



MISSIONARY OBLATES OF MARY IMMACULATE

The Superior General

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L.J.C. et M.I.

Father General's letter for February 17, 2013

Seriously engaged in becoming holy

Blessings on this day of thanksgiving for the grace of our vocation! As I visit Oblates around the world I see how close we are to the poor, how our lives are marked by simplicity and approachability. I am convinced of the necessity of our charism in the life of the Church. We bring people close to the Church, to the Body of Christ, and in our closeness to the poor we receive Christ too. I would like to remember in a special way two anniversaries we celebrate this year. In March of 1813, young Father de Mazenod gave his famous homily on the dignity of the poor at the Church of La Madeleine. Is this anniversary not an invitation for us to renew our commitment to the poor, to the ministry of preaching, to the study of the Word, to speak the language of the people we serve and to commit ourselves to the ministry of justice together with the poor? We will also commemorate two hundred years since Eugene de Mazenod began the Association of Christian Youth in April 1813. We renew our efforts for missionary action with and for youth. (I invite you to read our review, *Oblatio* I-2012/3 on our commitment to Youth Ministry).

It is about midway between General Chapters and we are getting ready for the Interchapter in Thailand in April. There, Provincials, Major Superiors and the Central Government will gather “to evaluate the extent to which decisions taken in Chapter have been carried out, to encourage further implementation of such decisions, and to provide for the remote preparation of the next Chapter” (R.128 e), which will coincide with the 200th anniversary of our foundation. The Interchapter keeps before our minds and hearts the commitment to a profound personal and communal conversion to Jesus Christ.

The Interchapter cannot be seen in isolation from last October's Synod on the New Evangelization and the Year of Faith, which we are now living. The recent Synod called for conversion in the life of those who evangelize: “*Personal renewal will give greater incisiveness to our presence in the world, where we live-out the hope and salvation given us by Jesus Christ*” (#17 *Lineamenta*, Synod 2012). New techniques of themselves will not draw others to the Good News, but our own lives, transformed by our encounter with Jesus Christ, will be the

convincing witness of the Gospel. The Year of Faith, in the same vein, “...is a summons to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord, the one Saviour of the world. In the mystery of his death and resurrection, God has revealed in its fullness the Love that saves and calls us to conversion of life through the forgiveness of sins” (# 6 *Porta Fidei*).

The members of the 2010 General Chapter outlined five areas of Oblate life which call for profound personal and communal conversion: community, formation, mission, leadership and finances. This outline is only the introduction to a deep reflection on how we might respond to the Spirit’s call to conversion. There is so much more involved in the Chapter’s call to us and this is echoed in the challenges given us by the Year of Faith and the Synod on New Evangelization. I cite here a short excerpt from a presentation to the Union of Superiors General by the Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries:

“I think that one of the primary issues stemming from the need to enter a process of new evangelization firstly concerns the person of the missionary, the evangelizer. ... We, missionaries, feel that we are called to check the quality of our lives, especially regarding consistency between what we announce and what we live.

“The requirements of the new evangelization press us to seriously examine our consciences to understand the extent to which we commit ourselves with all our hearts to serving the poorest people and the abandoned, to becoming one with the marginalized of our time, in order to defend their cause, and to live the solidarity and commitment that are born from the Gospel.

“The new evangelization must begin by shaping new evangelizers... The missionary who accepts to consecrate his/her life to evangelization is called to live in a conversion process... In this sense, the new evangelization leads the missionary to the awareness of the sanctifying dimension of his/her ministry, reminding him/her that the only purpose of one’s ministry is to elicit the profoundest desire for God: that all human beings become saints, just like Him.” Fr. Enrique Sánchez G. MCCJ

As we celebrate the anniversary of the approval of our Constitutions and Rules we recall Saint Eugene’s desire to form “...a Society in order to work more effectively for the salvation of souls and for their own sanctification” (**Preface**, 1825). The Oblates were to be seriously engaged in becoming holy and this was directly related to their effectiveness as missionaries. This is true also today. If we are to be available and courageous to take on the most difficult of missions “facing the challenges of today from our diverse contexts, including globalization, secularization, inculturation and information technology”; if we are to go beyond “just doing by inertia what we are used to”; if we are “to participate in crossing borders and being inter-cultural”; if we are to live and work together “within apostolic communities”; we need to be spiritually fully alive and to take seriously the call to be saints. Conversion will lead us to holiness; to a creative and audacious spirit that leaves nothing undared; and to the deepest sense of our oblation. Conversion will prepare us

to place our lives on the line for any mission. (The words in quotes are from the 2010 Chapter document, *CONVERSION*, p. 24, English version).

The Founder wrote in 1825 in the *Preface*: “*But it is not enough for them simply to be convinced of the sublime nature of the ministry to which they have been called. The example of the saints and reason itself make it amply clear that the success of such a holy undertaking as well as the maintenance of discipline in any society make certain rules of life absolutely necessary for unity of thought and action among the members. Such unity is a body’s strength, keeping up its fervor and insuring that it lasts.*” For Saint Eugene, the faithful living of our rules of life ensured our success in mission, helped us become saints and would give our apostolic body unity, strength and fervor.

In the days around February 17th, a day of great grace for us, I invite you to read prayerfully the *Preface* and numbers 1 to 44 of the *Constitutions and Rules* to which we publically committed ourselves. Allow the *Constitutions* to question you, to call you to change and to deepen and enliven your Oblate life with fresh zeal. I believe the Spirit is urging us to do so, offering us a time of grace and renewal, so that we change and embrace fully our Oblate way of life with passion.

I ask Mary Immaculate and Saint Eugene to pray for “*the success of such a holy undertaking.*”

Happy Feast Day!

Father Louis Lougen, OMI
February 17, 2013