand, it is the feeling that predominates in my soul, an unlimited trust in the goodness of my God. (Notes from retreat before the episcopate, Oct. 7-14, 1832, *Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 201-202)

*On his deathbed he reaffirms the desire to fully fulfill God's will:*

How I would like to see myself die so that I might freely accept the will of God! (Quoted in Leflon, IV, p. 304)

December 15

TOTAL ABANDONMENT TO GOD'S WILL

*To Father Jean-François Allard, who complained about the appointment of Father Eugène Guigues as bishop, the Founder gives one of his longer and clearer lessons on the acceptance of God's will:*

In this lowly world, my dear friend, one must not be too exclusive in one's opinions when not knowing how to resign oneself to things that are not going in the direction one wishes. We must recognize that above our feeble conceptions there is a sovereignly wise Providence who conducts all things by ways unperceived and often incomprehensible to the ends He proposes and when His most holy will is manifested to us by events, it is our duty to submit ourselves without fretting and to abandon entirely our own ideas which then cease to be legitimate and permissible.

What then must be done? Let us believe we were mistaken and put all our efforts into deriving all possible benefit from the position in which the good God places us. One should then regret having pronounced oneself too strongly in a sense contrary to that which divine Providence has chosen. Instead of murmuring, let each be concerned with his duty and confide himself to the goodness of God who never leaves us in the lurch when we are what we should be.

I like to repeat that we must comply with joy, happiness and the most entire surrender to the most holy will of God and cooperate with all our power in the accomplishing of His designs which can only be for the greater glory of His holy name and our own good, that is, the good of us who are his submissive and devoted children. Let no one draw back from this attitude and henceforth let all misgivings cease, all murmurs, all statements quite contrary, to these incontestable principles. (June 8 and 9, 1847, *Oblate Writings*, 1, p. 172)

December 16

## OBLATE MARTYRS IN LAOS

*On this day, the anniversary of the death of Jean Wauthier, we celebrate the liturgical memory of the Oblate Martyrs of Laos, whose beatification took place in Vientiane on December 11, 2016: Mario Borzaga, Louis Leroy, Michel Coquelet, Vincent L'Hénoret, Jean Wauthier, Joseph Boissel. On this day we can also remember the catechist, Paul Thoj Xyooj.*

\* \* \*

### BLESSED JEAN WAUTHIER (1926-1967) MARTYR IN LAOS

*He was born in the diocese of Cambrai in northern France, and entered the novitiate at Pontmain in 1944. With a robust physique, and a very high moral rectitude, it's no wonder that when drafted for military service, he chose the paratroopers. After returning to the seminary at Solignac, he asked to go to the missions and was happy to be sent to Laos. He arrived there in 1952 and was immediately assigned to serve the mission among the Khmuh. From that time on he worked tirelessly for these people, especially for refugees. It was in fact his help to the Khmuh that led to his being killed.*

*The week before Christmas in 1967, Jean wanted to visit a small group of Khmuh that remained near Ban Na. Under cover of a simulated attack of Lao-Viet, he was attacked while returning to Hin Tang, on the evening of Saturday, December 16. Two shots in the chest and Father was down. At the time someone wrote: "His organizational skills and ingenuity in storing and distributing humanitarian aid, may have upset some people; and this aid which fell from the sky, certainly whetted the appetites and excited the greed of some. What is certain is that he was killed in the line of apostolic ministry and because of it." The day after, one of the catechists wrote to his parents: "Father Jean died because he loved us and would not abandon us."*

From my childhood, I have always aspired to missionary life. That is why I entered the Congregation. It is with this one goal that I spent my years at the scholasticate. Among the many Oblate missions that I could admire, during the novitiate I felt a strong desire to bring the Gospel to Laos. I have never changed my mind since then. My spiritual director did not object to these aspirations; he always encouraged me, trying to make them become more spiritual.

Therefore, my Most Reverend Father, I ask you to send me to Laos. [...] I think I have the necessary physical stamina. I am used to the cold, and during my military service in southern Morocco I have seen that heat did not cause me any trouble. I have never been ill during the scholasticate. Finally, the sometimes hard manual labor of the past six years and my military service in the paratroopers suggest that I have a good physical resistance.

Anyway, I am ready to accept any apostolate. In this first Obedience I want to see only the will of God sending me to the best place where I can most easily sanctify others and go myself, with the help the Blessed Virgin, Saint Joseph, and our Venerated Founder, “usque ad apicem perfectionis”. (Letter to Léo Deschâtelets for his first obedience, December 20, 1951)

\* \* \*

PAUL THOJ XYOOJ, CATECHIST (1941-1960)  
MARTYR IN LAOS

*When he disappeared in the forest he was 19 years old. In 1957, at the age of 16, he had entered the seminary of Paksane, which he soon left for health reasons. Returning to his native village of Kiukatian, he placed himself at the service of the Oblate missionaries as a zealous and helpful catechist. Thanks to him there were many conversions. The last three months, he was with Father Mario Borzaga in Kiukatian. On April 25, 1960 they left together for Pha Xoua.*

*A young 15-year-old boy, who was in the forest hunting, recognized Father Mario and Xyooj with their hands tied behind their back: “Pushed by the soldiers, they went up the path and they stopped where*



it forked. The soldiers removed the prisoners' shirts and forced them to kneel. Xyooj was hit repeatedly with the butt of the rifle, on his head, his ears, his whole body, to the point that he was bleeding all over.... One of the soldiers shouted to Xyooj: 'Go away at once', but he replied: 'No, I'm not going, I'm staying with the Father. If I leave, he goes with me; if he does not leave, I stay with him'." Another shouted, 'Since he doesn't want to leave, let's kill him along with the other one.' Another soldier shouted, 'You are responsible for bringing this devil and convincing more than 10 families to follow him in one day'." The witness heard Xyooj praying in Hmong, "O God, protect us and protect our fate; you see them and you see what they are going to do."

On witness says: "I am convinced that Xyooj died because of his faith. He taught the faith without any other purpose. He was pure. He gave his life for the ideal he lived. He practiced the Gospel he taught in everything. His and Father Mario's blood was shed for God." Xyooj's nephews reported what their father, the catechist's older brother, told them: "Our father told us that since the missionary had come to proclaim the Gospel in the village, his younger brother, Xyooj, had fallen in love with the Gospel. Uncle Xyooj loved religion very much and therefore went with the Father to proclaim and teach it from village to village, wherever the Father went."

*December 17, St. Lazarus*

#### SANCTIFY MYSELF TO SANCTIFY MY FLOCK

*St. Eugene firmly believed in the tradition that St. Lazarus with Martha and Mary had taken refuge in Provence and had become the first bishop of Marseilles. He always considered it an honor to be his successor. During the retreat in preparation for taking possession of the episcopal see of Marseilles, he meditates on his vocation as a pastor.*

I must attach myself to this people as a father to his children. My existence, my life, all my being must be consecrated to it, I must have no thought but for its good, no fears other than I have not done enough for its welfare and sanctification, no other solicitude than that which must include all its spiritual interests and even in a certain way its tem-

poral welfare. I must in a word consume myself for it, be ready to sacrifice my leisure, my desire, rest, life itself for it. [...]

I would like in a word, in working efficaciously for the sanctification of my flock, to sanctify myself to an eminent degree of perfection as the sublimity of my [episcopal] character and my eminent dignity require. [...]

The episcopate is the apogee of perfection on earth. They should be saints like the Apostles whose successors Bishops are to exercise worthily their functions, to accomplish as one ought all the obligations. [...]

So it means descending into one's interior to purify it of every imperfection and remove all that could constitute an obstacle to the working of the Holy Spirit. It is that divine Spirit which must henceforth be absolute master of my soul, the only mover of my thoughts, desires, affections, my whole entire will. I must be attentive to all its inspirations, listen to them first in the silence of prayer, follow them then and obey them in the line of action they lay down. Avoid with care all that could sadden it and weaken the influence of its power in me. [...]

Nourish the love of God and all the virtues that flow from it by the daily offering of the holy Sacrifice, oraison, prayer, reading holy Scripture, the holy Fathers, good ascetical works, the lives of the saints. [...]

As my obligations cannot be limited to the acquisition of the sublimest virtues, I must attentively consider what is imposed in relation to the flock the Sovereign Pastor is to confide to me. I must achieve my salvation through them, I must save myself with them, at least I must be able to bear witness to having done everything that depended on me for their instruction, to exhort them, turn them away from evil, excite them to the practice of virtue, be an example to them in all kinds of good works, finally to procure for them all the means in my power to assure their salvation and lead them thus from the terrestrial fold, where God places them under my crook, to heaven where we must be reunited in God's bosom. (Retreat notes, May 1837, *Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 235, 237-239)

M. Nogaret, *Monseigneur de Mazenod, l'évêque*, "Vie Oblate Life" 41 (1982), p. 69-85; B. Dullier, *Saint Eugène de Mazenod évêque de Marseille (1837-1861)*, "Vie Oblate Life" 60 (2001), p. 21-42; 43-64.

