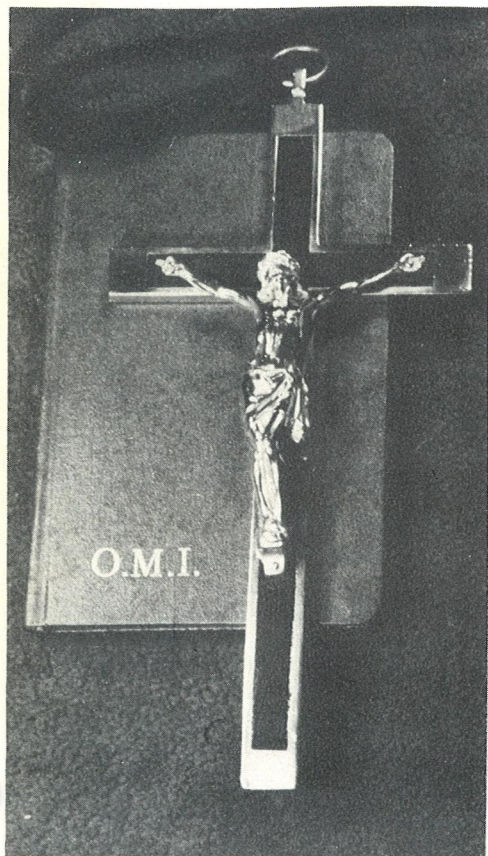


# PRAYING WITH OUR CONSTITUTIONS

OBLATES OF MARY IMMACULATE

JAMES E. SULLIVAN, O.M.I.



RICHARD HASLAM, O.M.I.

**PRAYING WITH OUR CONSTITUTIONS**

**MISSIONARY OBLATES OF MARY**

**IMMACULATE**

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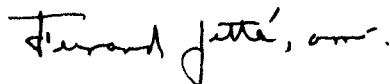
## F O R E W A R D

The approval of the new Oblate Constitutions and Rules has occasioned a number of projects; among the most promising is the work I present to you today.

The idea of *Praying with the Constitutions* took root in the heart of a Chapter member, Fr. James E. Sullivan, O. M. I., in 1980. He immediately sought the collaboration of some confreres and thus, gradually, the work began to take shape.

As pointed out in the introduction, this is not a prayer book; its intent is to help us in praying and interiorizing our rule of life. The thoughts which it presents on each article are of a personal nature, close to the life—style of the one who wrote them. They vary greatly, combining psychology with theology, joining devotion with concern for justice in the world. Some are more nuanced, others more radical, but each is a starting point for advancing our reflections.

I thank those who have contributed to this work and hope that others will follow their example.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Fernand Jette, O.M.I." with a stylized flourish at the end.

FERNAND JETTE, O. M. I.  
Superior General.

## INTRODUCTION

### OUR CONSTITUTIONS.

Our Oblate life is a life-long project of daily responses to the Lord's invitation to total consecration. To be an Oblate is to live an experience of the Gospel vision given to our Founder and to each of us by the Holy Spirit. Our Constitutions are the written expression of the essential elements of our call — the stable expression of a living gift which is our charism. They should crystalize our experience as a conscious reflection of the whole Congregation. On the one hand they strengthen and confirm our own lived experience, on the other, they set down an ideal to motivate us in our life project. This is what we should be, this is, in fact, who we are in various degrees.

It is not enough that our call be written down, read or studied and checked out once in awhile. Our growth as Oblates — the effectiveness of our unique charism depends on our ability to internalize the values which are expressed in these Constitutions. We fulfill our vocation, we grow, we become more and more Oblate as we make these values our own, letting them become a part of us. We must incorporate them into ourselves as our guiding principles and our motivating forces. This requires understanding, acceptance, firm attitudes and action, all accompanied by evaluation.

Since the call expressed in our Constitutions is, in the first place, a gift from the Lord, prayer is essential for its internalization. We must pray with and about the Constitutions and about ourselves as questioned by the Constitutions.

### PRAYING WITH THE CONSTITUTIONS.

This is not so much a prayer book as it is a book of aids to our prayer. Its purpose is to give the Oblate a means to help him internalize the values of Oblate Life and Mission as expressed in the Constitutions. We wish to present helps for prayer, reflection, self-questioning, evaluating experiences and determining concrete action in a life project. The different elements which are presented with each article, the texts from Sacred Scripture, references to Church Documents, brief theological reflections, the questions for reflection and the experiences are certainly not exhaustive. In a way, they are just examples or models. Hopefully, the Oblate who uses these various elements will continue, in his own growth process, to find other texts, expand his theological reflection, be confronted with concrete questions and to learn from and question his own experience.

## HOW TO USE PRAYING WITH THE CONSTITUTIONS.

This manual is presented as an aid for daily personal prayer and reflection. It can also be useful for a monthly retreat day. Although it was composed with the individual Oblate in mind, it can be helpful for community prayer, retreat days or even community study or evaluation days.

### A. The book presents various aids for prayer and reflection:

1. The text of the Constitution and Rules— — We have limited our work to the first part of the Constitutions and Rules — —Charism. Where one or other of the Articles of the Constitutions and several Rules did not lend themselves to this type of prayer or reflection we have placed the text in its place so that the manual contains the entire text of Part I.

At the end of this Introduction there is an instrument of reflection to help towards a better understanding of the articles of the Constitution and Rules. The text of each of the Constitutions, in itself, can be used as a topic of conversation with the Lord.

2. Praying with Scripture — The Scripture texts presented with each article do not necessarily refer directly to the immediate content in the Article or Rule nor to every idea expressed in them. In some cases the texts have been chosen to touch on the fundamental theme behind the Article. There are seven texts for each article which will give ample help for prayer, either of one hour, a full day or several days.

Holy Scripture is a true form of God's presence. Through His revealed Word God calls us to listen to what He is saying to us here and now. Silence and solitude are necessary to be able to listen. We must ask the Lord for the grace to listen to what He says. Read the Scripture passage slowly and attentively. Read it a second time pausing after each verse. When something touches you, a word or a phrase that has a special meaning, stop and savor these words, turn them over within you, repeat them, listen with your heart. We do not have to constantly compare ourselves with what Scripture says, making every prayer an examination of conscience. Listen! Let your feelings affect you, experience God's love, a new meaning, be moved to do something. Spend the time just being with God. Use your whole being — — memory, imagination, feelings, understanding — — to be with the Lord in His Word.

3. Documents of the Church— — We just present one or two short references to some Documents of the Church regarding the theme of the Article or Rule. A personal research for more would be helpful.
4. Reflection— — A short reflection is presented to awaken some ideas about the Article or Rule. These reflections are not, in any way, meant to be an interpretation of or a commentary on the particular Article or Rule. It is merely a personal reflection of an individual Oblate. It is a way of faith sharing which may help the reader in his own reflection on the Article. It does not necessarily treat the entire content of the Article but just touches on the core theme of the Article.



5. Questions for reflection— — These questions try to be concrete and demanding. They require an openness and humility. The questions should confront us and not simply provide us with an opportunity to praise or excuse ourselves with superficial responses. Each person may think of even more concrete questions that he may have to ask himself.
6. Exercises— — One or two exercises are presented to help us examine our experience, where our daily living of the Oblate values, life and mission is. These exercises may help us to reflect on our life in its dimensions of attitudes and actions. To be effective, they should be done with care and attention in a reflective, prayerful manner.

## **B. Community Sharing:**

The Congregation began in a faith—sharing. The founder shared his call, his vision and dreams for mission with his first companions. We continue to be a corporate force for the kingdom. Although the prayers, questions and exercises are, first, intended for our own personal growth, they will help us in our growth in “one mind and heart”, as we share the fruits in our community prayer, meetings and encounters.

## **C. A Method for Personal Use:**

The contents of this book are such that the prayer and reflection on one Article may be divided up in many ways. A person may use a part of one Article for an hour of prayer. He may dedicate an entire week to one Article. He may return to the same Article at different times using different Scripture texts, other questions or exercises.

Hopefully, this manual will not be a book to be read through one time. The creativity of each Oblate will help him to find his own method and aids to make the values of the Oblate call integral parts of his life and mission.

The same questions could be asked at the end of the reflection and prayer about each article: “What must I do, what steps must I take to make the call, the values, the mission, the gift stated in this article, a concrete dimension of my life as an Oblate? What do I have to do to live the reality expressed by this article better?”.

## COLLABORATORS

In the spirit of fraternal sharing, as expressed in Article 39 of the Constitutions, this manual is the result of the collaboration of Oblates from the six regions of the Congregation. These are the names of the contributors.

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A  
BASIC APPROACH  
towards  
Deeper Appreciation  
of the  
CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

“First of all, we must know them well: we must read them, re—read them and meditate on their content. We must not allow ourselves to be put off by this word or that literary expression which we may not like: rather, beyond the word or expression, we must make an effort to grasp the meaning and to hear the call of God addressed to us through the medium of these words.”

(Letter of Fr. General, February 17th., 1981)

The objective of the Process suggested here is to come to know the elements contained in each one of the Articles of the Constitutions and Rules. The hope is that these articles can become more personal and life—giving for each Oblate and for each Oblate community.

An hour of either individual work or group meeting is recommended for each Article.

## PROCESS

### Individual Approach

1. Read the text of the chosen Article.
2. Pick out and note the different ideas contained there.
3. Rewrite the Article in your own words.
4. Compare your own life with the demands of the text.
5. Write down skills you may need, to live out this article more fully.
6. Note the areas demanding more effort and/or clarity for you.
7. Write a prayer in your own words based on the invitation of the article.

