



## **John Paul II (1920-2005) In Thanksgiving**

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During the more than quarter century of his service as universal pastor of the Church John Paul II has touched the lives of untold millions both in and out of the Church. Among Oblates he will no doubt be remembered fondly as the pope who declared Eugene de Mazenod a saint and enrolled Joseph Gerard and Jozef Cebula among the blessed. They will also recall as a lasting testament of his support and encouragement the words he addressed directly to our religious family on these and other occasions. It is in a spirit of thanksgiving for his long life of service that we present some excerpts here.



## **John Paul II speaks to the Oblates**

### **To the XXX General Chapter (Dec. 5, 1980)**

[...] A single glance at your large family fills my heart with admiration. You are missionaries of the Lord, Oblates of the Madonna....

Capitular assemblies these days are inspired by that ardent desire for renewal and growth urged by Vatican Council II.... In this regard it behooves that each member, in an attitude of faith and humble availability, assimilate the example and teachings of the Divine Master. This involves committing themselves ever more to be ever better priests and religious, living a life dedicated to the generous pursuit of justice, of love, of peace between men, by giving preference to the humble, to the poor, to the suffering.... The more we shall be able, in our priestly ministry and community living, to practise justice and charity, the greater will be our credibility as priests and missionaries among the people of God and the brethren to be evangelized.

### **To the XXXI General Chapter (Oct. 2, 1986)**

It was a pleasure for me to cast a glance on the preparatory works of this Chapter. I noticed an acknowledged convergence of the Congregation's various regions toward a community missionary labor more clearly dedicated to disadvantaged peoples, even at the cost of sacrificing more personal commitments. This first convergence, in fact, gives rise to another, namely the stressing or even the resumption of authentic community life, transparent, fraternal, joyous, open and therefore generating fervor for your religious and apostolic life.

The basic question [de Mazenod] asks today of all his sons, by the voice of Peter's Successor, is brief and deeply stirring: "Is Jesus Christ really at the heart of your life?"...

Be vigilant also to call not only to Oblate missionary life in priestly ministry but equally to the well-prepared and very precious service of Oblate Brother. Continue to widely associate the Christian laity to your tasks of evangelizing the poor.

### **Homily of Pope John Paul II at the Mass of Canonization (Dec. 3, 1995)**

[...] Bl. Eugene de Mazenod, whom the Church today proclaims a saint, was a man of Advent, a man of the Coming. He not only looked forward to that Coming, but, as a Bishop and the founder of the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, he dedicated his whole life to preparing for it. His waiting reached the intensity of heroism, that is, it was marked by a heroic degree of faith, hope and apostolic charity. Eugene de Mazenod was one of those apostles who prepared the modern age, our age. [...]

Eugene de Mazenod, in fact, had a very profound awareness of the universality of the Church's mission. He knew that Christ wanted to unite the whole human race to himself. This is why throughout his life he devoted particular attention to the evangelization of the poor, wherever they were found.

Founded in Provence, in his native region, the Congregation was not slow in spreading "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Through preaching based on meditation on God's word, it put into practice St Paul's exhortation: "How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how

are they to hear without a preacher?" (cf. Rom 10:14). Proclaiming Christ, for Eugene de Mazenod, meant fully becoming that apostolic man whom every age needs, with the spiritual fervour and missionary zeal that gradually configured him to the risen Christ. By patiently working on himself, he learned to discipline a difficult character and to govern his Diocese with enlightened wisdom and steadfast goodness. Bishop de Mazenod led the faithful to accept Christ with an ever more generous faith in order to live fully their vocation as children of God. His every action was inspired by a conviction he expressed in these words: "To love Church is to love Jesus Christ, and vice versa". [...]

His influence is not limited to the age in which he lived, but continues its effect on our time. Indeed, the good accomplished by virtue of the Holy Spirit does not perish, but continues in every "hour" of history.

### **Pope's Address at Pilgrims' Audience after the Canonization (December 4, 1995)**

[...] And you, dear Oblates of Mary Immaculate, it is with joy that I meet you again and confirm you in the mission which you have received from Christ through your Founder. Twenty years have passed since his beatification, and in due course of those years you have worked ever more earnestly to know him better yourselves and to make him known to others. As your Rule bids you, continue to "follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ" and, in so doing, "strive to be saints", walking "courageously along the same paths trodden by so many labourers for the Gospel."