*December 18*

#### A BISHOP CLOSE TO HIS PEOPLE

If mornings such as this one has been, and indeed many others too, were to occur too often, I felt that I would not be able to continue. It is not merely a question of giving money, but to be faced with unfortunate people and to realize that, even doing the impossible, I am not able to meet their needs, is more than I can cope with. A widow whose husband has died in Cayenne and who hasn't a penny either to live or to return to her country. A young man, of Belgian nationality, coming out of hospital where he spent all his money and who is now [p. 80] worn out by his illness and by frustration, has only the 10 Francs given him by his consul to get him back to Belgium. An old lady, the sister of a priest of the diocese who died a long time ago, who has all her belongings in the pawn shop (Mont de Piété) and who has not the wherewith to go to her son who would at least give her a bowl of soup to prevent her dying of hunger.

So many other cases of misery as well! I just cannot keep going. Apart from what I was able to give, I wrote a letter of recommendation for the widow to a lawyer asking him to give her a sort of petition which she can present to any doctor. That was the profession of her husband who died in Cayenne from sunstroke. I wrote a letter on behalf of the young Belgian to a member of the administration of charity. After all that, try to sit down to table and eat if you can!

The day was not yet over for my heart already so mangled. I learned that Dherbes, parish priest of St-Julien, one of my best priests, has been vomiting blood for three days. In spite of the rain, I hastened to him. My visit, which he did not expect, pleased him immensely. This was my duty, I, the father of my diocesan people, who live the priests like the elders of my spiritual family. I pray God to preserve this one who is virtuous and capable. (Eugene de Mazenod, *Diary*, September 5, 1838, *Oblate Writings*, 19, p. 192)

MARIE ROSE EUGÉNIE DE JOANNIS (1760-1851)  
MOTHER OF THE FOUNDER

*St. Eugene's mother died during the night of December 17-18, 1851. He always had a deep relationship with his mother. On the occasion of her death, which took place on 18 December, so he wrote to Bishop Guibert:*

My dear mother was taken from us in the fullness of her strength, without having spent a single day in bed, with no fever, no death throes, one could even say without having been ill. [...] I only had time to give her absolution and receive her last breath. [...] Of course I am resigned to God's will, I would be quite unworthy of my saintly mother were it otherwise, but my cup of grief is full, and I cannot console myself at having no longer before me this accomplished model of all the Christian virtues personified in my own mother, so worthy of my love and veneration. However, God in his goodness continues to give me a kind of consolation that moves me deeply, that is to say, the concern demonstrated by everyone and which, seeing what kind of people they are who to my great astonishment are showing it from every part of France, can be looked on as a kind of canonization. Imagine, I do not know how many Bishops have had the kind and charitable consideration to write me the most consoling letters. Some before they had received the death-notice, and others simply on receipt of the printed notice that one does not usually give a reply to.

You must acknowledge, dear friend, that there is in all this a real consolation that God in his goodness has contrived to give me, and so in my grief, I would linger on these words of benediction with an unspeakable satisfaction, that knows no bounds and although it is my nature to feel suffering to an excessive degree, I understand even so that I have but lost the happiness of having my good mother here below, while her great virtues, through the merits of Jesus Christ, have brought her into the glory of heaven. And so while I knelt beside her bedside and watched over her until the moment when I had to tear myself away,

I gazed upon her sleeping form and as before a relic I prayed to her and I felt that from my prayer there was reawakened in me the desire and will to become better so as the more to resemble her who was the first to teach me to love God. If you but knew to what pitch of perfection she carried virtue. You know some of it.

Well, let me tell you that she placed no limits to her charity, and that it was no longer a matter of giving out of her superfluity to the poor and to good works but all her income went on that. (December 29, 1851, *Oblate Writings*, 11, p. 67-68)

## *December 19*

### A BISHOP CLOSE TO HIS PEOPLE

In 1837, during the pastoral visit of “La Ciotat” after a lunch that was “annoying as ever”, he [Bishop de Mazenod] takes a stroll through the town. “I was followed by a group of people and I heard whispering: ‘How gracious! And they said he was haughty’.” “How could they give me this ridiculous reputation? If being haughty means being five feet six or seven inches tall, that is good. But otherwise I’m afraid of being too familiar, and as for haughtiness I never knew what it was.” [...]

This sympathy for the humble was the effect of a supernatural spirit, but also of an innate expansive cordiality. [...] Going through the diocese by carriage he runs into a wagon driver who is sweating and cursing without being able to pull his wagon out of a bog. He gets down, goes next to the horses, and shouts so loud that they get moving through the water. In a neighborhood of old Marseilles, a commoner finds Monsignor beside the cradle of her child, intent on calming its screams: passing by he had heard the child and could not resist. In his pastoral visits he even accepts to do little errands for the good housewives who had sons who were soldiers in Marseilles. [...]

The outskirts of Marseilles were a large village, and poverty reigned in certain neighborhoods. They were his favorite. “For the third time this week I went to confirm someone in our worst neighborhoods. But I always come back edified from these slums, the home of misery.” “Confirmation of a dying child. I had to go up to the fifth floor. But what a compensation for a bishop who feels his spiritual fatherhood seeing

himself surrounded by a crowd of poor but good people! On each floor all are at their doors with candles, they receive the blessing on their knees, the room of the sick person is decorated like the Sepulcher, full of neighbors....” [...]

“January 8: I have just returned from confirming a sick person in the rue de l’Échelle (one of the poorest quarters of Marseilles) .... People vied with one another to ensure that I did not slip. They were astonished on seeing the bishop come to visit this miserable area. The sick person was overjoyed to see that the bishop was not deterred by the poverty of the place from coming to her. Little did she know, the good woman, that I was as happy as she was to approach the poorest of my children and to fulfil the duties of my ministry among this unfortunate class of people, who are more interesting in my eyes than the richest and most powerful in the world.”

“When he went out on foot in the city, people gathered around him full of respect.” “The ordinary folk of *Saint-Jean* and the *Major* adored him.” This strong statement is from Timon-David. But those who were the first in showing their devoted sympathy were the women at the Market: fishmongers, shopkeepers. [...] Their queen was the famous *Babeau* (Elizabeth), a battle-axe who could even put men in their place; she even took advantage of the good nature of the bishop to sometimes stop his carriage [...]. These were ordinary folk who in the Revolution of 1848 made themselves the bishop’s bodyguards. (V. Anzalone, *Eugenio de Mazenod, Vescovo di Marsiglia...*, Roma 1961, p. 223-226)

*December 20*

#### ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIS PRIESTLY ORDINATION

*December 8, 1811, while on retreat in Amiens, St. Eugene communicates his imminent ordination to his mother:*

Dear, darling mother, I am only going to write you a few lines as I am on the most important retreat of my life, in which I must dialogue alone with God on matters of eternal import; by rights I should not be writing to you at all, but I really had to let you know that your Eugene, this poor miserable sinner the sum of whose iniquities are known to God

alone, will of a surety in a few days' time be vested with the most eminent dignity on the face of the earth or even in heaven. I will not dwell on it further, dear mother, but sum it all up in a word: pray for your son, and have others pray for him too, every saintly person you know.

God knows with what love and expressions of tenderness and gratitude I shall offer for you yourself, your sanctification, and even your earthly happiness, that holy Victim who is always heard on account of his infinite dignity. Dear mother, be one with me on Christmas Eve, join in the holy mysteries in Aix while in Amiens, in the most fervent of communities [Sisters of the Sacred Heart], I celebrate them for you; let each of us for our own part speak our minds to our good Master who assuredly will be quite unable to say no on such a wonderful day; be sure, he will pay off all our debts, yes, I will ask him this with confidence when in his infinite, incomprehensible mercy, he places himself in a way in my power, I shall speak to him too of our mother and many others too, but do not let us yield just yet to the feelings such thoughts awaken in our soul, the time has not yet come to pour out what the Lord is working within me. [...]

I bid you now an affectionate farewell, dear mother, and hold you tenderly to my heart which is all yours after God. You know the ordination takes place on the 21st, the feast of St. Thomas the Apostle. Hands will be laid on probably between 8:00 and 10:00 a.m. A double dose of prayers that day. (*Oblate Writings*, 14, p. 226-227)

## December 21

### ST. EUGENE IS ORDAINED A PRIEST

*December 21, 1811, Eugene de Mazenod was ordained a priest in Amiens by Bishop Demandolx, whom he had met at the National Council convened by the Emperor (June-July 1811). He had been Vicar General of Marseilles at the same time as Eugene's great-uncle André and he knew the Mazenod family. It allowed him to escape the appointed Archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Maury, whose appointment by Napoleon the éope had many reasons not to recognize. He had prepared intensively for ordination, as we read in his retreat notes.*

My Saviour, my Father, my love, bring me to love you; this only do I ask, for I know full well that that is everything. Give me your love. [...]

The language of terror no longer speaks to me; love alone has power over me. I must prepare a dwelling for my well-beloved; it is love, love alone that must bear the entire cost. (December 1-21, 1811, *Oblate Writings*, 14, p. 214, 223)

*This is what he shared with his spiritual father, Father Duclaux, about his experience on the day of ordination:*

I am a priest of Jesus Christ; I have already for the first time offered the awesome sacrifice with the Bishop. Yes, it is I, it really is I, the wretched sinner whose turpitudes you are familiar with, who has immolated the immaculate Lamb, or at least he has immolated himself through my ministry. Dear Father, I fancy I am dreaming when I bring to mind what I am. Joy, fear, confidence, sadness, love enter one after the other into my heart. The thought uppermost in my mind and that I get quite lost in is this: so this is how my God in his goodness avenges himself for all my acts of ingratitude, by doing so much for me that, God though he may be, he can do no more. After this, could I ever again be tempted to offend him? Truly this is the moment to reply: it were better to die a thousand deaths. [...]