### Group Approach

1. Invite one of the participants to read the text of the chosen Article.
2. Everyone is then invited to read his own rewritten version of the text, together with the skills he feels are needed and the areas of effort or clarity that seem indicated.
3. Everyone shares with the others his understanding of the article, the demands he feels it makes on him and the prayer that he wrote.
4. Initiate a discussion and try to come to a consensus about the changes the article calls for in this community.
5. Close the session with spontaneous prayers of petition.

# CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

## Of The Congregation

### Of The Missionary Oblates

### Of Mary Immaculate

#### FOREWARD

Our Lord Jesus Christ, when the appointed time came, was sent by the Father and filled with the Spirit "to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour" (Lk 4: 18–19). He called men to become disciples to share in his mission; in the Church he continues to call others to follow him.

Blessed Eugene de Mazenod heard that call. Burning with love for Jesus and his Church, he suffered deeply on seeing how God's people were abandoned. He chose to become "the servant and priest of the poor" and to give his life wholly to them.

Faced with an overwhelming task, he gathered a few priests around him, men who shared his impassioned zeal for the most abandoned. "Live together as brothers", he urged them; "Strive to imitate the virtues and example of our Saviour Jesus Christ, principally through preaching the Word of God to the poor". At his persuading, they committed themselves permanently to the preaching of missions, binding themselves by religious vows. Soon afterwards he decided to receive Brothers as true sons of the family. Thus began the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of the Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary.

On february 17, 1826, the new Congregation and its Constitutions were formally approved by Pope Leo XII. For the Oblates, the Founder's Preface to the Constitutions will always be an unrivalled expression of his charism and a bond of unity for the Congregation. Here, then, is that text which each succeeding generation of Oblates has treasured as it's Rule of Life.

#### PREFACE

The Church, that glorious inheritance purchased by Christ the Saviour at the cost of his own blood, has in our days been cruelly ravaged. The beloved spouse of God's only-begotten Son is torn with anguish as she mourns the shameful defection of the children she herself bore. Christians, but apostates, and utterly mindless of God's blessings, they provoke divine justice by their crimes. And did we not know that the sacred deposit of faith is to be preserved intact to the end of time, we would hardly be able to recognize the religion of Christ from the few remaining traces of its past glory that lie scattered about. Such is the state of things brought about by the malice and corruption of present day Christians that it can be truly said that the greater number of them are worse off now than was the gentile world before its idols were destroyed by the Cross.

Faced with such a deplorable situation, the Church earnestly appeals to the ministers whom she herself enrolled in the cause of her divine Spouse, to do all in their power, by word and example, to rekindle the flame of faith that has all but died in the hearts of so many of her children. Alas, few heed their Mother's urgent plea. Indeed, many even aggravate things by their own disgraceful conduct and, instead of trying to lead people back to the ways of justice, they themselves must often be reminded of their own duties.

The sight of these evils has so touched the hearts of certain priests, zealous for the glory of God, men with an ardent love for the Church, that they are willing to give their lives, if need be, for the salvation of souls.

They are convinced that if priests could be formed, afire with zeal for men's salvation, priests not given to their own interests, solidly grounded in virtue — in a word, apostolic men deeply conscious of the need to reform themselves, who would labour with all the resources at their command to convert others then there would be ample reason to believe that in a short while people who had gone astray might be brought back to their long unrecognized responsibilities. "Take great care about what you do and what you teach", was Paul's charge to Timothy, "Always do this, and thus you will save both yourself and those who listen to you" (1 Tim 4:16).

How, indeed, did our Lord Jesus Christ proceed when he undertook to convert the world? He chose a number of apostles and disciples whom he himself trained in piety, and he filled them with his Spirit. These men he sent forth, once they had been schooled in his teaching, to conquer the world which, before long, was to bow to his holy rule.

And how should men who want to follow in the footsteps of their divine Master Jesus Christ conduct themselves if they, in their turn, are to win back the many souls who have thrown off his yoke? They must strive to be saints. They must walk courageously along the same paths trodden by so many before them: apostolic labourers for the Gospel who, while carrying out the same ministry to which they themselves now feel called, handed on such splendid examples of virtue. They must wholly renounce themselves, striving solely for the glory of God, the good of the Church, and the growth and salvation of souls. They must constantly renew themselves in the spirit vocation, living in a state of habitual self-denial and seeking at all times to reach the very summit of perfection. They must work unremittingly to become humble, meek, obedient, lovers of poverty and penance, mortified, free from inordinate attachment to the world or to family, men filled with zeal, ready to sacrifice goods, talents, ease, self, even their life, for the love of Jesus Christ, the service of the Church, and the sanctification of their brethren. And thus, filled with unbounded confidence in God, they are ready to enter the combat, to fight, even unto death, for the greater glory of his most holy and sublime Name.

How vast the field that lies before them! How worthy and holy the undertaking! The people are caught up in crass ignorance of all that pertains to their salvation. The consequence of their ignorance has been a weakening of the faith and a corruption of morals with all the licence which that inevitably entails. Thus, it is supremely important, it is urgently imperative, that we lead the multitude of lost sheep back to the fold, that we teach these degenerate Christians who Jesus Christ is, that we rescue them from Satan's power and show them the way to eternal life. We must spare no effort to extend the Saviour's empire and to destroy the dominion of hell. We must check the manifold evils of sin and establish the honoured observance of every virtue. We must lead men to act like human beings, first of all, and then like Christians, and finally, we must help them to be come saints.

Such are the great works of salvation that can crown the efforts of priests whom God has inspired with the desire to form themselves a Society in order to work more effectively for the salvation of souls and for their own sanctification. To bring all this into being, they must carry out their duty worthily, faithfully fulfilling their splendid vocation.

But it is not enough for them simply to be convinced of the sublime nature of the ministry to which they have been called. The example of the saints and reason itself make it amply clear that the success of such a holy undertaking as well as the maintenance of discipline in any society make certain rules of life absolutely necessary for unity of thought and action among the members. Such unity is a body's strength, keeping up its fervour and insuring that it lasts.

Wherefore, while pledging themselves to all the works of zeal which priestly charity can inspire - above all, to the work of the missions, which is the main reason for their union - these priests, joined together in a society, resolve to obey the following Constitutions and Rules; by living them they hope to obtain all the benefits they need for their own sanctification and for the salvation of souls.

## CO—WORKERS WITH THE SAVIOUR

What more sublime purpose  
than that of their Institute?  
Their founder is Jesus Christ  
the very Son of God;  
their first fathers are the Apostles.  
They are called to be the Saviour's co-workers,  
the co-redeemers of mankind;  
and even though,  
because of their present small number and  
the more urgent needs of the people around them,  
they have to limit the scope of their zeal,  
for the time being,  
to the poor of our countryside and others,  
their ambition should, in its holy aspirations,  
embrace the vast expanse of the whole earth.



# PART ONE — THE OBLATE CHARISM

## CHAPTER ONE

### MISSION

### OUR CALL

#### Article 1

The call of Jesus Christ, heard within the Church through people's need for salvation, draws us together as Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Christ thus invites us to follow him and to share in his mission through word and work. We are a clerical Congregation of pontifical right. We come together in apostolic communities of priests and Brothers, united to God by the vows of religion. Cooperating with the Saviour and imitating his example, we commit ourselves principally to evangelising the poor.

#### Scripture for Prayer:

1. Gen. 12, 1-3 " . . . Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk . . . "
2. I Sam. 3, 1-18 " . . . Speak, for your servant is listening . . . "
3. Luke 1, 26-38 " . . . Let it be done to me as you say . . . "
4. Jer. 1, 4-10 " . . . To whomever I send you, you shall go . . . "
5. Isa. 49, 1-6 " . . . The Lord called me from birth . . . "
6. Isa. 43, 1-7 " . . . I have called you by name, you are mine . . . "
7. Matt. 25, 14-30 " . . . Well done, you are an industrious and reliable servant . . . "

Church Documents: Lumen Gentium, chap. 5; 39-42

#### Reflection:

#### CHARISM

Charism is a gift of the Holy Spirit given to a person for the good of others. Vatican II tells us that, "by these gifts he (the Holy Spirit) makes them (the faithful) fit and ready to undertake various tasks for the renewal and building up of the Church." (Lumen Gentium 13). This charism is the experience of God that a person has, that experience which calls the person to take a stance before God and demands that he BE in a certain way and DO a certain mission. It affects the very BEING of the person, making him "fit and ready" to undertake the DOING of a mission. It is that person's vocation, his spiritual identity. In a way of speaking, the charism of a religious is his gospel talent, for which he is accountable.

Each Founder of a religious congregation had his own personal experience of God, his encounter with God. He felt the presence of God strongly enough in his life to call him to BE in a certain way, and to HAVE a special vision of the Gospel. This impelled him to fulfil a certain mission.

Where is the charism of Blessed Eugene de Mazenod today? the charism of the Founder was not just a special quality of personality which inspired others to follow him. It was a gift of the Spirit, a grace. Grace is an individual gift to a concrete person. The Founder received it. His first companions received it. We, his spiritual sons, have each received it.

The founding of any religious congregation originates in a faith-sharing, by which the founder communicates his own experience of God to others and they recognise the similarity with their own experience of God. The moment comes when they can say, "This group of religious is BEING and DOING what I feel called to Be and DO."