An immense field for the apostolate still lies open before you; this is both exhilarating and demanding. Evangelizing the poor remains the primary missionary concern of the Church. As I said in my Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, missionary activity proper, or the mission *ad gentes*, "can be characterized as the work of proclaiming Christ and his Gospel, building up the local Church and promoting the values of the Kingdom" (n.34). The holiness of your lives makes you zealous missionaries for the evangelization of Christians and non-Christians. I know your fervour well. Continue to give priority to proclaiming Christ, in faithfulness to your motto: "to evangelize the poor." By your community life, by faithfulness to your Founder, you will not cease to bear fruit, as the presence of many Bishops from your Congregation clearly attests. [...]

### **To the XXXIII General Chapter, September 24, 1998**

[...] 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 [...]

[...] You are also concerned with the 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*, n. 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 [...]

**To the XXXIV General Chapter, September 24, 2004**

[...] I thank all of you for the affection you show the Successor of Peter, which I cordially return, and with greater reason because of the devotion I feel for your founder, St. Eugene de Mazenod, as well as for the esteem I feel for your Congregation, at once Marian and missionary. [...]

[...] I encourage you to persevere in the objectives you have set for yourselves, above all in a renewed fraternal union, in keeping with the will of your holy founder, who conceived the Institute as a family, whose members form only one heart and soul. [...]

[...] Make clear choices in virtue of the priorities of your mission. Among the priority exigencies is certainly permanent attention to the spiritual life in order to live an ever-renewed fidelity to the original charism. It is God, who with the action of his Holy Spirit, allows religious families to respond adequately to the new exigencies, by taking recourse to the specific gift that has been entrusted to them. [...]

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**A Message from Father General**

Dear fellow Oblates, associates and friends,

Today, the second Sunday of Easter, a great silence fills the city of Rome. Various performances and sports events have been cancelled, more and more pilgrims are arriving, and preparations are underway to remember one of the great men of our times. Last night, Jesus, the Merciful One, welcomed home John Paul II. According to the liturgy it was already Sunday of the Divine Mercy.

Television has shown us how people everywhere in the world feel close to him. We Oblates can also say that we have been close to him and add that he has also been close to us. *OMIWORLD* just published some of the words John Paul II addressed especially to us, the followers of St. Eugene. When John Paul II declared our Founder a saint he said: "Proclaiming Christ, for Eugene de Mazenod, meant becoming fully that apostolic man that every age needs, with the spiritual fervor and missionary zeal that gradually configured him to the risen Christ."

The mission demands that we become configured to the risen Christ! Only in this way shall we find the power to do our part in making the Church ever more missionary, one that reaches out to the people of the whole world. The Pope has taught us by his example with more than a hundred apostolic trips throughout the world.

Let us pray for his soul so that the Lord may purify him and make him an effective intercessor for humanity. Let us pray also that the Church be ever more missionary, and that the conclave give us a new Holy Father who is a man according to the heart of God. This time in the election, we will have a direct representative in the person of our Oblate cardinal.

From Rome, greetings and union in prayer,

Fr. Wilhelm Steckling, OMI  
Superior General

## **Cardinal Ratzinger's Homily at John Paul II's Funeral Mass (April 8<sup>th</sup> 2005)**

### **"He Roused Us From a Lethargic Faith"**

"Follow me." The Risen Lord says these words to Peter. They are his last words to this disciple, chosen to shepherd his flock. "Follow me" – this lapidary saying of Christ can be taken as the key to understanding the message that comes to us from the life of our late beloved Pope John Paul II. Today we bury his remains in the earth as a seed of immortality – our hearts are full of sadness, yet at the same time of joyful hope and profound gratitude.

These are the sentiments that inspire us, brothers and sisters in Christ, present here in St. Peter's Square, in neighboring streets and in various other locations within the city of Rome, where an immense crowd, silently praying, has gathered over the last few days. I greet all of you from my heart. In the name of the College of Cardinals, I also wish to express my respects to heads of state, heads of government and the delegations from various countries.

I greet the authorities and official representatives of other Churches and Christian Communities, and likewise those of different religions. Next I greet the archbishops, bishops, priests, religious men and women and the faithful who have come here from every continent; especially the young, whom John Paul II liked to call the future and the hope of the Church. My greeting is extended, moreover, to all those throughout the world who are united with us through radio and television in this solemn celebration of our beloved Holy Father's funeral.

Follow me – as a young student Karol Wojtyla was thrilled by literature, the theater and poetry. Working in a chemical plant, surrounded and threatened by the Nazi terror, he heard the voice of the Lord: Follow me! In this extraordinary setting he began to read books of philosophy and theology, and then entered the clandestine seminary established by Cardinal Sapieha. After the war he was able to complete his studies in the faculty of theology of the Jagiellonian University of Krakow.

How often, in his letters to priests and in his autobiographical books, has he spoken to us about his priesthood, to which he was ordained on November 1, 1946. In these texts he interprets his priesthood with particular reference to three sayings of the Lord.

