

THE OBLATE: A MAN OF THE CHURCH

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The Oblate and the Church. - A Rule of life. - Interior Renewal.

L.J.C. et M.I.

February 17th reminds us all, as Oblates, of the two vital facts that are at the origins of our existence: we were conceived in the mind and heart of a priest who knew Jesus Christ and was able to recognize him in the poor; and we were born of the Church who was able to discern this priest's divine calling and to confirm his work as authentic.

We would not be Oblates today if it had not been for Father de Mazenod; nor could we be so unless the Church, 150 years ago, had accepted his work and approved it.

The Oblate and the Church

How much store our Founder set by this approbation we can gauge from reading what he wrote at that period.

Since 1826, it is clear enough, mentalities have changed; people are now less concerned about the institutional side of things, they seek less after official approbations and for detailed rules of life. All the same, for us, celebrating February 17th recalls to mind certain basic truths which would, if overlooked, endanger our very being as Oblates. It is on this that I would like to dwell briefly today.

The first of these truths is that we stem fundamentally from within the Church; cut off from her we are nothing. The Church it was that gave us birth, and it is in communion with the Church and our being rooted in her that we have grown and borne fruit; and still today, it is only within the Church and in her alone that we can grow and develop.

It was, to be sure, in this sense that our Founder wanted us to be men of the Church and the Pope's men, as well as men of the poor and of God's people.

A Rule of life

The second of these truths is that, as an Oblate apostolic corps, we need some kind of structure or rule of life – workable, not too burdensome, yet effective nevertheless – which we accept and become truly imbued with so that we may be transformed in Jesus Christ, and our existence be given genuine consistency.

Many are the Oblates who were enabled to grow and develop personally and to bear marvellous fruits of holiness and apostolic labours, thanks to the Rule of life which they fully lived! Left to their own resources they probably would never have risen above a certain human and spiritual mediocrity.

It is good to reflect on this during this anniversary of the approbation of our Rules. We should ask the Lord Jesus to make ITS capable of perceiving always, through and beyond the external structures and the rules, however imperfect they may be, the inner law of love and enable us thereon to build our lives.

Interior renewal

Finally, a third and last truth that this feast recalls for us is our real need of continual inner renewal.

Our becoming imbued with a life-ideal and with a rule of life is the work of a lifetime. In years past, Cardinal Villeneuve used to say jestingly: "There are no true virtues before the age of forty!". Today perhaps some would say fifty or sixty!

On February 18, 1826, the day after the approbation of our Institute, the Founder wrote thus to Father Tempier: "The conclusion we ought to draw (from this approbation) is that we should strive, with fresh zeal and the utmost dedication, to seek all the glory of God we possibly can and the salvation of our poor fellow-creatures by every possible means... In the name of God, let us be saints!".

That approbation, far from turning us in upon ourselves, ought rather to make us more open to God and to the world of the poor. "We must spare no effort to extend the empire of Christ!" – remembering always, though, that the effectiveness of any apostolic enterprise relies, next to God, on the spiritual strength of the apostolic man.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, our Patroness and Mother, help us to be the kind of "inwardly strong and truly apostolic man" desired by Blessed Eugene de Mazenod!