There are two moments in the charism of a founder, of his first companions and of all of us who have followed in their steps. The Founder received the Oblate Charism, the gift to be and do, plus a special charism, given only to him, to call and to unite. The first companions received the same gift-charism, to be and to do, direct from the Holy Spirit, plus the gift to respond and to congregate. Each of us who have followed received from the Holy Spirit the same gift to be and to do, plus the gift to continue and to grow. Our vocation to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate was a question of recognition. "I wish to respond to the appeal of God that I experience, and I recognise that the concrete way of answering already exists in the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate."

This first article of our Constitutions describes our charism. It contains a description of BEING - following Jesus Christ, living in apostolic community, binding ourselves to God, cooperating with and imitating the Savior. . commitment. All this sums a special vision of the Gospel - Jesus as Savior. It also presents a description of DOING - sharing in Jesus' mission, by word and work, evangelising the poor. All of these elements together constitute our identity - our vocation.

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. What good qualities do I have which help me to cooperate with the grace of my charism?
2. What are the elements of dissatisfaction with myself in the living of my religious life?
3. What alternatives do I see for living my Oblate Charism better?
4. Who and what can help me choose and grow in the alternatives?

## EXERCISES

### I. My Experience of God:

Use your dynamic memory. Do not only recall the events of your life but place yourself again into those events. Recall your feelings and reactions at that time. Ask to see, with the vision of faith, where God has been present in your life. Go as far back as you can remember, go through your whole life to the present day. When were you closest to God and when farthest away? What were the events connected with and who were the people involved in the development of your vocation? What were the moments of conversion? How has your prayer life developed and fluctuated? In a word, what has been your experience of God?

### II. Oblateness:

A. Remember some occasion in your life in community or in your apostolate when you felt most Oblate. This means a time when you felt that you were really being and doing what you were called to be and do as an Oblate. Perhaps, at the time, you did not advert to the "oblateness" of the occasion, but now as you recall it, you see that this was so. Place yourself again in that moment. What was the occasion? What happened? Recall it well. Relive it. What were you doing - not just the action and words, but what was the deep religious response behind these actions and words? What were your feelings at the time? What were the elements of Oblate charism that stood out: total consecration, the following of Jesus, the evangelical counsels, fraternal community, evangelization, the poor and most abandoned, Mary?

- Notes:
1. Sentiments present in the occasion.
  2. Values behind these sentiments.
  3. Elements of Charism.

#### B. Oblateness in an brother Oblate:

Now recall a brother Oblate with whom you have lived or worked and in whom you have witnessed our Oblate call incarnated. Either on occasions in community life or in apostolic life or in the general day to day of his religious life, you witnessed that this Oblate really incarnated what we, as Oblates, are called to be and do. Think about this. What was he really doing - not the action in itself but the deep religious response he was manifesting.

1. Why do you say that he incarnated the Oblate Charism?
2. Which were the elements of our Charism that stood out in his life?

### III. Response to the world through our Charism:

Page through the world news in today's newspaper and mark as many articles as you can which call for a response of one or more of the elements of our Charism.

## Article 2 TO LIVE CHRIST JESUS

We are men "set apart for the Gospel" (Rom 1:1), men ready to leave everything to be disciples of Jesus. The desire to co-operate with him draws us to know him more deeply, to identify with him, to let him live in us.

We strive to reproduce in ourselves the pattern of his life. Thus, we give ourselves to the Father in obedience even unto death and dedicate ourselves to God's people in unselfish love. Our apostolic zeal is sustained by the unreserved gift we make of ourselves in our oblation, an offering constantly renewed by the challenges of our mission.

### Scripture for Prayer:

1. Malachi 3, 1–24      "... The Lord whom you seek. ..."
2. Luke 1, 26–38      "... He will be called Son of the Most High. ..."
3. Philippians 3, 7–15      "... I have counted all else rubbish. ..."
4. John 17, 1–18      "... to know you, the only true God and. ..."
5. John 14, 5–14      "... I am the way, the truth and the life. ..."
6. John 21, 15–19      "... do you love me more than these. ..."
7. Matthew 5, 1–12      "... Blessed are the poor in spirit. ..."

**Church Documents:** Readings from "Lumen Gentium" Chapter V, 40;  
Chapter VI, 44.

## REFLECTION :

### FOLLOWING OF JESUS

The root of all christian spirituality and the demanding simplicity of christian identity is the following of Jesus. To be a disciple of Jesus is to follow him and that is christian life. So the following of Jesus is criterion of identity and faithfulness for all christians. Vatican II establishes the "following and imitation of Jesus" as the determining occupation and life pattern of the religious. "Since the fundamental norm of the religious life is a following of Christ as proposed by the gospel, such is to be regarded by all communities as their supreme law." (P. C. 2a).

Religious should strive to live this following of Jesus radically, as a prophetic way of living christianity as a clear witness to evangelical life. Thus religious are "ready to leave everything to be disciples of Jesus". This following of Jesus cannot be reduced to an interpretation that deprives discipleship of its historic content of renunciation and liberation which exist in the message and the very life of Christ. Cross, sacrifice, humility, obedience, poverty are not exalted themes for their own sake. They must challenge man to struggle within and overcome the causes of suffering and the cross.

The religious must follow a God who assumed the human condition. He had a history like ours, he lived our experiences, made options, gave himself to a cause for which he suffered, had successes, joys and failures and surrendered his life. The starting point of our spirituality is the encounter with this humanity of Jesus. He is the only way we have to know God, his words, his deeds, his ideals and his demands. It is here that the first disciples began. They knew a man and little by little they began to see that he was the Son of God. So to follow Jesus is, first of all, "to know him more deeply". "To identify with him" is to assume aspects of his type of life. As a man Jesus had attitudes and performed actions. The disciple "puts on" the attitude, the options, the acts, the loves and the commitment of Jesus and thus "strives to reproduce in (himself) the pattern of (Jesus') life".

To follow Jesus, then, is not so much doing exactly what Jesus did, as it is signifying in our time and place what Jesus signified in His time. So it means knowing the Word of God and knowing the reality of today.

So that by our attitudes and actions, of which Jesus is the model, we can be obedient to the will of the Father and serve God's people.

This demands a continuous conversion, a daily confrontation in our attitudes and actions with those of Jesus.

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. What does “fidelity in the following of Jesus” mean for you?
2. Which of your attitudes are coherent with those of Christ and which are not?
3. Which of the Beatitudes can you say can be applied in some concrete way (however slightly) to your life and why?
4. Cite for yourself three concrete actions of yours during the past month that you think were inspired by or express Christ-like attitudes.

### Exercises:

- I. Search out in the Scriptures the variety of answers to Christ’s question to Peter “and who do you say I am?” How did the prophets, John the Baptist, the disciples, the sick and the poor, the pharisees and the leaders, the Father and Christ Himself answer this question. Place yourself in the scene of Mt. 16 and see Jesus call you by name and ask you “and you, who do you say that I am?” Answer the question directly to Him in writing.
- II. Read all the accounts of the Resurrection and the appearances of Jesus after the Resurrection. Summarize in one or two words, each of Jesus’ words and actions. What did the risen Jesus say and do, what attitudes did he demonstrate?
  1. How many of these words, actions and attitudes has He used towards you in the course of your life?
  2. Which of these words, actions and attitudes do you need from him more?
  3. As a follower of Jesus which of these words, actions or attitudes have you most frequently performed for others?
  4. Which have you never performed?

## Article 3

## IN APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY

The community of the Apostles with Jesus is the model of our life. Our Lord grouped the Twelve around him to be his companions and to be sent out as his messengers (cf. Mk 3:14). The call and the presence of the Lord among us today bind us together in charity and obedience to create anew in our own lives the Apostles' unity with him and their common mission in his Spirit.

## Scripture for Prayer:

- |                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| 1. Isaias 43, 1-5      | "...fear not, for I am with you. ..."                                       |
| 2. Philippians 2, 1-11 | "...make my joy complete by your unanimity. ..."                            |
| 3. John 17, 20-24      | "...may they all be one. ..."   |
| 4. Ephesians 2, 19-22  | "...you form a building which rises on the foundation of the Apostles. ..." |
| 5. Revelation 21, 1-5  | "...this is God's dwelling among men. ..."                                  |
| 6. Psalm 84            | "...Happy are they who dwell in your house. ..."                            |
| 7. I Cor 3, 9-17       | "...We are God's co-workers. ..."   |

## Church Documents:

Perfectae Caritatis 15

## Reflection:

## COMMUNION

The community of Jesus with his apostles, as well as the first christian communities and even our own Oblate communities, are all historical realizations of their Trinitarian Communion. They are an attempt to mediate the Trinitarian Communion of the love of the Father through the Son in community that calls itself "religious life". This free and gratuitous fraternity of brothers in service to the world cannot be a community without this communion.

Jesus receives the Holy Spirit from the Father and becomes the Lord of History in deep communion with men. The Father conceives in us this same Spirit of Jesus, by whom we become brothers to each other and through and in whom we live every and any fraternity on earth - (Ph 2,3) "If therefore there is any comfort in Christ, any encouragement in the Spirit, any feelings of mercy, fill up my joy by thinking alike, having the same charity, with one soul and one mind."

Jesus reveals this love of the Father, which, manifests itself in our love for our brothers. "No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. In this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. . . Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God." (1Jn 4, 12-15).

In Jesus Christ, dead and resurrected, the reconciliation of men with God, of man with men and man with the world takes place. “. . .but we exult also in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation”. (Rom 5,11).

From now on mankind is offered the real possibility of forming a people reconciled by the power of the Holy Spirit. That is why it is possible for men to live a community of love, of fraternity, of reconciliation and of pardon. The pardon of God, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit, is the condition that makes it possible for any community to have true pardon, overcome hatred, contradictions, limitations and sin, the ultimate root of all disintegration.