First: "It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain" (John 15:16). The second saying is: "A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). And then: "As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love" (John 15:9). In these three sayings we see the heart and soul of our Holy Father. He really went everywhere, untiringly, in order to bear fruit, fruit that lasts.

"Rise, Let Us Be on Our Way!" is the title of his next-to-last book. "Rise, let us be on our way!" – with these words he roused us from a lethargic faith, from the sleep of the disciples of both yesterday and today. "Rise, let us be on our way!" he continues to say to us even today. The Holy Father was a priest to the last, for he offered his life to God for his flock and for the entire human family, in a daily self-oblation for the service of the Church, especially amid the sufferings of his final months. And in this way he became one with Christ, the Good Shepherd who loves his sheep.

Finally, "abide in my love": The Pope who tried to meet everyone, who had an ability to forgive and to open his heart to all, tells us once again today, with these words of the Lord, that by abiding in the love of Christ we learn, at the school of Christ, the art of true love.

Follow me! In July 1958, the young priest Karol Wojtyla began a new stage in his journey with the Lord and in the footsteps of the Lord. Karol had gone to the Masuri lakes for his usual vacation, along with a group of young people who loved canoeing. But he brought with him a letter inviting him to call on the primate of Poland, Cardinal Wyszyński. He could guess the purpose of the meeting: He was to be appointed as the auxiliary bishop of Krakow.

Leaving the academic world, leaving this challenging engagement with young people, leaving the great intellectual endeavor of striving to understand and interpret the mystery of that creature which is man and of communicating to today's world the Christian interpretation of our being – all this must have seemed to him like losing his very self, losing what had become the very human identity of this young priest. Follow me – Karol Wojtyla accepted the appointment, for he heard in the Church's call the voice of Christ. And then he realized how true are the Lord's words: "Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses it will save it" (Luke 17:33).

Our Pope – and we all know this – never wanted to make his own life secure, to keep it for himself; he wanted to give of himself unreservedly, to the very last moment, for Christ and thus also for us. And thus he came to experience how everything which he had given over into the Lord's hands, came back to him in a new way. His love of words, of poetry, of literature, became an essential part of his pastoral mission and gave new vitality, new urgency, new attractiveness to the preaching of the Gospel, even when it is a sign of contradiction.

Follow me! In October 1978, Cardinal Wojtyla once again heard the voice of the Lord. Once more there took place that dialogue with Peter reported in the Gospel of this Mass: "Simon, son of John, do you love me? Feed my sheep!" To the Lord's question, "Karol, do you love me?" the archbishop of Krakow answered from the depths of his heart: "Lord you know everything; you know that I love you." The love of Christ was the dominant force in the life of our beloved Holy Father. Anyone who ever saw him pray, who ever heard him preach, knows that. Thanks to his being profoundly rooted in Christ, he was able to bear a burden which transcends merely human abilities: that of being the shepherd of Christ's flock, his universal Church.

This is not the time to speak of the specific content of this rich pontificate. I would like only to read two passages of today's liturgy, which reflect central elements of his message. In the first reading, St. Peter says – and with St. Peter, the Pope himself – "In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him. You know the word (that) he sent to the Israelites as he proclaimed peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all" (Acts 10:34-36). And in the second reading, St. Paul – and with St. Paul, our late Pope – exhorts us, crying out: "Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, beloved" (Philippians 4:1).

Follow me! Together with the command to feed his flock, Christ proclaimed to Peter that he would die a martyr's death. With those words, which conclude and sum up the dialogue on love and on the mandate of the universal shepherd, the Lord recalls another dialogue, which took place during the Last Supper. There Jesus had said: "Where I am going, you cannot come." Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus replied: "Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow me afterward" (John 13:33,36). Jesus from the Supper went toward the Cross, went toward his resurrection – he entered into the paschal mystery; and Peter could not yet follow him. Now – after the resurrection – comes the time, comes this "afterward."

By shepherding the flock of Christ, Peter enters into the paschal mystery, he goes toward the cross and the resurrection. The Lord says this in these words: "when you were younger, you used to dress

yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go” (John 21:18).

In the first years of his pontificate, still young and full of energy, the Holy Father went to the very ends of the earth, guided by Christ. But afterward, he increasingly entered into the communion of Christ’s sufferings; increasingly he understood the truth of the words: “someone else will dress you.” And in this very communion with the suffering Lord, tirelessly and with renewed intensity, he proclaimed the Gospel, the mystery of that love which goes to the end (cf. John 13:1).

