

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE PROVINCIAL COUNCILS IN THE UNITED STATES

December 4th, 1981 - Homily - Belleville, Illinois

A step forward. - Unity and collaboration. - Vocations. - Men of faith and hope.

L.J.C. et M.I.

We have come to the end of our regional Congress. We are concluding it together in God's presence, around the altar. During this Mass, we pray for all our brothers in the United States, as well as for those men and women who are working with us. We pray, furthermore, that God will strengthen us in our commitments and bring to fruition the priorities the Region has chosen.

Participating in this Congress was a joy-filled and enriching experience for me. Thank you very much.

A step forward

The liturgical texts that we have just heard speak of faith and hope: "But a very little while, and Lebanon shall be changed into an orchard... a forest" (*Isaiah 29:17*). "Are you confident I can do this?... Because of your faith, it shall be done to you" (*Matthew 9:28-29*).

In our Constitutions we read: "We are pilgrims, walking with Jesus in faith, hope and love" (*1980 Constitutions*, art. 30).

This gathering was another step forward into the future. Since the 1979 Congress of San Antonio, you have already done a great deal in applying your regional priorities. This, today, is like a fresh start. We must continue going forward in the same direction with a great deal of confidence, courage and faith.

Growth within a Province is a slow process; this is even more true for a Region. We might compare it to a tree. If we were to watch it, day in and day out, we would see no real growth and we might become quite impatient. If, on the other hand, we were to see this same tree after five or ten years, we would notice its remarkable growth.

Since 1972, since 1979, your Region has grown very much as a Region. It is more united, it engages in more dialogue, works together more, is becoming stronger and more able to make common commitments.

Furthermore, your brother Oblates in other countries see you more and more as a Region, as a single group from whom they expect very much.

The Congregation needs your enthusiasm and love of life; your concern for justice and peace, your spirit of freedom and progress, your generosity, your willingness to share and your self-confidence. But even more than all this, the Congregation needs the solidity of your faith and the strength of your hope.

As I look to the future of your Region, I see three attitudes that will be especially helpful in its growth.

Unity and collaboration

First, to continue promoting collaboration and unity among yourselves. Eight hundred men of good will, who share the same ideals, who work together for the same cause, who mutually support and encourage one another – that constitutes a considerable force within a country. You must be aware of this. Beyond the boundaries of Provinces, the identity of the Oblate as a man of the poor, as someone easily

approachable and always available, as a man who witnesses to Gospel detachment and to a simple style of life, as someone who is an incarnation of Christ's love, must become more and more apparent.

Vocations

Secondly, to pursue with confidence and tenacity the work undertaken to promote vocations. You already have a good number of novices. You will have more and more if you persevere in your effort. My own deep conviction in this matter is this: as long as the Christian spirit will exist among people, some of them will hear the call of Jesus Christ to follow him in a radical way by committing themselves to the evangelical counsels and by the total gift of their lives to serving the poor. If the Oblates stay vigorous enough and holy enough to answer the needs of these people, they will have disciples and novices. As Paul VI told us in 1974: "Our world more than ever needs preachers, qualified spiritual animators and missionaries who are totally available".

If we can produce today the kind of men we did in the past, we have nothing to fear, we can look ahead to the future with confidence.

Men of faith and hope

Thirdly – and this is my conclusion – to be always witnesses to the faith by your life and works, and also by your word. As the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* asserts: "Preaching, the verbal proclamation of a message, is indeed always indispensable" (n. 42). This goes to the very root of our Oblate vocation.

As Oblates, we must look for new ways, search out the most effective personal and community means of teaching modern men and women who Christ is.

"The future", – I am quoting Bishop Poupard, the former Rector of the Institut catholique de Paris – "is in the hands of those who can give to tomorrow's generations a reason to live and to hope; for what is the value of travelling to the moon, what is the value of progress, if it is to end in suicide?" (*Le Devoir*, October 24, 1981)

To my mind, our present mission in the world remains quite clear: we must give to the generations of today and tomorrow sufficient reasons to live by leading them to know who Jesus Christ is.

May our Immaculate Mother and her great Servant, Blessed Eugene de Mazenod, help us carry out this mission!