There is only love in my heart. I am writing at a time when my heart overflows, to coin an expression of the Apostle's in a moment like the one I am experiencing. If the underlying sorrow for my sins, which is always with me, still persists, it is also true that love has changed its nature. [...]

I am a priest! You have to be one to understand what it means. Just to think of it sends me into transports of love and gratitude, and if the thought of my sinfulness recurs, love abounds all the more. *I shall not call you servants anymore.... You undo my fetters. I will offer you the thanksgiving sacrifice.... What return can I make to the Lord?* They are like so many arrows that pierce this heart that has been so cold until this day. [...]

Starting with the days preceding ordination and especially after ordination, I think I know O.L.J.C. better. What would it be like to know him as he is! Dear Father, please pray that I do not make myself unwor-



thy of so many graces. I am receiving more than enough to make a great saint.... (December 21, 1811, *Oblate Writings*, 14, p. 228-229)

F. Santucci, *All for God: Eugene de Mazenod's Priesthood*, "Oblation" I (2012), p. 143-186.

*December 22*

#### REMEMBERING HIS ORDINATION

*Returning from his first trip to England, St. Eugene wanted to pass through Amiens to celebrate Mass in the cathedral where 40 years before he had been ordained.*

Pilgrimage to Amiens.... It is a long time since I have experienced during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass the consolations, the happiness – I would almost say, the ecstasy – that the Lord deigned to grant me at this altar where I received the imposition of hands and offered, with the Bishop [de Mandolx], my first Mass [Dec. 21, 1811]. I would hesitate to tell you this if the canon who was so kind as to assist me and the Mass servers had not been witnesses of it. Father Aubert is totally unaware of what happened. He was not assisting me that particular day and I felt obliged to conceal from him this grace which, however, I must confide to you. How could one reject that which God gives us in spite of our unworthiness? But the experience of that grace was so strong and so sweet that, from the *Confiteor* to the last Gospel, in spite of myself, my tears flowed unchecked. I had to ask them to fetch my handkerchief because I was unable to read. I dare say that, through the grace of God, I rediscovered there all the fervor with which he had gifted me during the month's retreat when I was preparing myself to receive the priesthood and on the day I had the joy of being made a priest. (To Fr. Tempier, Limoges, August 12, 1850, *Oblate Writings*, 11, p. 23)

December 23

I AM A MINISTER OF JESUS CHRIST

*On the day of his priestly ordination St. Eugene shares his feelings with his mother.*

Dear, darling mother, the miracle has been wrought: your Eugene is a priest of Jesus Christ. That one word says everything; it contains everything. It really is with a sense of deepest lowliness, prostrate in the dust, that I announce such a huge miracle worked in such a great sinner as myself. Dear mother, I have not the strength to say more. Every moment is precious in the state in which the grace of such a tremendous sacrament has placed me; I have to stay in a state of total recollection to savour what it pleases God in his goodness to have me taste in the way of happiness, consolations, etc. What shall I say? The tears are flowing, or rather streaming down; they ought to flow forever, as they take their source in the tenderest of loves and are simply the expression of a most just gratitude, a feeling I will bring with me into blessed eternity.

I leave you now, dear, darling mother. I have three days still to get used to the idea that I am a priest and prepare to celebrate the divine mysteries on the delightful night our lovable Saviour is born in a stable. I was on retreat from the first day of Advent; it was none too long to prepare the ways, to open my heart to the best of my ability for his coming in me. I pray I have not placed any obstacle to the fullness of his spirit which he was disposed to pour out in me by the grace of ordination!

But I am finishing, with an affectionate farewell and with congratulations on what I am. If I am but faithful, I will be your glory for all eternity! But that is a thought that would lead me too far afield. Goodbye everyone; I hold you all tight to my heart. And yes, I am going to continue, kneeling on my two knees before my crucifix, and give you all my blessing, begging the Lord whose unworthy minister I am, to bring your virtues to flower and perfection and pour out continually in your souls the abundant fruits of his grace, which he merited for us by shedding his blood on Calvary. May his peace, his holy peace, be always with you. (Eugene de Mazenod, *Oblate Writings*, 14, p. 226-227)

THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION

Rise up, O Sion, and look to the East. Almighty God would have you clothed anew with his justice, he wants to ring your brow with an immortal crown.... The splendour of his glory is to issue from your bosom, and his rays, shining out to the darkest corners of the least known parts of the inhabited world, will draw on you forever the attentive gaze of astounded nations jealous of your glory. [Bar. 5:1,3] For the divine Word has been seen on earth and has spoken with men [Bar. 3:38].

This prodigy, foretold long ago by the inspired son of Nerias to the children of Israel as they sat by the waters of Babylon and despaired of ever being freed, this prodigy we have seen, it has come to pass among us. Yes, the Word of Life, which was there from the beginning, we have heard it, we have seen it with our own eyes, we have felt it with our hands, for life itself was made visible, we have seen it and bear testimony.... [1 John 1:2-3].

But who could recognize him beneath these rags with which poverty has clothed his delicate limbs? Is it credible, is it even conceivable that wisdom, goodness, justice, infinite grandeur could mean to glorify itself once and for all in such a child?

There speaks human wisdom, but St. Paul replies that what is weak in God is stronger than all men put together, that what does not seem worthy of divine wisdom is wiser than all human wisdom combined.

A Liberator was promised, we were to await one worthy of God and suited to our needs. Behold this Liberator, he has appeared as was foretold, and as he was to be. His humble and obscure origins reveal him rather than conceal him. Destined to be King of a new order, his greatness had to be of a new kind. He who by his death was to destroy cupidity's reign, had from the first moment of his existence to despise pomp and false show.

He must needs be at once both God and man, reunite in his person both God who was offended and human nature that had given offence, that man made strong in Jesus Christ would have the wherewithal to fully satisfy divine justice, and that God would there find an act of reparation superior to the offence and reconciliation would be complete.

Only then could mercy and truth meet, justice and peace reunited and reconciled embrace. [Ps. 84 :11]. Such is the secret and mystery of the deep humiliation of J.C. in his birth. (Eugene de Mazenod, Spiritual conference, December 31, 1810, *Oblate Writings*, 14, p. 170-171)

\* \* \*

*December 24, 1837, St. Eugene took possession of the Diocese of Marseilles.*

*December 25*

#### THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST AND OURS

In order to bring salvation to men, Christ wanted to become incarnate, to take on a body like theirs and to live their life like them and with them. He made himself like unto men, says St. Paul, in all things except sin.

When our Founder set out to evangelize the poor of Provence, he chose a similar way: to become poor with the poor, to speak their language and to go to them in order to tell them who Christ is. And when he sent his missionaries out into the world he told them: Go to the poorest, the most abandoned; love them, learn their language....

The same obligation holds for us today. It is at the root of our vocation as Oblates: to make ourselves poor with the poor and to go to them and live with them in order to reveal to them Jesus Christ through our love and our goodness, through the witness of our works and the proclamation of the Gospel message. [...]

When considering the form of Christ's incarnation, we notice this first of all: not only did he make himself man, he also freely willed to live the life of man in a situation that was poor. He could, while possessing wealth, have lived the life of a virtuous man. He did not want to do so. As Oblates we have made a similar option. To what extent do we live it? [...]

As Oblates we must take the model of our incarnation in the world from Jesus Christ. And we must all feel ourselves challenged by his mystery. Some still remain too far removed from their people, especial-

ly from the poor; they welcome the poor when they come to church, but they live at too great a distance from them and in a manner too different from theirs. Moreover, they don't go to them enough, particularly those who don't practise their faith or who have only a distorted image of Jesus Christ. Is it lack of zeal, or lack of élan, or lack of inner freedom stemming from routine generated by established ways? [...]

Others don't merit such a reproach. No matter what their concrete commitment may be, they live like the poor and close to the poor; they have succeeded in maintaining and developing a missionary spirit and a sensitivity to the poor. They spontaneously go forth in search of the "lost sheep", to those who are farthest away, to those who are the most marginal to the Church's life. Some of these Oblates, however, possibly due to a lack of discernment or of sufficient spiritual maturity, run the risk of committing themselves to dead-end courses of action. Far from being the presence of Jesus Christ and a way of evangelization, their manner of identifying with the life of the poor, of the working people, rather leads them to a progressive loss of the meaning of Jesus Christ, of the universality of his mission, and of the urgent requirements of his kingdom. What began in the beauty of hope ends in disillusionment.

For the Oblate, incarnation in today's world remains the normal way of evangelization. We must, therefore, proceed along this path with confidence and courage, but do so all the while having Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, in mind. What saves the poor is not the presence of one more poor person among them; rather it is the presence of Christ who is poor in their midst. (F. Jetté, December 8, 1975, *Letters to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, Rome 1984, p. 27-33)

*December 26, St. Stephen, Protomartyr*

#### MARTYRDOM AND MISSION

*Saint Stephen's martyrdom can be a source of reflection on the vocation to "martyrdom" of the Christian and of the Oblate in particular.*

The martyrdom of charity is the basic spirit of oblation. It flows through the Rules and Oblate spirituality as a way of living the mission.

Several Oblates have experienced the martyrdom of blood, or have had a consciousness of martyrdom in the way they carry out the mission.