This communion is the fruit of the Cross of Jesus. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit which takes men away from egotism, sin, enmity, hate. It is a process of overcoming sin within a dynamic fraternity, much different than a “club of friends”. It is a long slow reconciliation process that can only happen if one is “a son of God the Father” being a brother to His other sons.

Thus communion is “new life” which assumes all the human values of friendship and brotherhood.

This is the essence, the foundation of all community -this theological communion- the gift of the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit.

This communion has certain qualities. It is accepting: It accepts the differences in persons, for it is God who made the other to be himself. It overcomes oppositions. It pardons. It converts those who live it. It unites in one same “desire” but not necessarily in one same “feeling”. It is gratuitous in as much as it is a gift of the Father to us and our gift to our brothers. It is the fundamental inspiration of every salvific communitarian mediation in the church, including our Oblate apostolic community.

#### **Questions for Personal Reflection:**

1. What three concrete things in your community life show that the community of Jesus with his apostles is the model of your community life?
2. To what point have you interiorized the presence of Jesus in you so that it affects your community life?
3. In what three concrete ways do you feel you have been a gift to your brothers in community during this past month?
4. Which of the qualities of communion is most lacking in your life?

#### **Exercises:**

1. My expectations: Reflect on your life with your Oblate community during the past year. Write out your personal impressions about this community. Make a list of what you expect from your community. Make a list of your own needs and aspirations that you feel have not been met by your community. If it is possible, share this reflection with your community.



- II. My contribution: Make a list of the concrete actions which you have performed in the past year which you think have contributed to the basic communion of the community.

What other things could you have done to help this communion?

### TO PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED

Like the Apostle,  
to preach "Jesus Christ, and him crucified. . .  
not in loftiness of speech,  
but in the showing of the Spirit,"  
that is to say, by making manifest  
that we have pondered in our hearts  
the words which we proclaim,  
and that we began to practice  
before setting out to teach.

— 1826 —

### WITH JESUS ON THE CROSS

Since the ministers of the Gospel  
will never reap abundant fruit from their labours,  
unless they hold in highest esteem,  
and, so to speak,  
constantly bear about in their own body  
the death sufferings of Jesus,  
the members of our Society will earnestly strive  
to keep their passions in check  
and to deny their self-will in everything;  
like the Apostle, they will glory in their weaknesses,  
in results, persecutions and distress  
endured for the sake of Christ.

— 1826 —

## Article 4

## TO LIVE CHRIST JESUS CRUCIFIED

The cross of Jesus Christ is central to our mission. Like the apostle Paul, we “preach Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). If we bear in our body the death of Jesus, it is with the hope that the life of Jesus, too, may be seen in our body (cf 2 Cor 4:10). Through the eyes of our crucified Saviour we see the world which he redeemed with his blood, desiring that those in whom he continues to suffer will know also the power of his resurrection (cf. Phil 3:10).

## Scripture for Prayer:

1. Luke 21, 12-19 “...you will be brought to give witness. . .”
2. Mark 14, 32-36 “...let it be as you would have it, not as I. . .”
3. Rom. 6, 1-11 “...our old self was crucified with him. . .”
4. 1 Cor. 1, 22-29 “...the power of God and the wisdom of God. . .”
5. Gal. 2, 19-21; 6,14 “...I have been crucified with Christ. . .”
6. Col. 2, 24-28 “...I fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ. . .”
7. Phil. 2, 5-11 “...He emptied himself. . .”

Church Documents: Lumen Gentium, 3: Perfectae Caritatis, 1, Gaudium et Spes, 78

## Reflection:

## THE CROSS

In answering Christ's invitation to follow him, we have already experienced the thrust of his challenge- “If anyone wishes to follow after me, then let him deny himself and take his cross upon him and follow me”. (Mark 8:34)

The prospect of a Messiah who had to suffer and die prompted Peter to rebuke Jesus for making such a prediction. Jesus, in turn, rebuked Peter, and called on his disciples to follow him as a crucified Lord.

We too share Peter's abhorrence at this prospect and we are fearful before its challenge. Like Peter, we want strength, power, achievement, success in our apostolate. We are prepared to take a certain amount of suffering. But we find it hard, and, at times, almost impossible to face rejection, or the apparent failure to effect change with its accompanying frustration. Many of us experience a sense of helplessness in the face of growing evil and injustice. Our fragile faith is tested.

In the experience of this fear and doubt we are at one with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Their confusion is ours, and like them, we are invited to take it to Christ for meaning. There is little value in wishing, as they did, that things had been otherwise. The cross is a reality of life. We must learn to carry it as Christ did.

Christ suffered, was rejected, was unjustly condemned and killed. In the rare Jewish tradition, He saw himself as the suffering servant of all. He shared the frailty and suffering of the human condition; he shared the injustice experienced by so many; he shared the sense of rejection of those who live marginal lives. But he went further. He evoked the merciful forgiveness of his Father on those who killed him; and he continues to do so for all those who perpetrate injustice and violate human rights and dignity. For it is only his forgiveness that calls such people from greed and selfishness, and from the fear in which these originate. For it is only in being one with those who suffer that Jesus can save both them and those who cause their suffering. "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself". (John 12:32)

This was the law of his life. He could not avoid it, though he was tempted to seek other ways. He chose it, and out of this cruelty of man to man, God mysteriously brought victory over sin and death. For he took Christ's voluntary acceptance of this life pattern and transformed it into the gateway to eternal life. It is paradox, it is mystery. And it is the reality that we can enter only in the power of the Spirit.

Christ first invites us to deny ourselves and then take up our cross. It is not an invitation to deny our worth or our gifts. But it is to choose to put to death our selfish ego and reject those things that we cling to out of a false self-sufficiency. It is to accept to really live in faith and not just out of one's own meagre resources. His invitation to the cross strikes at the heart of all our fears, the fear of losing self. For it is only when we refuse to be preoccupied with the self that we can begin to experience what it is to be free for the gospel. It is only in confrontation with the cross that we can come to know the true self, with its fears and its sinfulness. "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18). It is only in the shadow of the cross that we can show our wounds, accept our need of healing and forgiveness, admit our own evil tendencies; and so be led to experience the possibility of victory over sin, evil and death.

We are not called to take up Christ's cross, for that is unique to him. But we are called to positively embrace and be a real part of his suffering in the world. And we are invited to meet suffering as Christ did. We are well acquainted with suffering in our ministry. We can try to ignore it and hope it won't touch us or drain us. We can struggle to eradicate it with all our energy. But it will always be part of a fallen race and it will always torment us. We can only choose to conquer it as Jesus did, by entering its mystery, choosing to bear it and defeat it in that choice. Through his suffering it has become bearable; so his invitation still stands - to take up our part of the burden and follow him. "For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom and weakness of God is stronger than man's strength." (1 Cor. 1:25)

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. Do failure, frustration, my own suffering or that of others, invite me to seek hope and strength in the cross of Christ?
2. How do I witness to the saving mystery of the cross in visible acceptance of my own suffering?
3. How do I approach others who are suffering in a way that invites them to find strength in the passion of Christ?
4. To what extent can I say now, with St. Paul, "May I never boast except in the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world"? (Gal. 6:14)

### Exercises:

- I. Reflect on some particular experience of suffering in your life. Try to surface your feelings at that time, how you reacted in the situation or experience. Compare those reactions with the attitude of Christ in the gospels. Ask for the gift of healing, the ability to forgive and the faith to see God present in the times of trial.
- II. Surface and reflect on some present anguish over the suffering of others: especially those who are suffering from injustice, persecution, victimization, lack of dignity or hope.

What are your feelings about the situation? Are you angry, aggressive, tempted to drastic solutions, doubtful of God's love or mercy?

Take these feelings to Christ on the cross and pray for peace in your heart; for faith to see God at work in this situation as He was in the sufferings of His Son.

Discern the most effective way you can concretely work to eliminate the causes of these sufferings.

**Article 5a****AMONG THE MOST ABANDONED I**

We are a missionary Congregation.

Our principal service in the Church is to proclaim Christ and his Kingdom to the most abandoned. We preach the Gospel among people who have not yet received it and help them see their own values in its light. Where the Church is already established, our commitment is to those groups it touches? least.

Wherever we work, our mission is especially to those people whose condition cries out for salvation and for the hope which only Jesus Christ can fully bring. These are the poor with their many faces; we give them our preference.

**Scripture for Prayer:**

1. Matthew 5, 13-16 "...You are the salt of the earth. . ."
2. Matthew 10, 5-15 "...Go after the lost sheep. . ."
3. Matthew 10, 16-27 "...You will be brought to trial before rulers. . ."
4. Luke 4, 14-22 "...He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor. . ."
5. John 10: 1-18 "...I am the good shepherd. . ."
6. John 15, 1-8 "...Live on in me as I do in you. . ."
7. Matthew 28, 16-20 "...Know that I am with you always. . ."

Church Documents: Nuntiandi, Chap. I, 6; II, 19; III, 29, 30, 31, 38.

**Reflection:****EVANGELIZATION**

Evangelization means more than just preaching and administering the sacraments. Evangelization has developed from being a simple proclamation of the word to those who have not heard of Christ. It has progressed to the second step of being the continued proclamation of the word and life to those who have heard of Christ, and to the third step of proclaiming the word to them so that, by living that word, they may be free. Therefore, to really evangelize, we must first of all be a sign and proclaim. It is not enough merely to get involved in social or ideological development. We have to, with our voices and our lives, proclaim the Word of God.

