

# TO THE OBLATES OF CANADA

June 10th, 1977 - Letter - Saint-Norbert, Manitoba

*The Oblates' role in the past. - Promotion of justice. - Formation of Christian leaders. - Cooperation between Provinces. - Witnessing to Christian values. - Concern for vocations.*

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Following the Joint Session in Saint-Norbert with your Provincials and province delegates, and following also our visits to some of your works and communities, the members of the General Council reflected together on the Oblate Canadian reality. They asked me to share with you some of their impressions, before my return to Rome. I do it willingly, and with some assurance, since the text was reviewed and approved by them.

Everywhere and in a special way at Villa Maria, the welcome given us was warm, brotherly, very open. The members of the Council thank you sincerely. It is as brothers that we have come to you, to listen to you, to challenge you and be challenged by you, to affirm you in your commitment of service to the Church and to the poor, convinced as we are that your work and your life, if successful, can be a source of inspiration and of confidence for the whole Institute.

## **The Oblates' role in the past**

In the past Oblates played a role of primary importance within the Church of Canada, *a mari usque ad mare*. Here they proclaimed the Gospel to the poor, they carried the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ to the most remote corners of the Far North, they became the apostles and support of immigrants, Germans, Poles, Italians..., and they spread devotion to the Virgin Mary. Moreover, in answer to the Founder's vision of Montreal as "the gateway leading the family to the conquest of souls in several countries" (*Letter to Honorat, October 9, 1841*), they left from Canada to be missionaries, not only in the United States and Mexico, but also in Africa, Asia and South America.

"The more you are holy", Bishop de Mazenod said to them, "the more will good abound" (*Ibid.*). Among them were authentic saints. Be it sufficient to mention the three Oblates whose cause of beatification is in progress: Bishop Grandin, Bishop Charlebois and Brother Anthony Kowalczyk.

Today still, despite aging personnel, despite a decrease in vocation, the 1.600 Oblates constitute an important apostolic force. They are called to respond to new challenges, which are becoming more urgent day by day. The Congress focused on three of these challenges. We too wish to underline them.

## **Promotion of justice**

In the Canadian society, the promotion of justice. Serious problems exist, "burning issues", as it was said, which call for a Gospel perspective: the right to life, native rights, the rights of immigrants, the new social order, the very future of Canada. No Oblate can remain indifferent in the face of such questions. The promotion of justice, especially in today's world, is an integral part of evangelization. It is the duty of every Oblate to be well informed on these issues, to remind the faithful often of their responsibility in such matters, and to support and help his Oblate brothers who are involved directly in this difficult apostolate.

## **Formation of Christian leaders**

In the Church, the formation of Christian leaders. This too should be a constant preoccupation of every Oblate today: in view of forming living Christian communities, native or white, promoting the involvement of laity in the ministries and responsibilities of the Church. The future of the Church is to be found here, and an Oblate can never be too active in this area.

## **Cooperation between Provinces**

Between Oblate Provinces, cooperation. As early as October 9, 1841, the Founder wrote to Father Honorat: "We are all members of one body, let each one strive by every means and by making

sacrifices, if he must, for the well-being and growth of all its potentialities". The Oblates of Canada will be strong and effective in spreading the Gospel inasmuch as they are united and capable of working together, of sharing. Considerable progress has been made in this field since the founding of the Oblate Conference of Canada, in financial help, in personnel, in services. The redistribution of the territories of the Northeast (James Bay and Labrador) between the Provinces of Saint-Joseph, Notre-Dame du Rosaire and Saint Peter's is also an eloquent example. We can only encourage strongly such an orientation while assuring you that no Province will be weighed down by a burden too heavy for its shoulders.

What more can I say to you, what advice can I give as I prepare to leave you?

### **Witnessing to Christian values**

In a world of wealth, be witnesses to the poverty of Jesus Christ and to his interior freedom. Make every effort to live as people who are poor, to love the poor, to serve them, those in this land, without forgetting those in the Third World.

In a world ever more materialistic, to the point that moral values lose all meaning, do not fear to proclaim Jesus Christ explicitly, and to be a reminder "in season and out of season" of Gospel values and of the demands of faith. In sending the first Oblate priests to Canada, the Founder wanted "men capable of proclaiming the "Word of God" (*Letter to Courtes, August 11, 1841*).

In a world willing to crush its prophets, be strong. "Take comfort in the Lord and in the might of his power", recommended Bishop de Mazenod. "Hold yourselves erect, loins girded with truth... Be united in the same spirit, working together for the faith of the Gospel" (*Letter to Honorat and the first Oblates of Canada, September 29, 1841*).

### **Concern for vocations**

Finally, be concerned with Oblate vocations. In order to promote justice, form Christian leaders, cooperate among Provinces... we must first of all exist! In all the Provinces where this is possible, I know that great efforts are being made in this sense. I compliment you and can but encourage you to persevere in your effort with much confidence. Surely the Lord will answer you. In concluding, I wish to thank our Oblate Bishops for their brotherly presence during the Congress, and to greet in a special way our Oblate Brothers, who are so numerous and active in several Provinces of Canada. You are a great wealth for the Congregation and the Church. To the Oblates of the most remote missions, whom no member of the General Council was able to visit, and to the Oblates who are ill and offer up their suffering for the Congregation, I wish to express our deep affection and assure you of our prayers. To our novices and scholastics, finally, I say: Welcome among us! May you find happiness with us in the total gift of yourselves to Jesus Christ! You are the Congregation of tomorrow!