In its formulation, the desire for martyrdom, as expressed by Eugene, reflects some of the various historical influences, but in its essence it is inherent in the Oblate spirituality, beyond the historical contingency and becomes a spiritual reality, timeless, within the charism as an element that informs the style and the very missionary sensitivity of the Oblates. If it is true that the mission is born of the greatest love, there is no greater love than one that gives life.

This means putting the cross and the mystery of the martyrdom of Christ at the center of our mission so that we can see the world that is the recipient of our proclamation as well as our mission through the eyes of Christ crucified. This means to carry within us the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may show us to be truly co-redeemers.

Martyrdom is the "beautiful witness" (Cf. 1 Tim 6:13) that makes instantly intelligible the message it carries. Where dialogue and proclamation are not possible verbally, the only form of proclamation is life. The witness will be stronger and engaging the more the life of the one who gives it will be put into play, even to the supreme gift through martyrdom.

By the participation in the death of Christ, constantly lived out in the small "daily deaths", up to receiving the grace of the same martyrdom as Christ, the distinction between messenger and message is superseded. The content of evangelization, which is Christ, is to identify with the container. It reaches its purity and authenticity, surpassing the opacity that the culture and person of the announcer bears within himself.

The martyrdom of the missionary who shares and suffers all kinds of difficulties, including that of disappointment when he does not see anything flourish, is that seed which dies to bring life, which makes it so particularly attentive to the voice of the Spirit and that gives this message: Christ. Christ speaks to every man of any culture and race effectively through the "new martyrs" who make him mysteriously present. (M. Giorgianni, *Il martirio "carisma" della missione*, Frascati 1994, p. 133-137)

December 27

#### TEMPIER ARRIVES IN AIX

True to his promise, Father Tempier left Arles the day after the Solemnity of Christmas, December 26, 1815, and arrived at Aix on the 27th, the feast of St. John the Evangelist. Father de Mazenod was waiting for the arrival of the stagecoach. After the first effusions of the holiest friendship, the most cordial that ever was, and that was to last fifty years without any distortion, they went together to meet the Vicars General and Tempier said, “Thanks to the precautions taken, the esteem for the person of our revered father, and, above all, thanks to the goodness of God, who had merciful plans for me, the welcome of the Vicars General was good; not a word of blame about my departure from Arles was spoken; we could not have been more pleased or happier.”

“From that day, until January 25, I only went to my parents for my rest at night; during the day, I was at M. de Mazenod’s, and we happily discussed everything we intended to do for the glory of God and the salvation of souls; we said all our Office and did our spiritual exercises together, as often as we could, as Mr. de Mazenod was often disturbed by his congregants. – Tempier, *Mémoires*” (Rambert, I, p. 174)

December 28

#### BENJAMIN INOCENCIO (1958-2000)

##### MARTYR IN JOLO, PHILIPPINES

*Father Benjamin Inocencio, Chancellor of the Vicariate of Jolo in the Philippines, was shot dead on December 28, 2000, a few meters from the Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Cathedral. Father Inocencio, 42, was sitting in a jeep on his way to a store in Jolo town, 950 kilometers south of the capital Manila, when a gunman boarded the jeep, fired at him, and killed him at 10:05 a.m. Father Benjie was born on January 17, 1958, in Pasig City, southeast of Manila, and was ordained priest on April 25, 1992. He was first assigned to South Upi in Maguindanao, then served seven years as pastor in the island mission of Cagayan*

*de Mapun, Tawi-Tawi province, southern Philippines, before being assigned to Jolo.*

Today we have lost one of our confreres as a victim of violence. It appears to be an attack directed against our very Oblate mission – a mission to promote peace on earth, to make Jesus Christ visible where he is needed most. Father Benjamin Inocencio OMI was murdered at 10:05 a.m. local time near the tomb of Bishop Benjamin de Jesus, who was also assassinated four years ago.

What is our reaction to such an event? I was shocked and sad when I first received the news this morning. In the name of all Oblates I immediately expressed our condolences to our Oblate missionaries in the Philippines to Bishop Angelito Lampon, to the people in Jolo, and to the relatives of Father Benjie. Our worldwide corporate body stands united in solidarity with our brothers there who are daily tested in their work for justice and peace.

We need to pray for them that they do not lose courage. They continue to be afflicted in so many ways. The fourth anniversary of the violent death of Bishop Benjamin de Jesus is only five weeks away. As we ponder these events we need to pray for the agents of such violent deeds that they too be delivered from their bondage. One of them lost his life in the incident.

My second reaction evokes a biblical text: the “murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44) has again shown his teeth...

Oblates must be doing something very good that this happens to us. But how much further will the persecution of evil still go? We have no other defense than the power of the one who himself had to flee from Herod when the king murdered the Holy Innocents. Our defender too fell victim to violence and triumphed in the power of the Resurrection. He is Emmanuel – God with us.

Through Him may we all be strengthened in our Oblation and Mission and may Fr. Benjie Inocencio be our advocate. (Wilhelm Steckling, December 28, 2000, Feast of the Innocent Martyrs)



TO KNOW JESUS CHRIST

Full and complete knowledge of Jesus Christ, that is to say, in our considerations we must never separate the divinity from the humanity of Jesus Christ, nor the humanity from the divinity.

If we consider him only as God we could no longer worship him suffering and dying to atone for our sins. We could not consider him. If we stop at his humanity, we would have to renounce admiring him in his humiliation thus becoming our Mediator, our Savior, our Victim. We must never separate these two qualities of Jesus Christ, not even for a moment. We want to adore the Child Jesus, fruit of the womb of the Virgin Mary.

Let us adore Jesus Christ in all his infinite perfections which are the subject of the admiration and praise of all the blessed in heaven.

And first of all, the knowledge of Jesus Christ is the noblest and most excellent.

Jesus Christ! The name alone, O my brothers, does it not already say more to you than my feeble voice could express. Jesus Christ! Is not your heart already completely filled at the name of Jesus Christ? In speaking this adorable name that fills heaven with joy and happiness, the earth with consolation and hope, and hell with trembling and terror, do you not feel moved with love, respect, gratitude, regrets, desires, all the feelings in a word of which your heart is capable, and would my whole life suffice to develop in you these various feelings that already stir in your souls at the name of Jesus Christ.

I need no other evidence to convince you of the sublimity of this knowledge since the name itself of the adorable person we want to consider so fills your souls that it only remains for me to try to put before you the feelings that he has created in you.

But who am I to dare to undertake to make known to others the One I maybe do not know enough myself; and even though I may have meditated deeply enough on the topic that we will not understand well until it will be given to us to live only in him, for him and by him, should I not fear and tremble on hearing these formidable words spoken from the mouth of the Almighty. "Sinner, who are you to declare my

word, sinner, tremble because you defile my righteousness by making it known". (Eugene de Mazenod, Topics for meditations and instructions [1808-1811])

December 30

#### THE PURCHASE OF THE CARMELITE CONVENT IN AIX

*December 30, 1815 marks a further important step for the foundation of the Missionaries of Provence. That day, thanks to the presence of Father Tempier, the contract for the purchase of the Carmelite convent in Aix was signed.*

Before the Revolution the Carmelites had a beautiful convent in Aix with an adjoining church and a large garden. During the Revolution all the property of the Aix Carmelites was confiscated and declared national property to be sold to the first comer. August 10, 1796, Mr. Jacques Ginezy was able to buy three quarters of the convent. He sold it in turn to Ms. Victoire Gontier on January 17, 1810. She opened a girls' boarding school there, but being in difficulty [...] thought it prudent to sell to Father de Mazenod the part she had purchased from Mr. Ginezy while reserving certain rights for herself.

When signing the bill of sale, the Founder paid 5,000 francs [...]. The remaining 11,000 francs were paid in installments. March 12, 1816: 3,000 francs. May 30, 1816: 4000 francs and on December 31, 1822: 4,000 francs. Although Mrs. Gontier had reserved for seven years the use of a part sold to the Founder, she gave it up after five months, precisely on May 13, 1816. From that day the Founder and his companions really felt at home. (J. Pielorz, *Nouvelles recherches sur la fondation de notre Congregation*, "Missions OMI" 83 [1956], p. 192-253)

You should know that, in order to secure the acquisition of the part of the house that the teacher, Mrs. Gontier possessed, I had to accept the most onerous conditions. She sold me her property in the hope that the closeness of the missionaries would be good for the boarding school that she insisted on keeping. To this end, she gave me only half of the building, reserving the other half for her and her guests; she would also

enjoy the right to enter the chapel; this spared her hiring a chaplain whom she would have had to pay. She also hoped that one of us would undertake to confess them; it was not enough that she had sequestered us in the rooms that she had ceded; but to get to the apartments at the top of the house, which now form the library, we had to go up the narrow staircase that goes to the outside. We had much difficulty to squeeze in. (Eugene de Mazenod, *Mémoires*, Rembert, I, p. 176)

\* \* \*

BLESSED MARCELINO SÁNCHEZ FERNÁNDEZ (1910-1936)  
MARTYR OF SPAIN

*He was born on December 30, 1910, in Santa Marina del Rey (León).*

*On March 24, 1927, he began his novitiate as a coadjutor Brother and was professed on March 25, 1928. He remained in the novitiate community, rendering valuable services as a tailor and janitor. In 1930, when the scholasticate of Pozuelo was inaugurated, he was assigned to the new community and dedicated himself to various tasks, mainly tailoring. He was a “factotum” because he did a bit of everything: sewing, sweeping, cleaning, acting as errand boy and letter carrier for the superior, taking care of the pigeons and chickens... He made his perpetual profession as a brother on August 28, 1935.*