To discover what evangelization really is, we must go back to the simplicity and the newness of the Gospel. The Gospel is love and that is what we are proclaiming. But we cannot proclaim the love of God unless we become a sign of that love. We proclaim it by our teaching but also by loving those people with whom we come in contact. An individual priest cannot, I think, evangelize the masses. He can only evangelize, or help them to evangelize themselves, those with whom he comes into contact and loves concretely. He can show that they are persons who are lovable to God and, therefore, to himself.

The fact of proclaiming makes us a sign that God exists and that He loves man. This can have its own effect on the persons and the society to whom and where the Word is proclaimed.

This brings us to the second element of evangelization. Presence! We have to be present, a presence which is contained in community. Presence is sharing, not just our goods but our life, our weaknesses, the fact that we do not know everything. Maybe we do not love as much as some of those people to whom we have gone to teach.

Sharing with them, caring with them and bearing with them. This brings us to the third element; evangelization must be liberation. The salvation of Christ is an ongoing process which frees men, not only from sin but from the effects of sin. The method of our evangelization, therefore, must be to make people aware that they are all children of God and brothers and that they have a dignity. The place for this conscientization is the basic community of people who can know each other and can love each other concretely.

Therefore to be a missionary, an evangelizer, is to undergo constant conversion. It is a conversion from a god who is really not the God of love. It is a conversion to the God of love and a realization that money and power and knowing things is not important but that loving is important. It is a conversion to Christ who said: "Greater love than this no man has than a man lays down his life for his fellow man". It is a conversion to the other. It is a conversion to a Church which is not so much the institute which give security but is a Church with a mission, which provides a challenge in the constant process of forming man.

#### **Questions for Personal Reflection:**

1. What time, means, method do I take to prepare my direct proclamation of the word by preaching, meetings, etc.?
2. What type of Presence do I experience with my people?
3. How do I concretely show my love for the people to whom I am called?
4. How am I evangelized by the poor?

#### **Exercises:**

- I. Make a planned re-study of "Evangelii Nuntiandi":  
Which ideas or elements in this document are you already living?  
Which elements have still to be implemented by you?  
Which elements do not apply to your mission work?  
Which elements of your mission work go beyond this document?
- II. An analysis of your missionary work:  
What are the fundamental motives behind the work you are now doing?  
With these particular people?  
How do you question yourself about your work?  
How do you help your people?  
What is your concrete objective in your work with the people?
- III. Examine your work and conversations with your people during the past month?  
How many moments in these encounters would you consider as evangelization by proclamation, by witness, by presence, by love?

Wherever we work, our mission is especially to those people whose condition cries out for salvation and for the hope which only Jesus Christ can fully bring. These are the poor with their many faces; we give them our preference.

### Scripture for Prayer

- |                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| 1. Exod. 3, 7-10  | "...I have witnessed the affliction of my people. . ."     |
| 2. Isa. 10, 1-4   | "...Woe to those who enact unjust statutes. . ."           |
| 3. Amos 2, 6-8    | "...they force the lowly out of the way. . ."              |
| 4. Matt. 10, 5-10 | "...the reign of God is at hand. . ."                      |
| 5. Luke 4, 18-23  | "...He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor. . ." |
| 6. Phil. 2, 6-11  | "...He emptied himself. . ."                               |
| 7. James 2, 1-13  | "...you treated the poor man shamefully. . ."              |

Church Documents:                      Evangelii Nuntiandi Nos. 30-31

### Reflection:

#### THE POOR

Through out history, when the Church has become too "settled" and lost in some degree its sense of mission, it renews itself by once more turning its attention to the poor and asking to see in them the face of Christ. Once more it tries to make its own the compassion of the Lord for the meek and lowly, trying in its members to recapture His spirit of outreach to those whose condition makes them open to receive in joy the riches of God. Our own Founder recognised this need in the poor of Provence and responded to it with his companions.

The hearts of the poor, the marginalized, the abandoned, the hopeless cry out for "good news". But their poverty does not necessarily make them open to the Gospel. They have many needs, and, like all people, are also tempted to anger, resentment, fear, bitterness, greed and hate. There is little value in preaching an other-worldly desecrated gospel to a hungry people. It is true "that the worst form of poverty is not to know Christ" (MO, 1972, 15b) We are called to proclaim the Gospel to those who have yet to hear it for the first time and to those who see no need for Christ's presence as well as to those who have already heard the Gospel message. However, it is the materially deprived, the underprivileged, those who toil and suffer almost without hope that most deserve our compassion and our care. That much is clear from the Gospels and the life of Christ. It is also the basis of our charism as Oblates and sons of Eugene de Mazenod. Therefore, the Missionary Outlook Statement of the 1972 Chapter in the section entitled, Preference for the Poor, says, "With renewed zeal we will seek out, befriend and respect as brothers, the abandoned poor with their many faces- the weak, the unemployed, the illiterate, victims of alcohol or drugs, the sick, the marginal masses in less developed countries, immigrants and

minority groups in all countries who are excluded from the benefits of development.” (MO, 1972, no. 15) We are called to give such people our preference. “These are the poor with their many faces; we are called to give them our preference.” We are also called to give them the hope that only Jesus can bring. To give them our preference can imply many attitudes. It can call us to live fully with them, sharing our life, our means, our limitation: we can really share the injustices they endure, calling them to patience and forgiveness as we strive to remove the intolerable conditions under which they live. Unless we are willing to experience what they experience, we can hardly call them to a Christ like response to their situation, and show them in our own lives the joy and peace of God’s presence even in their affliction. For while we seek to do all we can to alleviate their economic disabilities, we have also to call them to the joy of the beatitudes. The social apostolate has broader objectives than mere equitable economic sharing. It has to be a clear sign of God’s Reign of Peace and Justice, as well.

Not all of us will find ourselves ministering directly to the most abandoned. But our stated preference as Oblates will challenge us in many ways. We will need constantly to question the inclination to subtly fall into an over comfortable life-style, feeling that such is expected and even our right, for the milieu in which we minister. We may also need to have the courage to challenge those to whom we minister in more affluent situations, about their concern for the poor in their own neighborhoods. This is especially true today in the apostolate of education, where parental aspirations tend more and more to go along with economic security and advantage for their children. As communities and Provinces, we are also called to examine frequently the type of ministries we are engaged in, and at times we will feel urged to shift our emphasis in accord with our traditional charism to serve the poor and abandoned. We will face dilemmas over our choice of ministries, between those that provide financial security and those that call for the risks the poor have to take daily. Above all, we need, in a special way, to be fully supportive of those brother Oblates who are trying to live with, work with, suffer with and be a voice for the voiceless in our world.

#### Questions for personal reflection:

1. How often have I, in recent months, preached about the rights of the poor?
2. How often, in the past two months, have I spoken to a rich or powerful person about the situation of the poor, the underprivileged, the dispossessed?
3. How often have I just spent time having a friendly and compassionate conversation with a poor person?
4. Do I really know “the most abandoned” in my area of mission?

#### Exercises:

1. Spend an afternoon or retreat day on this topic of “The Poor.” How do I experience this call to the “most abandoned”? If my work is not directly with the poor, nor in the midst of the poor, what do I do not to lose sight of the principal end of the Congregation - the evangelization for the most abandoned? How do I get the people with whom and for whom I work to better understand the situation of the poor, to love them and have solidarity with them? What must I do to be closer to the poor?
2. Pray with the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10, 29-37). Imagine yourself in the position of each of the personages. Which one fits you better? Whom would you want to be like? How can you be more like that one?



## Article 6

## IN THE CHURCH

Our love for the Church inspires us to fulfil our mission in communion with the pastors whom the Lord has given to his people: we accept loyally, with an enlightened faith, the guidance and teachings of the successors of Peter and the Apostles.

We coordinate our missionary activity with the overall pastoral plan of the local Churches where we work, and we collaborate in a spirit of brotherhood with others who work for the Gospel.

Our efforts will be characterized by a genuine desire for unity with all who consider themselves followers of Jesus, so that, according to His prayer, all may believe that the Father has sent him. (Cf. John, 17,21) Finally, in our hope for the coming of God's reign, we are united with all those who, without acknowledging Christ as Lord, nevertheless love what he loves.

## Scripture for Prayer:

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| 1. Luke 10, 16-20    | "...your names are inscribed in heaven. ..."                      |
| 2. Matt. 13, 31-32   | "...the reign of God is like a mustard seed. ..."                 |
| 3. Matt. 28, 16-20   | "...teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. ..." |
| 4. I Cor. 14, 12     | "...try to be rich in those that build up the Church. ..."        |
| 5. Acts 2, 42-47     | "...praising God and winning the approval of all the people. ..." |
| 6. I Thess. 5, 12-22 | "...remain at peace with one another. ..."                        |
| 7. John 17, 6-19     | "...I have sent them into the world. ..."                         |

Church Documents:	Evangelii Nuntiandi 62, 63
	Perfectae Caritatis 2c

## Reflection:

## EVANGELIZING MISSION IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

Religious life cannot be perceived nor can its existence be justified except in the context of the Church. The Church is the Presence of Christ as response to the needs of the world, which is groaning in its struggle to become Kingdom.

The Holy Spirit is constantly present to assure that the Church continues to be Christ's Presence in response to the world by "alloting His gifts to everyone according to His will". (I Cor. 12,11). He distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts He makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks or offices advantageous for the renewal and building up of the Church. (L. G. 12). Among these gifts is the gift of religious life, which is not just an organization or sub-system within the Church, but is a gift to the Church from the Spirit, a gift for the life of the Church.

