

# 204TH ANNIVERSARY SINCE THE FIRST OBLATION IN THE CONGREGATION

**Synodality is a time of pilgrimage, hope, and communion.**

## **Introduction**

November 1, 1818: an important date to speak and reflect on our consecrated life, a date that reminds us of the day when our Founder, St. Eugene, and his companion on the journey, Father Tempier, made and professed their first oblation. We need to remember and celebrate the anniversary of what happened in that memorable year of 1818, the first oblation; This anniversary should help us to deepen our missionary work in light of the current issues in the Church, such as synodality, and even more so in the context of the recent General Chapter: pilgrims of hope in communion.

Pope Francis has insisted in recent years on the importance of living in a spirit of encountering, listening, and involving all the people of God, that is to say, taking everyone into account. It is an invitation to journey and to be on a pilgrimage together as Church with the Holy Spirit as the protagonist.

We respond to this call after having experienced the General Chapter in Nemi, Italy. From September 14 to October 14, 2022, the theme was: Pilgrims of Hope in Communion. On the ecclesial level, this theme is fundamental. However, we must ask ourselves: How does this theme affect our Congregation? Can we also walk together?

We must reflect as Oblates of Mary Immaculate on this anniversary of the first oblation of our first fathers. It teaches us how indispensable it is to learn to walk together as Oblates, for we are missionaries, and as Church, which is herself a pilgrim in the world and the very life of the people, walking towards the Risen Christ, and this in all the mission places where we live our charism: parishes, schools, care centers, etc.

Pope Francis consecrates the sixth chapter of his Apostolic Exhortation, "*Christus visit*," on the importance of the roots. In Panama, he told us, "I have exhorted you to "embrace your roots because it is from the roots that come to the strength that will make you grow, flourish, and bear fruit." (CV 186)

## **Synodality**

As Oblates of Mary Immaculate, when we speak of synodality, we mean to recognize the plurality within our communities and that we are part of a whole. And proof of this was what we lived from September to October in the General Chapter because we lived synodality sharing our desires and concerns, with an attitude of listening and

discernment, of participation and communion in the hope that moves us to continue forward on the path, uninstalling ourselves from our comfort, trying to take into account all the proposals and needs that exist in our units and regions: the work with the lay Oblates, with the young people, with the houses of formation, care of the common home (JPIC), the poor in their many faces and the Oblate brothers; where we all feel and know that we are part of the Church, for this reason, we can say that the Oblates are called to be builders of encounter, communion, and synodality.

## **Pilgrims**

For more than 200 years, we have walked and pilgrimaged as missionaries in many countries, accompanying the People of God to make a journey of faith, hope, and love with them. And on this anniversary of oblation, we can make this pilgrimage journey remembering the time we have been in each country, remembering the traces we have left, bringing them to our present, to relive and reflect from the heart, which is the sacred place where we can contemplate and meditate on how wonderful our consecrated life is. "Listen to that inner voice that invites us to leave our present place and make a journey towards God" (Retreat of the General Chapter, September 28). Throughout these years of pilgrimage, we can also recognize that we follow and are seeking God because we go out on a journey with others to help them find God. In other words, "living itself is a pilgrimage."

As Oblates, we try to deepen the idea of pilgrimage, the path we have traveled throughout our history, and our consecrated life. Rereading our Oblate history reminds us of our first encounter and our first Love. And it is a moment of grace to be able to celebrate these 204 years of the first oblation, so with gratitude, we hope that God continues to inspire us always to be pilgrims in the world, bringing words of life, especially to the most challenging places, among the poor and abandoned.

In the Gospels, we can find how the same "Jesus went through all the surrounding villages teaching." (Mk 6:6) and inviting others to be part of the pilgrimage, for example, the group of twelve, whom he then sends (Mk 6:7-13). Since we profess our vows, we are also sent as pilgrims to all missions. And on this pilgrimage, God calls us and chooses us to spread the Good News of salvation to the whole world, especially those who have lost hope.

## **Hope**

This hope is necessary to continue to advance in our pilgrimage with God. The hope we have as Oblates is that the good news of salvation will reach everywhere, to those difficult places. For

this, it is good to remember the first moments when St. Eugene sent missionaries out of Provence to spread the news of the Kingdom of Heaven. As Jesus says: "Go into all the world" (Mt 28:19). As missionaries, we have a purpose, a path, and a destiny to reach: to live our charism and our spirituality with hope.

"This same Christian hope tells us that death is not the end. For we are the people of the Passover, of the Resurrection" (General Chapter Retreat September 28). Jesus tells his disciples: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You place your trust in God. Trust also in me. In my father's house, there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I would prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself so that where I am, you may also be." (Jn.14;1-3). Here we understand that we are pilgrims of hope since our faith is not based on human arguments but on Christ. In this way, trusting in his presence, our hearts rejoice in what he has promised us, and so we transmit this hope, which we seek to witness to all God's people.

As Oblates, we are servants of hope; we gratefully welcome the life and missionary work with whom we work by living the evangelical councils and, above all, through the experience of charity, as our Founder asked in his last testament.

### **Communion**

We are called to be one, working in communion as a team, helping each other, and leaving behind all pretensions of individualism and self-sufficiency. Therefore, we can clearly say that we are not five divided regions but a single Congregation that manifests the Kingdom of God.

Throughout our history, we have tried to live in communion, to live charity among ourselves; from our own experience of faith and community, we share the different moments of fraternal life. We draw close to one another, share life, joys, and sufferings, and remain united in prayer, where we create a bond of fraternity, communion, and communication. For consecrated life is always a grace that keeps us in communion despite our differences. God gathers us in this community as diverse people with the same faith. And this communion that we share finds its deepest roots in love and the unity of the Holy Trinity: "Love leads us to communion with God, and we are convinced that we cannot have communion with God if we are not in communion with our neighbor." (Retreat General Chapter September 28).

Communion is not only the encounter with the other or with those with whom we live and share, but it is an encounter with others, nature, the poor, and the abandoned. It is a communion that calls us to live with a big heart, open to dialogue, solidarity, respect, and a continuous process of listening and commitment to society.

## **Conclusion**

Therefore, we conclude that to live this process of synodality, that is, of being pilgrims in hope and communion, we must consider the qualities that we demand of our new Superior General. As consecrated Oblates who have the qualities of men of faith, prayer, and deep love of the Church, we are not afraid to embrace the experience of interculturality. We can read the signs of the times, we are passionate about the mission, and we embrace not an individualistic mission but a team mission founded on the charism of St. Eugene, who walks alongside the laity, who is enthusiastic, kind, simple, and close to them.

Pilgrims of hope in communion. May this anniversary be a time of grace, renewal, communion, and above all, a time to journey with the people of God. A time of intense prayer that is at the heart of every mission.

### **Questions for personal or group reflections:**

- What excites you most about life as a consecrated Oblate of Mary Immaculate?
- What challenges have you encountered living your pilgrimage of hope and communion within our Congregation?
- ¿ What are the barriers that impede the processes of synodality in our communities?