*Marcellino was a simple person, without great intellectual or practical qualities, but he stood out for his humility, his helpfulness, his charity and his spiritual life. He was particularly distinguished by his devotion to Mary. Antonio Jambrina says that he was a “tireless worker, attentive to every service, and of admirable delicacy with the scholastics. Of firm piety, and a friend of the rosary that he did not let still, in any respite of his exhausting work”. As an errand boy and porter, Marcellino was well known by the people of the town, especially by those who frequented the Oblate house.*

*On the morning of November 28, 1936, he was “taken out” to be martyred in Paracuellos del Jarama. He was 25 years old.*

December 31

OUR HEART LIKE BETHLEHEM

At Holy Communion time, we can imagine our heart has become like another stable in Bethlehem where Jesus was born. Let us worship him with sentiments of the most lively faith and the most ardent charity. Love him, love him with Mary, with St Joseph, the angels, the shepherds and the Magi, and give free rein to all the emotions that cannot fail to fill our soul. (Boisramé, *Méditations*, II, p. 318)

Christmas reminds us of the incarnation of Christ and of our own incarnation among the people and especially among the poor. However, if Christ were no more than a man, nothing or very little would be changed. Everything is changed because Christ is God becoming man to make us gods. Our presence, our very mission, changes something if we are holy, if we live what is divine. (M. Zago, *All are called to holiness*, Circular 315, December 5, 1989, “Acta Administrationis Generalis” XII [1989], p. 39)

# Moveable Feasts

## *Lent*

### THE PURPOSE OF LENT

*Every year, on the occasion of Lent, Bishop Eugene de Mazenod wrote a pastoral letter to the faithful of the diocese of Marseilles. In 1846, he explained the meaning of this liturgical season.*

The purpose [of Lent] is especially to dispose souls to participate in the great mystery of the resurrection of the God-Man, by having them pass through the penitent and sorrowful path he himself has traced, by having them go up with him to Calvary and to spiritually go down with him into the grave, to be reborn with him to the new life he has gained by his victory over hell, sin and death. [...] In this way we will be like him, living, suffering and dying with him in this passing day of suffering and trial, resurrecting, triumphing and reigning with him in the eternal day of glory. [...]

It is to have us practice this union of spirit and heart with Jesus Christ that the Church calls us to live these holy forty days before arriving at the Passover. So we withdraw with him into the desert, we pray, we fast, we resist the temptations with him, we soon follow him to endure in spirit the work, the fatigue and the contradictions of his public life. In the night we will be together on the mountain to collect the fruit of his prayers, and during the day, we will witness his miracles, which show his mercy as much as his lovely person by a bond of love, moved by his inexhaustible charity, his infinite love for men; we will hear his divine word with reverence and, like Mary, his holy Mother, we shall ponder it in our hearts (Lk 2: 19); we fill ourselves with the feelings of our Redeemer, we are lead by the inspirations of His love, we make our soul like his, until he himself is formed in us (Gal 4: 19); we share his

humble, penitent and laborious life and we are conformed to His image, which is endlessly reproduced before our eyes, so that he becomes for us the firstborn of many brothers, and so that after being called and justified we might be glorified (Rom 13: 29-30). (Eugene de Mazenod, *Lenten Pastoral Letter* 1846).

### *Palm Sunday*

#### THE CHURCH, THE COST OF THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

Born of the blood of a God dying on the cross, she [the Church] will lead a life in conformity with her origin and whether among royalty or in the prisons, she will always carry this painful cross on which is hung the salvation of the world. Indissolubly united to Jesus Christ, slandered, persecuted, and condemned by the ungrateful people he wanted to save, she will walk constantly until the end of time in the path of his suffering and in an ineffable union that a hell trembling with rage will try ceaselessly to disturb; like her divine spouse, who is also her eternal model, she will always have to fight against all errors and inordinate passions, and to support the imperial claims of God, which are those of truth and justice. (Eugene de Mazenod, *Pastoral Letter* of January 19, 1845).

The Church, which is humanity regenerated, is really the spouse of Jesus Christ who on Calvary gave her a supernatural existence, that is to say, his own life.

The Church is thus the price of the blood of Jesus Christ and the object of his infinite love for mankind. He loved her more than his life, and because of him she is dear to God the Father who already from eternity has loved her so much as to give up his only Son for her, *sic Deus dilixit mundum ut Filium suum unigenitum daret* (John 3:17) [...]

This union between the children of men and Jesus Christ took place while the divine blood was shed on Calvary for their redemption and that by the passion and death of the Savior grace was merited for them. It is by grace that we are united with the adorable Mediator and through him to the Father; grace is the link that unites us to him and makes us participants in his merits, as if we had died with him and that his blood

mixed with ours communicated the cost and virtue that are essentially inherent in the sacrifice of the God-Man. (Eugene de Mazenod, *Pastoral Letter* of February 16, 1860).

### *Holy Thursday*

TO SANCTIFY THE NIGHT BETWEEN THURSDAY AND FRIDAY

*In his pastoral letter to the diocese, in 1857, Bishop de Mazenod explains to the faithful how to live the night of Holy Thursday:*

We do not want to wait for our return to Marseilles to invite you to sanctify the night between Thursday and Friday in your churches. We really desire that this great night, which commemorates the Passion of Christ, will not pass in your parishes, without a continuous adoration of the mystery of the Eucharist, in which, in the words of St. Paul, we announce the death of Lord.

Having made himself a victim for our salvation, he is now solemnly exposed in front of us in the state of immolation which puts before us the reality of his divine presence that in that hour he suffered for our souls, before giving his life for our redemption. Is it not a wonderful thing, in these precious moments, to be able to unite oneself without reservation to his person, merging our feelings with his, sharing in his pain, asking forgiveness for our sins and paying tribute to his glory, in the deep humiliation that He suffered? (Eugene de Mazenod, *Letter to the priests of the diocese of Marseilles*, March 28, 1857).

\* \* \*

IN THE NIGHT OF THAT HOLY DAY...

*Holy Thursday of 1816 is a memorable event in the history of the religious life of the Missionary Oblates. Saint Eugene himself describes that night:*

My intention in dedicating myself to the ministry of the missions to work especially for the instruction and the conversion of the most aban-

doned souls was to imitate the example of the Apostles in their life of dedication and abnegation. I had convinced myself that to get the same results from my preaching, I had to walk in their footsteps and practice as much as possible the same virtues. So I considered the evangelical counsels to which they had been faithful, as indispensable, so that our words while announcing the same truths would not be as the words of many I had noticed, that is to say, resounding brass and tinkling cymbals. My constant thought was always that our little family should consecrate itself to God and to the service of the Church by religious vows. [...]

I nevertheless talked about it to the first of them [my first companions], Fr. Tempier, whom I had chosen for my director and who had taken me as his. He was delighted by this proposal since it fully conformed to his own desires, and we agreed, Mr. Tempier and I, to proceed with the project. [...] In short, Father Tempier and I judged that we should not delay any longer, so on Holy Thursday kneeling beneath the canopy of the beautiful repository we had erected over the main altar of the mission church, we both pronounced our vows on the night of that holy day with a joy that cannot be described. Throughout that whole lovely night, we relished our happiness as we knelt in the presence of Our Lord at the foot of the magnificent throne where we had reposed Him for the next day's Mass of the Presanctified; and we begged Our Divine Master that, if it was His will to bless our Society, He would enlighten our present companions as well as those who would come later, to see completely what this offering of oneself to God could mean to anyone who wished to serve Him unselfishly and to consecrate their life to the spread of the Holy Gospel and the conversion of souls. Our wishes were fulfilled. (*Mémoires*, in Rambert, I, p. 187-188).

*Rambert and Rey seem to see here the beginning of religious life for the Missionaries of Provence. Indeed, Eugene speaks of vows. But in fact, he and Tempier took only one vow that night: a mutual vow of obedience. Father Taché wrote that the reason for this mutual obedience was based on perfection: they wanted to sacrifice themselves fully. It was not, however, a simple personal desire for sanctification. It involved the entire Society itself. In Father Tempier's death notice, Father Joseph Fabre said, "We can consider this act as an introduction*



to the religious life that they will be so happy to profess one day.... It was not a vain ceremony: it was a great act, one of those acts that affect people's destinies. It is only in eternity that we will know the merits of which this act was the source for both religious. The one who remained all his life the first superior knew also how to remain the first obedient one, and we do not know who had the best part: the superior who many times obeyed his subject, or the subject who had the power to order the one in whom he respected and loved the living image of God's authority. This is perhaps unique in the history of religious congregations; we note it with the humble gratitude that the gifts of God give rise to." (Notices nécrologiques, 2, p. 87). While everyone might not have been ready to embrace religious life, it is important to note that Eugene saw the evangelical counsels "as indispensable to embrace." Tempier and he would be on the cusp of the decision and would work in the community to bring about a desire on the part of all to make "this oblation to God of one's entire self," which is expressed in the vows.