This gift of Religious Life exists only in the concrete, specific lives of the individuals who are called to live the gift of a particular charism, in a particular religious institute. The charism of Religious Life is incarnated in the charism of each religious institute accepted by the Church. The vocation of each Congregation - our vocation as Oblates of Mary Immaculate - is to serve the Church in a special way to live its twofold dimension. We should help with its renewal by constantly calling it back to Christ and its roots in the Gospel through an ongoing process of conversion, of which we ourselves must be the witnesses through our lives. We must help with its reform by calling it to a critical awareness of how it must adapt to the needs of the world through a conscious reading of the "signs of the times".

Just as Religious Life is incarnate in a particular religious institute, "the Universal Church is, in practice, incarnate in the individual churches, made up of such or such an actual part of mankind, speaking such and such a language, heirs of a cultural patrimony, of a vision of the world, of an historical past, of a particular human substratum." (E. N. 62). Therefore, we, as religious, are called to serve the local Church. We must, each of us, as we undertake a mission in a parish, in basic communities, in institutes, or in any apostolate, immerse ourselves into the mystery of the local Church-always united to the Pastor. This local Church can have several levels, the principal one being the diocese or vicariate, whose Pastor is the bishop. It can also have an even more specific level of parish or basic ecclesial community. But it is on these local levels that we work in a very specific way by participating with the richness of our charism. If the expression heard from our history, "we are the Bishop's men", is to have any relation to our call from the Holy Spirit, we can only be bishop's men with our charism.

Rule 4 tells us that "faithfulness to our Oblate vocation must guide us in our missionary enterprises and in accepting pastoral assignments." This does not mean that we proudly do what we want and in the way we want. We cannot set ourselves up in competition to the other diocesan, religious and lay pastoral agents. As a result of our love for the Church, we participate in, cooperate with and foster in every way overall pastoral plans. We do this always with those elements of our charism which should mark any work we undertake.

Our prime objective, then, in being at the service of the local Church is not to satisfy any Oblate communitarian or personal need, but to contribute our abilities, our talents, our vision, our way of being and doing, born of our charism, to the building up of the Kingdom and the Church. For that reason, we will not cling to the things we have done but be ready to move on to other missions, in the same or other local Churches.

Our mission and our contribution is of the Church and as Church. This means that we do not act alone but participate in the mission that has been confided to the Church, collaborating with the others who are also called to this same mission. We should respond to the progressive call that the Church makes to us in its documents, to go beyond the actual structures of the service to the Kingdom of God, to be, from the local Church as a starting point, an evangelizing vanguard. This will bring us to dialogue with the bishops and other pastoral agents, to create, with vision, new and daring ways of bringing the Gospel message to the world. In a word, we are called to be the memory of the Church, on every local level, reminding ourselves and all that we are called to be Christ's presence in appropriate response to the world.

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. In what sense is evangelizing mission and insertion into the local Church a reality in my life, in the life of my community, in the life of my Province?
2. Is there a common, overall pastoral approach or plan in my local Church? Do I follow it? What do I do to foster such a plan?
3. Do I take pastoral decisions in discernment with others? To whom am I accountable for my work? When and how do I evaluate my pastoral work?

### Exercise:

Make a study of some particular Church policy, either on the diocesan or national level, of the past year, e.g., a policy about lay ministries, preparation for the sacraments, the justice ministry, etc. Evaluate this policy: is there some contribution you can make to it, are there some questions you have around it? Make a specific plan to implement it in your local area.

## Article 7

## PROCLAIMING THE WORD

As priests and Brothers we have complementary responsibilities in evangelizing. We will spare no effort to awaken or to reawaken the faith in the people to whom we are sent, and we will help them to discover "who Christ is". Our mission puts us on constant call to respond to the most urgent needs of the Church through various forms of witness and ministry, but especially through proclaiming the Word of God which finds its fulfillment in the celebration of the sacraments and in service to others. We have as our goal to establish Christian communities and Churches deeply rooted in the local culture and fully responsible for their own development and growth.

## Scripture for Prayer:

- |                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| 1. Eph. 1, 9-12    | "...we were predestined to praise His glory..."  |
| 2. Eph. 2, 19-22   | "...you are. . .members of the household of God. . ."  |
| 3. Psalm 133       | "...behold, how good it is. . where brothers dwell at one. . ."                                |
| 4. I Cor. 15, 1-8  | "...that Christ died for our sins. . ."  |
| 5. Acts. 2, 42-47  | "...they devoted themselves to. . the communal life. . ."                                      |
| 6. Rom. 12, 9-21   | "...Love one another with the affection of brothers"   |
| 7. II Cor. 8, 1-15 | "...they begged us..for the favor of sharing in this service<br>to members of the Church. . ." |

Church Documents: Gaudium et Spes. 32

## Reflection:

## CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, clearly states the purpose of God's plan: "all men are called to one and the same goal, namely God Himself. "(G. S. 24). They are called to this goal as one family, treating one another in a spirit of brotherhood. Jesus himself implied the communitarian nature of man's vocation and the similarity it has to the union of the Divine Persons- "that all may be one as we are one." (John 17, 21-22). *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, makes it clear also that God's will is "to make men holy and save them, not merely as individuals without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people." (L. G. 9). "So, from the beginning of salvation history, He has chosen men not just as individuals but as members of a certain community." (L. G. 32). Jesus' whole life and ministry developed this communitarian character of God's plan. (L. G. 32).

Pope Paul VI, in the Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelii Nuntiandi", - "On Evangelization in the Modern World", - makes the formation of christian community the sign of the full development of the proclamation of the Good News. When the Gospel "is listened to, accepted and assimilated, and when it arouses a genuine adherence in the one who has thus received it," then it reaches full development. This is "an adherence to the truths" but, "still more an adherence to a program of life" It is "an adherence to the Kingdom. . . to the new manner of being, of living, of living in community." This adherence only "reveals itself concretely by a viable entry into a community of believers. (E. N. 23)

The goal of christian life is to live the faith, to give praise to the glory of God, to live this union with God Himself. The goal of our pastoral efforts in our work of evangelization is to build up the family of God- to build christian communities, not where members may be counted and services rendered to individuals, but where truly christian life may be lived.

To be really community, a christian community must be small enough to enable an interpersonal christian relationship to exist. As smaller christian communities are developed we get back to the original meaning and purpose of what we call a parish. The word "parish" comes from the Greek word "oikias", which means neighbourhood. Whether this neighborhood is geographical or environmental, it is the gathering of neighbours who adopt christian community as a way of life. Whether this community is called a Basic Christian Community, a basic ecclesial community, a neighborhood community, a faith community or just a small christian community, whatever its name, it is the primary and fundamental ecclesial nucleus. It is, at its own level, responsible for its richness and expansion, it is the focal point of evangelization and the primary factor of human promotion and development.

The Synod on Evangelization reflected on these small communities because they are flourishing throughout the Church. These communities come together within the church, unite themselves to the church, cause the church to grow. They are in communion with the pastors of a local church. "As hearers of the Gospel . . . and privileged beneficiaries of evangelization they. . . become proclaimers of the Gospel themselves." (EN 58)

These christian communities distinguish themselves from other small groups, associations or organisations within the church, which may be formed for more specific apostolic, educational, social or organizational objectives. The christian community is Church, its objective is to form church. It is characterized by an intimate, interpersonal relationship in the faith, the deepening in each member of the Word of God, participation in the Eucharist as the celebration of the life events of the community, its sufferings and its joys. It causes the Word of God to be lived in solidarity and commitment to the new commandments of the Lord. It makes the ecclesial mission and the visible communion with the pastor present and active. Christians thus united "nourishing their adherence to Christ, look for a more evangelical life in the midst of the people, collaborate to question the vocation of communion with God and with their brothers, offering a valuable starting point for the construction of a new society, the civilization of love" (Puebla, Part III, chap. I). It leads to a greater commitment to justice in the social reality that surrounds it. It is not a community closed in on itself but goes outward as community to the diocese, the universal church, the neighbourhood, the city, the nation and the world.

To be a proclaimer of the Word it is necessary to build community, be a member of community. The more we can understand about community, the more experience we have in living community, the more capable we will be to undertake this task.

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. What have I done to try to understand better my obligation to build community?
2. What are my objections to the idea of small christian communities?
3. In the past two months which of my activities have been directed toward helping or evangelizing individuals and which toward the building of community?

### Exercises:

1. Make a study of the topic of community in its theological, sociological, psychological and anthropological aspects in order to better understand all that is involved in the call to build community.
2. Begin a reflection group with the laity in your apostolate to discover with them the way to build christian community.

### SIMPLICITY IN PREACHING

*To aim at elegance of style  
rather than solidity of doctrine  
would go directly counter  
to the spirit of our Rule . . .  
Our one and only aim should be  
to instruct the people . . .  
not only to break  
the bread of the Word for them  
but to chew it for them as well;  
in a word, to insure  
that when our discourses are over,  
they are not tempted to hear foolish praise  
on what they have not understood,  
but, instead, that they go back home  
edified, touched, instructed,  
able to repeat in their own family circle  
what they have learned from our mouth.*

We will always be close to the people with whom we work, taking into account their values and aspirations. To seek out new ways for the Word of God to reach their hearts often calls for daring; to present Gospel demands in all clarity should never intimidate us. Awareness of our own shortcomings humbles us, yet God's power makes us confident as we strive to bring all people—especially the poor—to full consciousness of their dignity as human beings and as sons and daughters of God.

