

THE BEATIFICATION OF BISHOP DE MAZENOD

June 6th, 1975 - Letter - Rome

The grace of the beatification. - Preparing for this grace. - Province visits. - Be strong in faith.

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Our Father and Founder will be proclaimed "Blessed" next October 19. The members of the General Council reflected on this coming event during their latest plenary session held in May. It is in their name that I am sending you this second letter.

The grace of the beatification

For us this beatification is both a grace and a challenge. It is a grace which confirms and invites us to joy... a challenge which tests our fidelity: fidelity to the mission among the poor; fidelity to that quality of being which the Founder wanted for the Oblates.

In today's world are we still the kind of missionaries to the poor envisaged by Father de Mazenod? Do we still go to the poor with the same preference, the same zeal, the same boldness, the same spirit of solidarity, the same love of the Church...? Do we still have the same deep attachment to Jesus Christ, the same concern for self-denial, the same inner thirst for holiness, the same conviction that the quality of our being is as important for the welfare of people as is the intensity of our activity...?

The beatification ceremony will be over quickly. And what will remain? Will there be the grace of conversion... new strength... a renewed thrust toward the poor?

Preparing for this grace

In order that Bishop de Mazenod's beatification may bear such fruits we must prepare for it. Most Provinces are doing so already, doing so admirably in prayer and joint reflection on our Founder's life and charism. It is an excellent occasion to re-read his life or writings, to meditate before God on our Constitutions or on the documents of the last Chapters.

But the Holy Year, in which this beatification is taking place, invites us to do even more. It calls us to do penance, to share, to rise above broken relations, to reconciliation.

It is in such a spirit, I believe, that we must prepare for the beatification: we too need reconciliation and pardon. We need it because of our discouragement, the times we have lacked fervour, and the divisions among us; we need it, likewise, because of the instances of our bad example and of our fearfulness in the apostolic service.

In this universal context of reconciliation and sharing I should like to ask two things of the Congregation.

First, that Friday, October 17 – or another day if the 17th is not suitable be for all Oblates a day of prayer, fasting and penance. The Lord invites us to such a practice in the Gospel, and the Church exhorts us to do this during the Holy Year. It would, moreover, be a gesture of solidarity with the world's poor and hungry people.

Secondly, that the gift which we will be offering to the Holy Father for Papal Charities on the

occasion of the beatification truly come from our personal privations and voluntary renouncement rather than from our surpluses. We ourselves should be able to do what we sometimes ask of other Christians. Thus, from now until October 19 I will gratefully and joyfully receive any offering, no matter how small, from such sources.

Province visits

Last March and April I made my first visit of the Congregation, a visit that allowed me to come into contact with almost 900 Oblates in Ireland, England, Haiti, the eastern United States and eastern Canada. I can truly say that everywhere I found great generosity in apostolic service toward people who in some instances are extremely poor. I likewise sensed a deep love for the Congregation, with renewed confidence in its future, despite present difficulties, and, in some places, a real renewal of prayer.

The Lord who has always guided the Congregation from the beginning is still at work within it. Examples of fidelity and even of heroism are no less present among us today than in the past. I think of our Oblates in Laos, in Zaire, in Bolivia and in other provinces – Oblates who love Jesus Christ and the people he confided to them enough to accept suffering with them and for them so as to build a better world. The Oblate “will, therefore”, as the Constitutions state, “bear about in his own body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may be operative in all men» (1966, art. 14). These are all realities which we must have at heart when reflecting on the Congregation and on the trials it undergoes. Otherwise our view remains incomplete and possibly distorted.

Be strong in faith

To all of you I repeat what I told the 1974 Chapter: In the name of God be strong! Be strong in faith and in obedience to the mission you have received. Be strong in your love. Be capable of holding on and going ahead, out of love for the poor and fidelity to Jesus Christ – to Jesus Christ in his poor!

Through the intercession of the Immaculate Virgin, “who is victorious over all evil” (1966 *Constitutions*, art. 6) and “the perfect model of our response to God” (1966 *Constitutions*, art. 61), may Bishop de Mazenod’s beatification be for us the occasion of an authentic inner renewal!