

# TO THE MEMBERS OF THE OBLATE CONFERENCE OF EUROPE

May 5th, 1979 - Homily - Hünfeld, Germany

*The influence of Oblate Europe. - A Europe that believes. - A Europe that brings hope. - A Europe of love.*

Our meeting is drawing to a close. At its opening, your President, Father Vanpetegem, said, "Our Congregation certainly has its roots in Europe, in the Church of Europe... As it had in the Founder's time, so it surely still has its place in the present day Europe of our time". That statement was an act of faith.

In this morning's Gospel (*John 6:60-69*), St. John has also just spoken to us about faith: about faith being put to the test, about faith which is a gift from the Father; he mentions the question of Jesus, "Do you want to leave me too?", and the amazing reply of Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life".

The situation of the Christian world is the same as that of the disciples and of the Twelve. Some find present-day conditions intolerable, and so they give up and leave; others, through God's grace, grow stronger in their faith and continue to forge ahead.

Our life is built on faith. And the faith of so many other people is shored up by the solidity of our own faith.

Within the Congregation we are experiencing the same thing in regard to our religious commitment. In terms of vocation, each Oblate is either a source of strength or an occasion of scandal for his brother Oblate. This holds true also for one Province vis-à-vis another, for one Region vis-à-vis another.

## **The influence of Oblate Europe**

Within the Congregation, Oblate Europe has always been, and still is today, a reality of the first importance, a reality to which no one can ever be indifferent. There are about 2.000 Oblates in Europe. Europe gave birth to the Congregation. Most of the Oblates who established the Institute in other countries have come from Europe; and even today, nearly 1.000 Oblates of European origin are at work on the different continents.

During the course of this week we have spent together I have often reflected on the reality of this Oblate Europe.

It is true that there are great differences from one Province to another. If viewed from the outside, however, in the measure that the notion of "Region" takes hold in the Institute, Oblate Europe, just like political Europe, will be more and more perceived as a single whole. The Congregation expects a great deal from this Oblate Europe.

## **A Europe that believes**

The Congregation needs an Oblate Europe which firmly believes and is not afraid to give an open public witness to its faith: to its faith in God, its faith in Jesus Christ, its faith in the Church, its faith in

its own vocation of evangelizing the poor.

We evangelize through our lives, by the very quality of our being. This is certain, this is classic. To be useful to others, we must first of all work unceasingly at our own conversion.

We evangelize through our works. Jesus healed the sick and brought comfort to human misery; he took up the defense of the weak and the oppressed; he even gave his life for them. The Oblate must do this too: this is essential.

But the Oblate is called to do more than this. He is also called to evangelize by word. He must still have the courage to speak of Jesus Christ. "We cannot help speaking of what we have heard and seen!" Peter and John asserted before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:20). And this, even though, as Paul VI admits in *Evangelii nuntiandi* (no. 42), "modern man is sated by talk" and "tired of listening" and "impervious to words".

As Oblates, we have to look for new ways, we have to try to discover what are the most effective means of telling modern man "who Jesus Christ is" and what man's own dignity is in Jesus Christ. As long as we have not accomplished this, our work of evangelization will remain incomplete, unfinished.

### **A Europe that brings hope**

Secondly, the Congregation needs an Oblate Europe that is a source of hope.

I remember the reaction of an Oblate in Asia who one day told me how he was affected by the defeatism expressed by certain Oblate confreres in Europe. These are hard times for certain Provinces, as is obvious. Within, we have an aging personnel and very few vocations; and, as we have seen these last days, from without there come appeals that are new, that are becoming more and more urgent and demand new ways and creativity.

Does this mean that we have to give up and withdraw into ourselves? Certainly not! It is hard times that are also "par excellence" the times for hope. "He hoped against all hope", St. Paul says about Abraham. "And God made him the father of a great people".

For us, too, this is a time for hope. The renewal in the religious life and in the Oblate life which is evident here and there can also happen among us, if we are capable of believing in it and paying the price for it.

### **A Europe of love**

Finally, the Congregation needs an Oblate Europe of love which nurtures dialogue and welcomes what others say; an Oblate Europe which is successful in overcoming divisions to become more and more united within itself, and in working together for vocations, for formation, for a more intense religious life; an Oblate Europe which is also successful to commit itself externally, fully and as a unit, to the service of the new poor. Like the Church, we must look upon our world "with great sympathy and with an immense desire to offer to people of today the message of love, of salvation and of hope which Christ has brought them" (PAUL VI, *Address at the opening of the second session of Vatican Council II*, September 29, 1963).

Even if we cannot do everything, we must still do something, and, as much as possible, we must do it together.

The present meeting was a step in this direction. I thank God for it, and I thank you.

To help the Congregation, Oblate Europe needs to live faith, hope, and love intensely, and to give an open testimony of this fact.

What is expected of us in helping the emerging political Europe is not all that different. A month ago, Pope John Paul II told the members of the Presidency Office of the European Parliament, "Institutions alone will never make Europe, it is men who will make it" (*L'Osservatore Romano*, April 6, 1979). I am certain that among these men, Religious can exert a great influence, if they are capable of an open and radical life of faith, hope and love.