### Scripture Readings:

- |                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| 1. Isa. 55, 10-11      | "...My word...shall not return to me void..."                        |
| 2. Ezech. 2, 6 :3, 8-9 | "...Fear neither them nor their words..."                            |
| 3. I Cor. 2, 1-5       | "...I came among you in weakness and fear..."                        |
| 4. John 15, 13-17      | "...There is no greater love than this..."                           |
| 5. John 15, 18-27      | "...They hated me without cause..."                                  |
| 6. John 16, 1-4        | "...I have told you this... to keep your faith from being shaken..." |
| 7. Rev. 2, 1-5         | "...You do not become discouraged..."                                |

Church Documents:      Evangelii Nuntiandi : 30-31 : 40-46  
                                      Dives in Misericordia  
                                      Redemptor Hominis : 8-18

### Reflection:

#### FAITH — RISK

Radically, it is the gift of faith that both calls us to respond to the invitation of Christ to follow Him and strengthens us in the unknown paths where he will lead us.

Like life itself, faith is dynamic. It changes as life progresses and new challenges call for deeper insight and greater trust. Faith doesn't necessarily become easier as we get older and our world changes. It can become stronger but it will always go hand in hand with fear, doubt and timidity. Like the disciples in the storm we are constantly challenged by the call of Jesus. "Where is your courage; how little faith you have!" (Matt. 8,26). Yet, like them, we are also encouraged by the promise that His Spirit is with us and by His loving encouragement, "Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (John 14, 1-2).

The challenge of this Article is a challenge to listen to the needs of others with a sensitive heart and to be open to their values and their aspirations. Such listening will, at times, evoke unsettling questions within ourselves. It will call for responses that will make us more deeply aware of the implications of leaving all to follow Christ. Our felt weakness will make us humble but only our trust can make us daring. At times we will be tempted to close our ears to the implications of the beatitudes and questions how blest we will be when insulted and persecuted for his name's sake. (Matt. 5, 11). We know well how the prophets suffered and how Jesus became the victim of those who hated justice and the truth.

Vatican II invites us to read and respond to "the signs of the times." These will vary in each age and in each culture and milieu. We are called to be sensitive to the values, traditions and aspirations of the peoples to whom we minister. It is a sensitivity that invites openness to their needs and, at the same time, a critical appraisal of these in the light of the Gospel. We will be called both to encourage and to challenge, to affirm and to confront, to blend justice with mercy.

We are all aware that in these times critical and complex situations exist in many countries around issues of social justice and basic human rights. Speaking the truth humbly and sincerely will always be a risk in such settings. Faith-Risk becomes a challenging value to all who are called to espouse the rights of the poor. We are also conscious of the many global issues that face us: world hunger, the threat of nuclear arms, the maldistribution of wealth and the fruits of the earth. Policies of greed in one country affect livelihoods in many. If our problems are global, so must be our consciousness. We anguish with the anguish of the world.

We are not people who have all "the answers". We must resist the temptation to narrow fundamentalism on the one hand and simplistically radical solutions on the other. Yet for all its complexity there are solutions offered by the Gospel to many of the issues we face and the prophetic voices within us and among others will not be stilled.

Here we must turn for strength to the humility of Jesus. It is that which will allow us to be conscious of our own limitations and also of the power of God at work within us. It is only such awareness that will allow us to speak and act authentically and with courage as we proclaim the Good News in these times.

Our hope rests in the humble, sensitive, gentle yet daring Jesus who tells us, "Take courage! I have overcome the world." (John 16, 33)



**Questions for Personal Reflection:**

1. How sensitive am I to the values and aspirations of others? Do I tend to be open or judgemental when presented with "Foreign" ideas or viewpoints?
2. Where and how do I experience today that my faith is most tested and tried? Have I spent time praying with Jesus around these feelings?
3. What serious attempts have I made to reflect on "the signs of the times"? Do current world situations challenge me?

**Exercises:**

1. A first exercise could be one of really listening. Attend a meeting in your area where issues of human rights, injustice, matters of public concern are being openly discussed. Preferably this should be a "non-church" sponsored meeting. List down the issues you hear that surfaced and try to relate them to your own values scale and priorities.
2. How about trying to find out if your "preaching" is relevant to the concerns of people and if it is spiritually nourishing to them? Invite some of those to whom you give the Word to share with you how they hear you. Risk their criticism: be open to their suggestions.

## Article 9

## AS PROPHETS OF THE NEW WORLD

We are members of the prophetic Church. While recognising our own need for conversion, we bear witness to God's holiness and justice. We announce the liberating presence of Jesus Christ and the new world born in his resurrection. We will hear and make heard the clamour of the voiceless, which is a cry to God who brings down the mighty from their thrones and exalts the lowly (cf. Lk 1:52). This prophetic mission is carried out in communion with the Church, in conformity with the directives of the hierarchy and in dependence on our Superiors.

## Scripture for Prayer:

- |                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| 1. Isa. 42, 1-9    | "...I, the Lord, have called you for the victory of justice. ..."    |
| 2. Amos 5, 21-24   | "...then let justice surge like water. ..."                          |
| 3. Matt. 10, 16-42 | "...When the hour comes, you will be given what you are to say. ..." |
| 4. Acts 4, 1-21    | "...we cannot help speaking of what we have heard and seen. ..."     |
| 5. Jer. 22, 1-17   | "...Thus says the Lord, do what is right and just. ..."              |
| 6. Psalm 82        | "...Rise O God, judge the earth. ..."                                |
| 7. Matt. 11, 1-15  | "...Blest is the man who finds no stumbling block in me. ..."        |
| Church Documents:  | Lumen Gentium No. 35   |

## Reflection:

## PROPHETS IN THE CHURCH

As Oblates in the contemporary world, we are consciously called to be prophets within the Church, spokesmen of the Spirit and visionaries of the historical moment, witnessing by our lives to the birth of a new world. Acknowledging our personal sinfulness and our collective limitations, we are challenged to live, in the midst of the poor and the powerless, a life of sharing and caring. We are to be a credible sign of the coming of God's reign among men.

Our mission is not an easy one. It demands a profound personal conversion: of heart, of life-style and of missionary thrust. It is crystal clear from this first section of our Constitutions that we are called as Oblates not simply to administer the sacraments to those who seek them, nor to be "the bishop's men" in the purely passive sense of responding affirmatively to whatever requests the local ecclesiastical authorities make of us.

Our fundamental commitment is to participate in the "prophetic" dimension of Church: where the new world is being born among the poor, by the power of the Spirit of the risen Lord. This is the Church that is willing to take risks by siding with the weak and the wretched of the earth, in their dangerous search for freedom and for justice. This is the Church that dares to trust in the promises of the Lord to march in the midst of his faithful people in their daily struggle to create a new and more human society. This is the Church that courageously questions the empty promises of this world's rich and powerful, by throwing in its lot with the least likely to succeed; the peasants, the urban workers, the exploited and the oppressed. It is a Church concerned with having the voiceless speak their word and participate in the decisions that will shape the future. It is a Church that allows itself to be criticised and converted by the cries of those who suffer most, and fulfills its mission by becoming the mouthpiece of the humble, such as Luke made Mary in that beautiful hymn of praise, the Magnificat. (Lc. 1, 46-55)

In this prophetic Church, our Oblate zeal is to be not only apostolic but also enlightened. We are invited by reality to move beyond a vague and often moralizing form of preaching, to create in ourselves and in others a critical consciousness of the root causes of our social ills. We are challenged daily to denounce not only personal sins but also those of institutions and the instruments of death, and to throw all our energies into the building of a new society, one where life can thrive and flourish - "where all may have life and have it more abundantly." (John 10,10)

As Oblates we are called upon to sow the seeds of this new society, more equitable and fraternal, by the quality of our lives and the consistency of our mission. Thus the prophetic Church is much more than a "progressive" Church. It is one which, by the gift of the Spirit, is capable of penetrating to the core of reality and perceiving that effective social change can only come about as a result of a prolonged and painful process of spiritual renewal and social reorganization. (Jer. 22, 15-16) It is one that has already gotten a glimpse of the new world intended by God, and concluded that its principal protagonists are not the power elites of business or government, but the blind and the lame, the powerless and the disinherited of the land. It is one which has encountered the living God in the sacrament of the poor. (cf. Is. 65, 17-25). It is to the prophetic Church, the Church of Peter, of John XXIII and of John Paul II that our Constitutions commit us. With the prophet Jeremiah we are tempted to cry out, "Ah, Lord God, I know not how to speak: I am too young." But with the faith and confidence of the same prophet we hear Yahweh's reply, "Say not, I am too young. To whomever I send you, you shall go: whatever I command you, you shall speak. Have no fear before them, because I am with you to deliver you says the Lord." (Jer. 1, 6-8)

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. In the past months when and how have I heard and caused to be heard the clamor of the voiceless?
2. What concrete steps can I take to clarify the idea of "prophetic", as applied to my community, whether local or district?
3. What is my restriction to priests, religious or laity who take a public stand on vital human issues? Try to focus on one or two such persons: how did I react to them internally and publicly? Did I feel threatened or challenged by their stand?

### Exercises

1. Make a list of what you think were the prophetic responses of Blessed Eugene de Mazenod to the world of his time. Make a list of the elements which you think are barriers to "the new world born in his resurrection." Determine some of the things you could do to announce the liberating presence of Jesus in relation to these barriers.
2. Go meet with a person who is poor, marginalized or oppressed in your area of work or in your community. Ask him to tell you how, where and why he feels himself voiceless. Listen to the facts but also to the feelings he is expressing. Make a list of the possible ways you could help him to be heard by those who have the power to change his situation.