G. Cosentino, *L'introduction des vœux dans notre Congrégation*, "Études oblates" 13 (1954), p. 287-308.

## Good Friday

### THE SIGHT OF THE CROSS

*Good Friday reminds us of one of the highest points of St. Eugene's conversion. He himself recalls that moment.*

Can I forget the bitter tears that the sight of the cross brought streaming from my eyes one Good Friday? Indeed they welled up from the heart, there was no checking them, they were too abundant for me to be able to hide them from those who like myself were assisting at that moving ceremony. I was in a state of mortal sin [p. 6] and it was precisely this that made me grieve. I could then, and also on some other instance, perceive the difference. Never was my soul more satisfied, never did it feel such happiness; for in the midst of this flood of tears, despite my grief, or rather through my grief, my soul took wings for its last end, towards God its only good whose loss it felt so keenly.

Why say more? Could I ever express what I experienced then? Just the memory of it fills my heart with a sweet satisfaction. So I had looked for happiness outside of God, and outside him I found but affliction and chagrin. Blessed, a thousand times blessed, that he, this good Father, notwithstanding my unworthiness, lavished on me all the richness of his mercy. (*Retreat made at the Aix Seminary December 1814, Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 81)

The charism, the Oblate gift that we seek to express through our lives is a way of knowing and following Jesus whose life appeared to be a total failure when we look at him hanging on the cross abandoned by almost all his companions. It seems that as Oblates, both associates and vowed brothers and priests, we have a source of life within us that originates in this experience of utter desolation and abandonment. Into this total darkness comes the strongest expression of unconditional love. It's the love of a Son for a Father and the love of God for all his people. This was young Eugene de Mazenod's experience as he entered a church on a Good Friday in 1807. St. Eugene saw Jesus on the cross on Good Friday in a way that he had never noticed the Lord before. His life was turned upside down as he perceived that Jesus' blood, his entire life, was given away to bring us life in abundance.

One component of Oblate spirituality is to come into contact with Jesus as my Savior, by letting myself be overwhelmed by his unconditional love for me, for us, for the poor and the abandoned, for the Church and for the world. This experience of love does not happen once and for all, but its deepening truly constitutes the growth of our spiritual life that transforms and changes our lives. Ultimately, this experience of God's love for us, this unconditional, free, unmerited love, makes us free people. (L. Lougen, *To Oblate Associates Gathered in Ottawa*, February 17, 2011)

J. Pielorz, *Vendredi Saint de 1807, mythe ou réalité?*, « Vie Oblate Life » 56 (1997), p. 13-45. *Good Friday of 1807. Myth or Reality?*, “Vie Oblate Life” 56 (1997), p. 47-78. L. Paquet, *La conversion d'Eugène de Mazenod*, 58 (1999), p. 403-427. G. Mammana, *Le vendredi saint d'Eugène de Mazenod*, « Vie Oblate Life » 58 (1999), p. 539-557. J. Amal, *St. Eugene's Good Friday Experience – An Inner-Journey*

*of Oblation and Martyrdom, in Oblación y Martirio, Actas de la Conferencia, Pozuelo, 4-5 de mayo 2019, F. Ciardi - A. Ruiz González (editores), (Oblatio Studia, 8), Missionarii OMI, Rome 2019, p. 47-54.*

### *Holy Saturday*

#### THE CROSS IS CENTRAL TO OUR MISSION

“The cross of Jesus Christ is central to our mission. Like the apostle Paul, we ‘preach Christ and him crucified’ (1 Cor 2: 2). If we bear in our body the death of Jesus, it is with the hope that the life of Jesus, too, may be seen in our body (cf. 2 Cor 4:10). Through the eyes of our crucified Saviour we see the world which he redeemed with his blood, desiring that those in whom he continues to suffer will know also the power of his resurrection (cf. Phil 3:10)” (C 4).

The Founder attributed a truly major importance to the mystery of the cross, in our apostolate as well as in our lives. He adopted this outlook for several reasons: first and foremost, the cross is God’s chosen way for saving the world; secondly, the cross is needed to keep the apostolic man rooted in humility and in truth, for by his ministry he is both witness and instrument of God’s marvelous deeds; and thirdly, ever since the internal shock of his “conversion” on the Good Friday of 1807, Eugene maintained a vivid awareness of the need to make reparation for his own sins and for those of the world.... The cross of Jesus, which is “central to our mission” results in hope of paschal joy, of new life in Jesus....

Our outlook on the world becomes that of Jesus the Saviour crucified. It was the Founder’s outlook after his “conversion”, how he saw himself and the world in terms of Christ’s blood. The expressions: “souls at the price of Christ’s blood”, “who have cost him his blood”, recur again and again in his writings.... This vision, this look normally generates a desire for the salvation of the world and the willingness to cooperate with Christ’s work of redemption. [...]

We are invited to contemplate the cross, Christ’s suffering not only within ourselves but also in others. Our desire is “that those in whom he continues to suffer will know also the power of his resurrection.” This brings to mind Pascal’s reflection: “Jesus will be in agony until the end

of the world; we must not sleep during this time" (Jetté, *O.M.I. The Apostolic Man*, p. 57-59).

## *Easter Sunday*

### CHRIST AT THE CENTER OF COMMUNITY

Christ himself is the foundation of the community. Christ calls us, he brings us together (cf. CC. 1, 3) and he is present in our midst. We follow him and become his cooperators in the community and through the community, because Christ makes himself present within it: "where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst" (Mt 18: 20).

Holiness and mission come through the community not because it is a means for their achievement, but because Christ is present in the community and through it. Of course this presence is not realized by a sacramental formula as in the Eucharist. It is realized by the way we live as Christians. Article 37 of the Constitutions provides the theological key and points out the method for realizing the community, for making Christ present, for making the community missionary: "By growing in unity of heart and mind we bear witness before the world that Jesus lives in our midst and unites us in order to send us out to proclaim God's reign". (M. Zago, *Community*, "Vie Oblate Life" 47 [1988], p. 3-10).

## *Sunday after Easter*

### THE MERCY OF GOD

*John Paul II designated the Second Sunday of Easter as "Divine Mercy" Sunday. Eugene experienced that mercy very deeply and used it as a tool in his ministry. His testament, written in 1854, gives strong evidence of this.*

I implore God's mercy, by the merits of our divine Saviour Jesus Christ in whom I place all my trust, to obtain pardon for my sins and the grace of my soul being received in holy paradise. With this in mind I invoke the intercession of the most holy and immaculate Virgin Mary,

Mother of God, daring to remind her in all humility, but with the consolation too, of the filial devotion of my whole life and the desire I have always had to make her known and loved and to spread her cult in every place by the ministry of those the Church has given me as children and who are united with me in my desires.

*This is followed by an invocation to the angels, the saints, his patron saints, of Saint Joseph, the souls in purgatory, and to those who will survive him. Then he continues:*

I have indeed complete trust that God in his goodness, in virtue of his infinite mercy, will grant me his holy paradise.... But it is precisely the knowledge of the imperfection of this charity in me and the countless infidelities I have to reproach myself with and which have made it grow cold in my soul, despite the graces with which I have been blessed all my life, that make me fear the length and severity of my purgatory. Acknowledging that I deserved hell, I cannot but acquiesce unreservedly in the sentence of temporal suffering that God's justice, tempered by his mercy, will pronounce for me.... It is this persuasion that, to shorten the desirable term, has me cry out to the friends... to borrow the words of the Church's prayers: *miseremini mei saltem vos amici mei*. (*Oblate Writings*, 15, p. 248-249).

### *Ascension*

#### OUR JOY IS IN HEAVEN

God has ascended among shouts of joy. In this blessed day of triumph for heaven and happiness for the earth, brethren, could we not be thrilled with a holy joy? In such a great solemnity of the universal Church could our heart not be elated and filled with the feelings of the purest joy? Today the Son of God, having completed the work of our redemption, victor of the world and of hell, enters into the possession of his Kingdom and his immortal glory. Today this loving Saviour leaves mankind in this land of exile, but he goes to open for them the gates of heaven closed because of sin for so many centuries. It is today that Jesus, the good Master, addresses to his disciples and to us the consoling promise not to abandon us as orphans but to send us his Holy Spirit.

Finally if He ascended to heaven, it is to strengthen our hope, for He is our head and we are his members, therefore we have good cause to hope to be together with him one day. Oh! How blessed are we to have before the Sovereign Judge in heaven a protector, an advocate, a pontiff so charitable, so powerful! [...]

But God forbid that we confine ourselves simply to admiring the greatness of this mystery. Let us make some reflections for our spiritual benefit. Jesus Christ ascending to heaven has brought all our expectations there. Then since, according [p. 2] to the thought of the great St. Leo, the triumph of Jesus Christ in His ascension is at the same time our elevation and happiness, the triumphant ascension of the Saviour must commit us to follow the path to achieve the same happiness. What is this happiness? What are the ways to get there? [...] We are made for heaven and our heart, says St. Augustine, can not be happy until it is in possession of this eternal rest. And to be fully convinced we have only to call upon the witness of our conscience. Is it not true that each of us feels in his heart an invincible necessity that brings it to seek its own happiness? Is it not true that while we are free in all things, it does not depend on us to want to be happy? Ah! Let's admit it in good faith that this desire, this overwhelming fondness for our happiness is proven true by the fact that being made in the image of God we are also made to possess Him. [...]

