

Oblate Associates gathering in Ottawa

February 17th, 2011

L.J.C. et M.I.

Dear Oblate Associates gathering in Ottawa, Blessings! I am honored to be asked by my brother Oblate, Jack Lau, to write a message to you on this February 17, 2011, a special day for us as Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. I would like to bless you as women and men gathered in the spirit of the Oblate charism and thank you for your witness to the life-filled gift Saint Eugene de Mazenod has given to the Church.

The charism, the Oblate gift we seek to express through our lives is a way of knowing and following Jesus whose life appeared to be a total failure if we look at him hanging on the cross abandoned by almost all his companions. It seems 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 went upside down as he perceived that Jesus' blood, his entire life, was given away to bring us life in abundance.

Part of Oblate spirituality is somehow coming in touch with Jesus as my Savior and being overwhelmed by his unconditional love for me, for us, for the poor and abandoned, for the Church and for our earth. That experience of love is not just once for all, but our growth in the spiritual life is to allow that experience to deepen, to transform and to change us. Ultimately, this experience of God's love for us, unconditional, unmerited, unearned, makes us free persons.

As we allow that experience of the Savior's love to make us free people, we are pulled into mission. We must wash people's feet. We must serve. We must announce the Good News of God's love for everyone. As we announce Good News, we also receive it from unexpected places: we receive grace from those to whom we minister! We evangelize the poor (Oblate motto) and the poor evangelize us. It is the dynamic of the Reign of God.

You might contemplate the Oblate Cross. There are questions we can ask ourselves:

- Remember and share times that you have felt God's love.
- Share what it means for you to follow Jesus and what his cross means in your life.
- How has prayer become a part of your life? How do you like to pray? What struggles do you find with prayer?
- Share with others how you reach out to the poor, the abandoned, those forgotten by others? What does that mean in your life?
- As followers of Jesus, we hopefully grow in simplicity of life, needing less "stuff" and noise. How does this happen in my life? Do I care for my body and for the earth?
- Are my relationships marked by openness, loyalty and integrity? How do I love God... others... myself?

I wish all of you a very spirit-filled February 17th! As you meet on the eve of this Oblate feast day, I hope you can share your experience of the Oblate charism and how you are trying to live it out in your life. In a special way I will be united with you as you gather together. May you have a good sharing, enjoy each other's company, laugh a lot, and feel loved by one another and by God.

May Mary Immaculate bless you with a lot of joy and strong hope!

Your brother in the Oblate charism,

Fr. Louis Lougen, OMI