He interpreted for us the paschal mystery as a mystery of divine mercy. In his last book, he wrote: The limit imposed upon evil “is ultimately Divine Mercy” (“Memory and Identity,” pp. 60- 61). And reflecting on the assassination attempt, he said: “In sacrificing himself for us all, Christ gave a new meaning to suffering, opening up a new dimension, a new order: the order of love. ... It is this suffering which burns and consumes evil with the flame of love and draws forth even from sin a great flowering of good” (pp. 189-190). Impelled by this vision, the Pope suffered and loved in communion with Christ, and that is why the message of his suffering and his silence proved so eloquent and so fruitful.

Divine Mercy: the Holy Father found the purest reflection of God’s mercy in the Mother of God. He, who at an early age had lost his own mother, loved his divine mother all the more. He heard the words of the crucified Lord as addressed personally to him: “Behold your Mother.” And so he did as the beloved disciple did: “he took her into his own home” (John 19:27) – “Totus tuus.” And from the mother he learned to conform himself to Christ.

None of us can ever forget how in that last Easter Sunday of his life, the Holy Father, marked by suffering, came once more to the window of the Apostolic Palace and one last time gave his blessing “urbi et orbi.” We can be sure that our beloved Pope is standing today at the window of the Father’s house, that he sees us and blesses us. Yes, bless us, Holy Father. We entrust your dear soul to the Mother of God, your Mother, who guided you each day and who will guide you now to the eternal glory of her Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. [*Original text in Italian; English translation issued by Holy See*]

### **Like a milestone in history**

*by Jean-Pierre Caloz, OMI*

The applause still rippled through the crowd as I was leaving Saint Peter’s Square. Many remained in their places to ponder what they had just witnessed. The crowd chanted: “Santo subito!” – “Saint immediately!”

The pallbearers hoisted the coffin, which lay right on the ground, up on to their shoulders. Moving quietly, with calm and dignity, the mortal remains of John Paul II advanced towards the basilica. Arriving at the threshold, the coffin was turned as if for a last goodbye and then disappeared into St. Peter’s to the chanting of the Magnificat. Emotion was high. I suddenly realized that John Paul II was indeed dead, that I would not see him again. I realized how much I had become accustomed to him, as if that were to last until a hypothetical death. But here it was, death, very real and merciless.

A cypress coffin – better than fir of course – without ornaments, with neither handles nor decorations lay there. I tried to imagine what that mass of world personalities sitting on the other side of the



square were thinking: of their own death, of their own coffin, of the lack of funeral folderol which surround – or with which we surround – the great and powerful of this world?

But what were all these world personalities doing here in the Vatican? The Bushes, Hillary, Kharzai, Khatami, all our European leaders... Kofi Annan and the others? Nobody invited them; they came on their own. They made a point of coming. Why? Each had their own reasons, of course, but their presence reveals the undeniable world-wide influence of the Pope. His person and his actions were indeed recognized and appreciated by the men of our time. To us who seek how to be credible in a secularized world, doesn't the example of the Pope offer a great encouragement and paths to be explored?

Seated with the statesmen were also the religious leaders. I recognized the large maroon coat of the Shiite Imams and other Moslems. As for the others I could not say who they were. They also were there, that is what counted. A small gesture but a powerful one so that the "war of civilizations" does not happen, so that never again will religion be used as a weapon of war, because in the hands of manipulators, it is terrible.

My heart was filled with joy; this is history, really history. This 8<sup>th</sup> of April 2005 will remain in history like a milestone. If we could understand the new spirit, the new civilization of dialogue: no longer one against the other, but one with the other together with our differences, without world domination, without economic dictatorship, keeping pace with the weakest, in the honest and slow work of negotiation... the civilization of love about which Latin America began to speak 30 years ago would not be far away!

Cardinal Ratzinger played his part well. With no affectation in his voice and with his strong German accent, he performed the rite. It was a mass, a mass and just that. The readings by handsome young people, the polished voices of the Sistine choir, the people who took part thanks to the booklets distributed on the chairs, at least where the priests were.... Ratzinger's homily was a homily and not a panegyric. He skilfully evoked the life of the Pope recalling the important "Follow me" events of his life, and finishing with a touching mention of Mary who had such a big place in his life. Then like an orphan he added: "We can be sure that our beloved Pope is now at the window in the house of the Father, that he sees us and blesses us. Yes, may you bless us, Very Holy Father..."

But life goes on. Here and there can be heard voices that point out the weaknesses of this exceptional pontificate. Nothing is perfect in this lowly world. Some readjustments will have to be made, guided by life and not by ideology or abstraction!

The massive, joyous, recollected and free presence of young people throughout these days of mourning in Rome must be recognized, taken into account and interpreted to draw from it the pastoral orientations which it bears. And if evangelizing were above all a matter of authenticity!

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