Therefore, what is the sound and only real good that can fully satisfy the human heart and make it perfectly happy if not the eternal and immutable good of heaven? [...] Where shall we go to find our happiness? It is only in heaven that we shall find it. It is God himself, very sound and true, the source of all good, and we need seek no other, because he himself, as he assures us, will be our great reward. (Charles-Dominique Albini, OMI, *Écrits spirituels*, 42-Ascension)

## *Pentecost*

### A NEW PENTECOST FOR THE MISSIONARIES

The novices ought not to forget that... that all their actions ought to be done with the dispositions in which the apostles were when they were in the Cenacle waiting for the Holy Spirit to come and enflame

them with his love and give them the signal to go forth swiftly and conquer the world. (Eugene de Mazenod to Tempier, November 4, 1817, *Oblate Writings*, 6, p. 45)

It must be admitted that this mission to the Indians of Hudson Bay is more than purely natural strength can endure. Ceaseless miraculous aid is necessary if a man is not to succumb in it. [...] You would not believe the success that this good Fr. Laverlochère [missionary in Canada who was visiting France to speak of the Canadian missions] has had here, at Aix and Toulon. This is something to thank God for. [...] There is something divine in the simplicity of this man of God! As the dean of the faculty of theology at Aix said, one sees in him the personification of the divine Christian apostolate. [...] M. Polge (professor at the Faculty) said to me soon afterwards that he had wept on hearing and seeing the living testimony of the divine character of the Christian apostolate, the successor of the fishermen of Gennesaret converted like them into a fisher of men, and renewing in his own person the miracles of Pentecost... (Eugene de Mazenod to Bishop Guigues, Marseilles, January 10, 1851, *Oblate Writings*, 2, p. 3-4)

Perhaps it would be fitting for me to tell Your Eminence about the good our Oblates of Mary are doing in the Missions of Ceylon. I have often received very heartening news. It would truly seem that the Lord is helping them in a very special way. I am convinced that they have been gifted with a certain participation in the miracle of Pentecost. How would it otherwise be possible to explain that in such a short time, they have been able to know enough of those difficult languages to instruct and confess the natives of that country? [...] You can be sure, Your Eminence, that four Oblates are not needed in the vicariate of Colombo, but 10 or even more if it were possible. [...] One of those who was already in the vicariate died a very holy death last year, a victim of his zeal for those stricken with cholera. [Fr. Leydier who died June 16, 1851.] [...] As far as I am concerned, I can vouch that they are four angels. That is why the Lord showers such blessings on their ministry. [...] I felt that these few details would bring pleasure to Your Eminence and I could write a whole volume were I to narrate the works of all our missionar-

ies throughout the world. (Eugene de Mazenod to Cardinal Fransoni, March 1, 1853, *Oblate Writings*, 5, p. 65-66)

### *Corpus Domini*

#### THE EUCHARIST: SUPREME GIFT OF HIS LOVE

The Eucharist is the last degree of the Word's self-debasement, and thus, the Eucharist is the highest term of his ascent in love. I ask you, O Christian souls, of all the divine mysteries, which is the one where God seems more loving and more lovable? Which one wins Him more infallibly your love? Is it not the most holy and adorable Eucharist? The supreme gift of his love, the last excess, the last folly of his affection, is it not in this august sign that frees you entirely, that makes him your brother in exile, the food of your soul, the balm of all your ailments, the viaticum of your earthly pilgrimage? Is it not here that you understand the helplessness and the futility of all human affection? Who other than a God could love you to this extent and do so many wonders to show you his love? But this divine stratagem has also had its full triumph: it is in its humblest form that the incarnate God has won more love. You are witnesses of this for me: why this so piously moved affluence? Why, in most Catholic countries, this long and splendid feast of Perpetual Adoration? Why these days and nights filled with intimate outpourings and ardent aspirations? Ah! I hear you, faithful souls, the love of the crushed God calls and causes your love, it will not be said that the infinite love spread so many seductions and so many wonders around you in vain! You fell under the charms that led the saints to radiant heights of ecstasy, and the beating of your hearts, even more than this splendor and pomp, proclaim that the Word, in the mystery that puts the finishing touch to his sacrifices, has conquered more love than all the other mysteries of His wisdom and infinite power. (Charles Baret, omi, [1825-1875]. *Le Sacrifice eucharistique*, "Missions OMI" 15 [1877], p. 245-246).



## *Feast of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus*

### CELEBRATION OF THE FEAST OF THE SACRED HEART

*On his way to Switzerland, St. Eugene went to Notre-Dame de Lumières, on the feast of the Sacred Heart, to take possession of the Shrine entrusted to the Oblates. This is what he wrote in his diary:*

As today is the beautiful feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, I did not want to let it pass without consecrating to him the house, our foundation and the community that is to serve the shrine and exercise the holy ministry of missions in the diocese. I have so far waited in vain for the two missionaries I summoned from Notre-Dame du Laus. I am annoyed by this delay, as I wanted to set the little community up today. I did not allow this hitch force me to let so beautiful a day go by without performing the ceremony I planned.

So on our return from our visit to the ruined chapel of the archangel St. Michael, Fathers Tempier, Honorat and myself put on choir dress, and alone in this big church, with no one for witness but our porter Xavier Grangier and his wife, we piously exposed the Blessed Sacrament, reserved in the ciborium on the altar, to the singing of the *Ave verum*.

Then we stayed on for a half-hour oraison. I think these were precious moments. We may have been quite alone in the presence of our divine Master, but we were prostrate at his feet to place our persons, our society, its ministry, its works, the house we had just taken possession of, under his powerful protection; we asked that he alone rule over us, that he be our father, light, help, counsel, support, our all.

We were calling down his blessings on ourselves and our Congregation that we were representing with all the more fervor because we were few in number.

As for myself, there was joined to all these thoughts a profound feeling of my unworthiness, convinced as I was to the depth of my soul that my sins made me essentially incapable of being the instrument of all the miracles the Lord is working for our men and through them, from the feeble beginnings of our small family up to the present.

This house, that I was placing at this moment specially under the protection of our sovereign Master and Saviour, was already the tenth foundation of our Congregation. (June 2, 1837, *Oblate Writings*, 18, p. 170-171)

### *Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*

#### IN THE HANDS OF MARY

*The Servant of God Fr. Anselmo Trèves (Aosta 1875 - Rome 1934) chose "Marianize to Christianize" as the motto for his life and his Oblate mission. That is to say, to procure the reign of Christ by procuring the reign of Mary. From one of his writings:*

To make oneself simple and small in the arms of Mary, next to her mother's heart, that is definitely our entire program and all our ideal. How wonderful, but according to me also how difficult! You have to completely forget yourself, be detached from everything, renounce every personal point of view in order to let yourself be guided only by the Spirit of Mary, by the hand of Mary, and to get lost in that divine crucible. To rise so far above ourselves and see everything through the eyes of Mary, we need to love and see everything with the heart and the will of Mary; our wing beats will be the Ave, that we will multiply as much as possible. (September 24, 1927)

To the Most Holy Mary, who humanized God, the task of deifying man. Her mission is therefore to sculpt the soul that abandons itself to her, because it is the live representation of her Son God. It will therefore take many strokes of the chisel and hammer before making us speaking and vivid images of her Jesus! But if we will let her do it, her job will soon be done! Therefore, absolute abandonment and at every moment, at every opportunity: blind surrender! It's not easy; how many times I have prayed to Our Lady not to strike continually nor too hard!

Ah! If I had instead accepted her cruel but maternally sanctifying action! At least let it be so from now on, and letting the hands of Mary blindfold us, throw ourselves into her arms with the trust of the child who knows who it trusts and falls asleep in its mother's arms (Novem-

ber 13, 1926). (In A. Rossetti, *Una vita con la Madonna. P. Anselmo Trèves O.M.I.*, Milano, Ancora 1964<sup>3</sup>, p. 160)

A.M. Trèves, *Maria Ideale di vita*, Texts selected and presented by A. Mitri, Città Nuova, Roma 1984. L. Cencio, *La catechesi mariana di Anselmo Trèves O.M.I. (1875-1934)*, Roma 1994. S. Franco, *Thinking, loving, working with Mary. The spiritual work of Anselmo Maria Trèves*, “Oblatio” X (2022), p. 37-61.



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*The names of the recipients of the letters of St. Eugene de Mazenod are not included.*

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 Drouart Jean: November 11  
 Dubois Edmond: August 15  
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 Dufour Christophe: January 27  
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 Dumolard Philippe: November 5  
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 Escobar García Gregorio: May 9  
 Esteban Francisco: March 19  
 Esteban Lacal Francisco: February 8  
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 Fabre A.: January 2  
 Fabre Joseph: January 20; January 25; March 6; July 28; August 8;  
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 Apostles: February 13; March 11; June 29; July 25; September 21;  
 October 25; October 28; October 31

Austerity: see Mortification

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Charity / Fraternal union: January 9; January 10; February 11; March 20; May 20; May 27; May 28; August 4; September 27

Chastity: April 21; April 22; April 23; April 24; April 20

Church: January 9; March 18

Community: January 11; January 25; January 28; February 1; February 3; February 6; February 9; February 10; April 17; July 29; October 20; December 13; Easter Sunday

Contemplation: see Prayer

Daring / Urgences / Zeal: January 9; February 5; May 20; October 13; October 16; October 23; November 20

Deceased Oblates: November 3; November 5; November 7; November 8; November 12

Evangelization / Preaching / Mission: January 19; March 15; March 16; March 22; March 23; March 30; March 31; July 22; July 23; September 27; October 3; October 5; October 6; October 8; October 10; October 22; December 26; Pentecost

Glory of God: March 18; July 15; July 18; July 19; July 21

Gospel: January 11; October 18

Holiness: January 16; February 1; May 20; June 10; October 15; November 1; November 14; November 15; November 16; November 17; November 18; November 22; December 13; December 17

