

Proud to continue following his inspiration...

May 21st, 2011 - Remarks during the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the death of Saint Eugene de Mazenod. - Cathedral of Marseille

Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, Cardinal Bernard Panafieu, Archbishop Georges Pontier, Monsignors, Father Yves CHALVET DE RÉCY, dear brothers and sisters from the Archdiocese of Marseille and the Archdiocese of Aix and Arles, and all you members of the Mazenodian Family.

May God's charity reign among you, and may his zeal for the mission be with you!

I am very happy to be with you in this cathedral to celebrate the anniversary of the death of Saint Eugene de Mazenod. I am grateful for this marvelous celebration and for the warm welcome you have given me, as well as to all the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate and to the members of the Mazenodian Family on this very special day.

For us Oblates, Saint Eugene was a man on fire with a great love for Jesus Christ, for the Church and for the poor. He shared these gifts with the people of Marseille for 37 years, as Vicar General and then as Bishop.

At the same time, he was the Superior General of the Missionary Oblates and he guided this growing Congregation from the bishop's house across the street.

It is from this same city that he sent us to preach the Gospel throughout the world. The statue of Saint Veronica wiping the face of Jesus, located in this cathedral, is a replica of the statue at the Shrine of Notre-Dame de la Garde, dedicated to all the missionaries who left Marseille "to go and wipe the face of the suffering Jesus" throughout the world. We Oblates are proud to continue following his inspiration in nearly 70 countries, with more than 4,000 missionaries and numerous lay associates.

One hundred and fifty years ago, Saint Eugene lay dying here in Marseille. He blessed the Oblates who were with him and he encouraged them to live with charity toward each other and to have zeal for the mission. These are the words that you have written on his tomb. The day of his death, those who surrounded him began to recite one of his favorite prayers, the Salve Regina. At its last words, "O clement! O loving! O sweet Virgin Mary!" Bishop de Mazenod died.

This prayer has become very dear to all Oblates, and we have the tradition of reciting it every day. Each time that the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, sent abroad to mission countries, were leaving aboard their ships from the Port of Marseille, their last view of France was the statue of Our Lady on top of the Shrine of Notre-Dame de la Garde. Most of them knew that they would never return to France, and they would sing the Salve Regina to their Loving Mother. This was a strong expression of their missionary offering, of their devotion to Our Lady and of their union with Saint Eugene, at the moment of their leaving to give their life to the preaching of the Gospel to the most abandoned.

Let us rejoice at his memory by invoking with much love the Mother of Mercy, the Loving Mother, by singing the Salve Regina before going in procession to the tomb of Saint Eugene.

Thank you very much.