

Letter of the Superior General for February 17, 2011

Dear Brother Oblates,

I would like to bless each of you on this feast which takes us back to 1826 when Fr. Eugene de Mazenod received papal approbation for the Missionary Oblates of the Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary. As brother Oblates we are "...committed principally to evangelizing the poor" (C 1). In a special way today, we are united with St. Eugene, with the Church and with the poor. Brother Oblates, thank you for your missionary generosity, your lives of prayer, your untiring service to the poor and the gift you make of yourselves as you live our vowed life in apostolic community.

On this day, February 17th, we celebrate the fruit of many years of labor, the struggles, the indomitable energy, the many disappointments and the joys of Fr. De Mazenod. He expended himself to see his missionary group approved by the Holy Father and it was with persevering faith that he succeeded. I would like to write about our vow of perseverance which I believe to be a real source of grace for us.

We know the historical context of this vow in post-revolutionary France. With the dispersal of religious, the vow was meant to keep the Oblates faithful to one another and to the mission. In our present-day situation, the vow of perseverance holds a rich potential for our life and mission. As we live and grow old as Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, to persevere in the following of Jesus is a commitment over our lifetime to live more deeply and with increased vigor the "Yes" of our oblation. Perseverance guides us more deeply in imitating the example of Jesus who, "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (John 13:1).

I recall St. Eugene's words in the Preface: "We must lead men to act like human beings, first of all, and then like Christians and, finally, we must help them to become saints." (CC&RR). It is good for us, the preachers, to look into our own lives to see if we are growing toward saintliness. I believe the vow of perseverance commits us to this journey, growing as human persons, as Christians and as saints. This movement, never quite finished in this life, is really the same as the call to conversion highlighted in our recent Chapter. Conversion is much more than simply "a theme" to be dealt with at a General Chapter, formulated in a document and then to be put away on a bookshelf. By the vow of perseverance, we embrace conversion, the call of the Gospel itself, as our way of life.

If psychology helps us understand human development toward maturity and integration, our life as vowed men should be marked even more so by spiritual growth and development through the years. Our vow of perseverance is a continual call to live more fully what we have promised the Lord. Through our openness to grace, we grow in our religious consecration so that we become

free to give away more and more of ourselves to others and to God; we become more deeply human, compassionate, loving; we have more energy for mission; we have the audacity to take risks; we dream new dreams and have new visions (Joel 3:1); we grow in holiness.

This February 17th, would you take your Oblate Cross in your hands and spend some time in prayer to the Crucified Christ? Please reflect on the quality of your life of perseverance over the years:

- Am I more deeply in love with the Lord Jesus, more centered on listening to the Word and on the Eucharist? Have I given more of myself as Jesus did?
- Have I become a 'poorer' Oblate in terms of evangelical poverty? Do I have greater trust in the congregation by having everything in common with my brother Oblates?
- Am I living a chaste celibate life with greater integrity, greater passion for God and for the poor?
- Have I grown in giving myself more fully to community life and in nourishing the community with my gifts?
- Am I more readily available to serve the needs of the mission to preach the Gospel to the abandoned as discerned by the Congregation and less centered on my own needs?
- Has my life become more alive and filled with the Gifts of the Spirit (Gal 5:22ss)?

These I believe are signs of religious life animated by the vow of perseverance. What a great gift and a source of grace Saint Eugene left us in this vow!

On this day we are also very specially united to Our Lady for it was on this day that we became Oblates *of Mary Immaculate*. Mary is the model and guardian of our consecrated life (C 13). She, who gave her *fiat* to God's invitation, helps us to give ourselves fully to God for the sake of the mission to which we are sent. I ask Mary to help us grow in perseverance as religious men in love with God and with his people_ . Mary will help us live in such a way that the more we give the more we will be blessed and renewed in the generosity of our oblation.

My brother Oblates, I send you my prayer and my love on this special day!

Your brother Oblate in Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate,

Louis Lougen, OMI
Superior General