Holy Spirit: January 6; February 3; May 15, May 16; August 27; October 14

Hope: March 24

### *Jesus Christ*

Baptism: January 6

Blood: March 4; April 29; July 1; July 3; July 4; July 6; Palm Sunday

Cross: March 27; March 28; March 29; September 14; Holy Saturday

Crucified: March 26; Good Friday

Eucharist: January 12; February 14; April 5; April 6; April 7; April 9; April 10; April 11; April 12; April 13; April 14; April 15; April

17; May 13; Corpus Domini  
 Jesus: January 9; January 11; August 2; December 4; December 24;  
 December 25; December 29; December 31; Holy Thursday  
 Sacred Heart: February 8, May 29; June 1; June 5; June 7; June 8;  
 June 16; June 17; June 18; August 8; Feast of the Most Sacred  
 Heart of Jesus  
 Savior/Redeemer: January 4; January 12; June 2; June 5; June 6; June  
 9; June 15; June 19

Lay Associates: May 19; June 4

Lent: March 10

Love of God: January 12; December 1

MAMI: May 17; May 18; May 19

Martyrs / Martyrdom: January 15; January 23; January 27; January  
 29; February 8; February 20; March 19; April 3; April 3; April 4;  
 April 5; April 10; April 18; April 19; April 20; April 22; May 1;  
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*Mary*: January 9; January 17; May 5; May 12; May 13; July 10;  
 July 16; August 4; August 22; September 11; September 12;  
 September 15; October 29; November 21; November 27;  
 December 10; December 11

Immaculate: January 4; February 7; May 2; May 4; May 7; May 8;  
 May 9; September 8; November 29; December 7; December 8;  
 Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

Mother of God: January 1st

Rosary: October 7

Star of evangelization: January 6

Mercy: see Reconciliation

Mission: see Evangelization; Preaching

Mortification / Austerity: November 23; November 24; November 25

Obedience / Superiors: July 26; July 27; July 28; July 29; July 30;  
 August 7  
 Oblate Brother: September 22  
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 September 4; September 5; September 6; September 7; September  
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 15; June 19; July 17; July 23; August 5; September 5; September  
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 Oraison: see Prayer  
 Perseverance: September 13; September 17  
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 March 12  
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 Poverty: February 6  
 Prayer / Oraison / Contemplation / Prayers: April 17; August 6;  
 September 15; September 16; September 18; September 20;  
 September 28; September 30; December 7  
 Preaching: February 14; February 13; February 20; February 21;  
 March 1; March 9; March 13; March 17; March 18  
 Prisons: February 18; February 19  
 Reconciliation / Mercy: January 4; February 11; February 14;  
 February 23; February 24; February 25; February 26; February  
 27; March 8; May 29; Easter Sunday  
 Religious Life: July 11  
 Rule: July 7; August 9; August 12; August 16; August 17; August 23;  
 August 27; August 29; September 1; December 13  
 Salvation of souls: March 18  
 Scholastics: February 23; March 17; November 10  
 Superiors: see Obedience  
 Urgencies: see Daring  
 Vocations: April 28; May 22  
 Will of God: January 15; December 14; December 15  
 Zeal: see Daring

EVENTS AND TOPICS CONCERNING EUGENE DE MAZENOD

*References to his writings are not included.*

Anniversaries of his life: March 14  
The Founders' Mother: December 18  
The Founder's Father: October 10  
Birth: August 1  
Baptism: August 2  
First Communion: April 5  
Beginning of exile in Italy: April 20  
Exile in Naples: January 1<sup>st</sup>  
Return to France from exile: October 11  
Good Friday: January 9; Good Friday  
Enters the St. Sulpice Seminary in Paris: October 12  
Receives the Minor Orders: May 27  
Ordained Deacon: June 16  
Announcing his Decision to Become a Priest: June 29  
Priestly Ordination: December 20; December 21; December 22;  
December 23  
Back to Aix from the Seminary: January 13  
In the Aix Prisons: February 18; February 19  
Preaching at the Church of the Magdalene: February 23; March 1;  
March 2; March 3; March 4; March 5; March 7; March 8  
Youth Congregation: February 14; April 25; April 26; April 27  
Blessing the Chapel of the Mission in Aix: November 21  
Meeting with Pius VII: February 7  
Decision for the missions in France: January 14; January 15  
The first Letter to Tempier: October 9  
Purchase of the Aix House: October 2  
Mutual vows with Fr. Tempier: April 11; Holy Thursday  
The drafting of the Rule at Saint-Laurent du Verdon: August 1  
  
Visiting Christian Rome: November 18  
Meeting with St. Gaspar Del Bufalo: October 21  
Closing of the Novena of the Immaculate in the Church of the Holy  
Apostles in Rome: December 7



Visit to St. Philip Neri's Rooms: May 26  
 Visit to St. Aloysius' Room: June 21  
 Visit to St. Ignatius' Rooms in Rome: July 31  
 Visit to the convent of the Passionists in Rome: October 19  
 Visit to the Church of Calasanz in Rome: August 25  
 Santa Maria in Campitelli: February 15  
 Approval of the Rule: February 16; February 17  
 Visiting Shrine of Loreto: December 10

Episcopal Ordination: October 14  
 Taking possession of the Diocese of Marseilles: December 24  
 Meeting with Bishop Bourget: June 20  
 In Saint Augustine's Footsteps: August 28  
 Consecration of Hippolyte Guibert: March 11  
 Visiting the Shrine of Notre Dame de Lumière: Feast of the Most  
     Sacred Heart of Jesus  
 Definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception: February 7;  
     May 7; December 8

Receives the Pallium: April 1  
 Laying the Foundation Stone of Notre Dame de la Garde: September 11  
 Knight of the Order of SS. Maurice and Lazarus: January 13  
 Imperial Knight of the Order of the Legion of Honor: September 27  
 Senator of the Empire: June 24

Last sacraments: March 10  
 Testament: May 23  
 Dies Natalis: May 21  
 Heart: May 27; May 30  
 Paternity: May 28  
 Missionary Daring: January 7; October 13; October 17  
 Bishop close to his people: December 18; December 19  
 In the Words of the Popes: May 24; June 28  
 In the Words of Witnesses and Historians: August 11; August 18;  
     August 19; August 24; August 26; August 29; September 25  
 Beatification: October 19  
 Canonization: December 3

## EVENTS AND TOPICS CONCERNING THE CONGREGATION

Mission in Puy-Ste-Réparate: February 13  
 The Christian Youth Congregation: April 25  
 Prospectus for Missions: January 18; October 4  
 Tempier arrives in Aix: December 27  
 The Purchase of the Carmelite Convent in Aix: December 30  
 Foundation: January 19; January 20; January 21; January 22; January 24; January 25; January 27; January 29; January 30; February 1; February 3; February 6  
 First Mission at Grans: February 11; February 12; February 14  
 First mission in Marseilles, January 2  
 Foundation of the "Calvary" House in Marseilles: May 6  
 Marian Shrine N.D of Laus: May 31  
 Oblate Madonna: August 15  
 Pontifical Approval: March 21; March 24  
 First General Chapter: July 13; October 24  
 Arrival in the British Isles: May 19  
 Beginning of the Mission in Canada: September 28; December 2  
 Beginning of the Mission in Ceylon: October 21  
 Beginning of the Mission in Natal: March 15  
 Election of St. Eugene's Successor: December 5  
 Procura to the Holy See: November 26  
 International Roman Scholasticate: November 10  
  
 Marian Shrine N.D. de l'Osier: May 4  
 Shrine of Montmartre: June 16  
 Liturgical Feast of Mary, Queen of the World: August 22  
 Notre-Dame du Cap: July 20  
 Our Lady of Good Counsel: April 26  
 Our Lady of Lourdes: February 12  
 Solemnity of the Dedication of Oblate Churches: November 12  
  
 The Scapular of the Sacred Heart: June 18  
 Consecration to the Heart of Jesus: June 8  
 Immaculate Conception Novena: November 29

Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate: May 17; May 18; May  
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Scholasticate La Brosse-Montceaux: July 24

Oblate Family: Institutes of Consecrated Life: August 14

Holy Family of Bordeaux: February 3; February 8; March 15

Oblate Martyrs in Laos: December 16

Oblate Martyrs of Spain: November 28

Laudetur Jesus Christus et Maria Immaculata: January 3

Missionaries of the Poor: March 9; March 18



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THE EDITOR - Professor Emeritus of Theology of Consecrated Life, Fr. Fabio Ciardi has been Director of the General Service of Oblate Studies in the OMI General House since 2010.

THE BOOK - *Nihil liquendum inausum*. “Spare no effort to extend the Saviour’s empire”. With these words, written in 1818, Saint Eugene de Mazenod opened up an unlimited field to the Oblate mission. This book offers some texts of meditation to accompany the members of the Oblate Family throughout the year: thoughts of Saint Eugene de Mazenod, of Oblates, of other people who have known and loved the Congregation sharing the same charism. It also remembers some of the most significant dates in the Oblate history: Events linked to the life of St. Eugene and the foundation of the Congregation; Recollection of the *dies natalis* of the Oblate Blessed, Servants of God, martyrs, and missionaries who left a significant mark on the history of the Congregation; Aspects of the Oblate charism and spirituality; The celebration of the feast days and liturgical seasons, as well of the saints who have a particular link to the life of the Congregation.