

TO THE OBLATES OF LATIN AMERICA

January 2nd, 1980 - Letter - Rome

At the service of the poor. - Vocations. - Sharing the peoples' joys and sufferings. - The prophetic quality of your religious life.

L.J.C. et M.I.

After two months spent with you, I would feel remiss if I did not write you a word of thanks, friendship and encouragement. Father Lorenzo Roy, my faithful travelling companion, joins me in expressing his gratitude and in sending you his best wishes.

At the service of the poor

We were received everywhere like brothers and were able to see with our own eyes the wonderful work of evangelization you are accomplishing among the poor. In nearly all the countries of Latin America, if a person wants to find the Oblates, he will have to go to the poor in the favelas or in the interior of the country where the Indians live. "The Lord has sent me to evangelize the poor". Without any doubt you live this motto of our Congregation. All the Bishops I met – some twenty of them – gave witness on that score. In Recife Archbishop Helder Camara told me: "The Oblates are wherever you find the poor with all their troubles and problems. I thank the Oblates... The poor know Don Helder, but Father Larry (Rosebaugh) knows the poor!". The Bishops' only regret is that you are not more numerous in their dioceses!

Vocations

On that subject the past few years have seen new hopes arise – vocations now seem to thrive on the South American continent. With all my heart I encourage you in your efforts in favour of vocations. Go forward with faith and perseverance. The Lord can only bless your efforts. Set your hearts on forming men like our Blessed Founder wanted them: "interior men, truly apostolic men", firm in their faith and filled with zeal for the poorest and the most abandoned.

Sharing the peoples' joys and sufferings

Living in Latin America as you are, you necessarily live also the sufferings, anguish, difficulties and joys of the Latin American Church. As Oblates, do you have something special to offer this Church? Yes, you undoubtedly have. Surely your love and your generosity in the service of the poor, your closeness to them. Surely also your availability and your missionary daring. But there are two other values as well, both at the core of our Oblate vocation, which could be increasingly developed to great advantage by incarnating them in your cultural milieu: I mean the very prophetic quality of our religious consecration and the witness of our prayer life.

The prophetic quality of your religious life

Your primary prophecy is that of your life. The authenticity of your being poor, chaste, obedient, the authenticity of fraternal communion among yourselves and with other apostolic laborers, is more effective in the long run to proclaim the Kingdom and to bring salvation in Jesus Christ to people than is exterior activity. The two are essential to an Oblate. He must develop the one and the other, while taking care however to base the second on the first.

The witness of your prayer life takes on a similar value. In your region as elsewhere certain Oblates pray much and others very little. The Latin American Church is searching for new ways of prayer,

more incarnated, more engaged in life: to experience God at the very heart of life and of liberating action, to meet there the Virgin Mary through the deep and very simple faith of the people. That is good, very good, but there is also the need for people to become aware that we are truly seeking God and that he is eminently our Friend. On this score, certain exercises of community and private prayer, and also the value we give to the celebration of the Eucharist, retain and will always retain a special importance.

In closing I recommend that you make a serious study of the Puebla document and of CLAR's publication (no. 42), *Experiencia Latinoamericana de Vida Religiosa 1959-1979*.

May the Virgin of Guadalupe, under whose patronage I began my visit in Latin America, be for you all a source of light, strength and joy!