## Article 10

## WITH MARY IMMACULATE

Mary Immaculate is patroness of our Congregation. Open to the Spirit, she consecrated herself totally as lowly handmaid to the person and work of the Saviour. She received Christ in order to share him with all the world, whose hope he is. In her we recognize the model of the Church's faith and of our own.

We shall always look on her as our mother. In the joys and sorrows of our missionary life we feel close to her who is the Mother of Mercy. Wherever our ministry takes us, we will strive to instill genuine devotion to the Immaculate Virgin who prefigures God's final victory over all evil.

### Scripture for Prayer:

1. John 6, 44-46, 65 " . . . No one can come to me unless the Father. . . "
2. Ephesians 2, 8-10 " . . . salvation is yours through faith. . . "
3. Philippians, 3, 7-11 " . . . for his sake I have forfeited everything. . . "
4. Luke 1, 26-38 " . . . Do not fear Mary. . . "
5. Luke 1, 46-55 " . . . my spirit finds joy in God my Saviour. . . "
6. John 20, 26, 29 " . . . Do not persist in your unbelief but believe "
7. Philippians 1, 27-30 " . . . exerting yourselves with one accord for the faith of the Gospel. . . "

Church Documents: Lumen Gentium 62  
 Dei Verbum 5

### Reflection:

#### MODEL OF OUR FAITH

Mary is presented to us as a model. True devotion to Mary is not limited to the number and types of prayers we offer asking for her intercession nor to the different public homages that we promote in her honor. If our devotion is to be authentic, it must be realized by our efforts to imitate her in our life and mission. Together with the Church we can see Mary as a model of our faith.

Mary's faith was unbreakable, irrevocable and constant. It was a faith that adhered to the Person of Jesus, the Word of God. A faith that only asked one question of discernment: "How can this be since I do not know man" (Luke 1, 34). Once her faith accepted that the answer came from God, "for nothing is impossible with God", she established the theme and motto of her entire life, "Let it be done to me as you say". That was the fundamental option, the fundamental "yes" which became the foundation of her faith. It was a "yes" that tore from the depths of her being a thousand other "yeses": "yes" to this angel at Nazaret "yes" to Bethlehem, "yes" to Egypt, "yes" to the sword that pierces her heart, "yes" to the Son that leaves home, "yes" to the way of the cross, "yes" to a closed tomb.

Hers is a faith that knows not what the future will bring but remains firm because the PERSON is always there. A faith secure in insecurity, constant in the presence of ambiguity. Mary could look at a crown of thorns and see a KING. She could contemplate the torn dead body of her son and see her God. She could hear the stone slam close on the entrance of the tomb and see the gates of liberation open for all of humanity. Neither the tiny hands of a newborn infant playing with a piece of straw in the manger, nor the nailed pierced hands of a man on a cross, could wipe out the memory of the words of Gabriel, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; hence the holy offspring to be born will be called Son of God." (Luke 1, 35).

As Oblates, with Mary as our Mother and model, we are called to imitate this faith. It is not just a belief in doctrines, but an adherence to a Person. Jesus doesn't give much explanation and long discourse to clarify what he means or what he asks. He just asks that we believe in him. "Believe in Me". It is a total surrender, a total trust. As Yves Raguin, S.J. says, "this doctrine of Christ's is a life infleshed in daily life." It has to begin with an initial relationship with God who is revealed through Jesus. The relationship grows through the very actions and attitudes that express it. We come to know beyond mere human knowledge "no mere man has revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father." (Matthew 16, 17).

This faith is the center, the motivating force, the basic integrating value of our life as religious. Our life project is based on our faith in Jesus Christ. It is this faith in Jesus that brings us as Oblates "together in apostolic communities to cooperate with the Saviour and "imitating his example". to "commit ourselves principally to evangelizing the poor." (CC and RR, 1). A confidence in a call, knowing within us that it came from God, brought us to our own "Let it be done. . .", that fundamental "yes". The question for us is how many of the thousand "yeses" that should have followed have we changed to "no" or "maybe" or "more or less" or "later"?

How much do we let our faith deepen by living that friendship with Jesus that he asks? Has our faith reached enough security to always answer "yes" as Mary did? Yes to total surrender. Yes to openness to the times. Yes to commitment, to action. Yes to simplicity of life and solidarity with the poor. Yes, to concrete actualized love for our brother Oblates and all our brothers and sisters. Yes to forgiveness, to service, to listening. Yes, to denouncing, yes to announcing. Yes to the cries that arise from the needs of humanity. Yes to prayer. Yes to dying to myself so that I am grow for others - yes, yes, yes!

Yes to seek his presence in the hearts of the people and in the events of daily life and in the on-going history of humanity of which he is the Lord.

### Questions for Reflection:

1. What place does Mary have in your Oblate life at this time?  
When was the last time you preached on Mary? Do you promote the celebration of Marian Feasts in your community, your ministerial setting?
2. What specific devotion to Our Lady do you have? The Rosary, a Novena, a special feast day? Why is this of importance to you at this time?
3. How does reflection on Mary's faith support you in times of ambiguity, doubt, fearfulness, tragedy?

### Exercises:

- I. Recalling your attitude before vows or in your formation years, and comparing that with your present experience as an Oblate, write a few paragraphs to articulate at this time your own "fundamental option" to the call you answered to follow Christ in faith.

**Rule 1.** Oblates are committed to missionary work as members of the Congregation and of their respective Provinces. All members are to participate in the planning and orientation of the apostolate for which, however, Superiors bear final responsibility.

**Rule 2.** Preaching missions at home and sending missionaries abroad have been traditionally central to our apostolate. There is no ministry, however, which is foreign to us, provided we never lose sight of the Congregation's primary purpose: to evangelize the most abandoned.

**Rule 3****OBLATE BROTHERS**

Oblate Brothers share in the common priesthood of Christ. They are called to cooperate in their own way in reconciling all things to him. (cf. Col. 1, 20). Through their religious consecration they offer a particular witness to a life inspired by the Gospel. Brothers have an important missionary role to play in building up the Church everywhere, but especially in those areas where the Word is first being proclaimed. Through their technical professional or pastoral service they are often able to exercise a fruitful ministry in situations not always open to the priest.

**Scripture for Prayer:**

1. I John 1, 1-7 " . . . what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you. . . "
2. Phil. 2, 6-11 " . . . He humbled himself. . . God highly exalted him. . . "
3. Col. 1, 15-20 " . . . it pleased God to reconcile everything. . . "
4. Luke 10, 17-24 " . . . what you have hidden from the learned, you have revealed to the merest children. . . "
5. I Cor. 12, 4-11 " . . . there are different ministries but the same Lord. . . "
6. John 16, 5-15 " . . . he will announce to you what he will have from me. . . "
7. I Pet. 3, 15 " . . . should anyone ask you the reason for this hope of yours, be ever ready to reply. . . "

**Church Documents:**

Perfectae Caritatis: Nos. 1, 5, 6, 8, 15

**Reflection:****ONE IN CHARISM**

Article One of our Constitutions and Rules speaks of us as "a clerical Congregation of pontifical right". This description is a canonical one: it, in no way, aims at lessening the dignity, equality or strength of charism that our Oblates Brothers share with those who are priests and deacons among us. The viewpoint of this reflection sees all of us as experiencing the same call from Christ to leave all and follow Him. Together, we live out in our time the charism we inherit from our Blessed Founder. As he saw it, "Christ as Saviour, this is the aspect of our Divine Master that we must contemplate".

Our Oblate Brothers are called to share fully in this mission of salvation. To enable them to do so, they commit themselves as fully as those who are clerics to follow Jesus, virginal, poor and obedient to the Father. Sharing a common charism, all Oblates, clerical or lay, bind themselves to apostolic community as men set apart for the Gospel. (Rom. 1, 1)

To attempt to overly distinguish how the vocation of a brother differs from that of the priest can be misleading, for what brings us together in community is this shared call to mission. On the other hand, we have to admit that our conscious awareness of brothers at times takes on the notion of them as being supportive rather than central to our Oblate mission.

It is through the common priesthood of Christ that the Oblate Brother sees his mission, namely, to recognise in the midst of daily activity that creation has been transformed by salvation. Our role is to proclaim, to teach and to assist in the growth of worshipping communities to celebrate this reality. This role can be characterized as priestly, as contrasted to the role of other religious communities, which could be characterized by healing or education. It is important to recognise the "priestly" character of our mission, derived from the priesthood of Christ, rather than look for those things that make priestly and brotherly vocations different in the Oblates.

Oblate charism calls us to proclaim the message of salvation most urgently among the poor and the most abandoned. While it is necessary to realise that our Brothers mediate this message in non-sacramental ways, this is not a limitation. In fact, in these days, this is even a greater challenge to bring the Lord into many situations where the priest may not be acceptable or be able to work comfortably. We are more than ever conscious in these days of how varied are the gifts of the Spirit given to meet the demands of our times. Our Brothers are called to discover, encourage and develop these gifts, given to them for the sake of the Kingdom.

### **Questions for Personal Reflection:**

1. As ordained ministers do we appreciate the "common priesthood" we share with our Oblate Brothers? Do we encourage them to feel at one with us in our common Baptism and consecration?
2. As Brothers, do we feel called in our own right to be disciples of Christ, taking an equal responsibility for the calls of our mission and the life of our communities?
3. As brother oblates, do we appreciate that our common vocation is to be Oblates though our ministries may vary?

### **Exercises:**

1. Take some time soon to discuss and share with an Oblate priest or Brother how our different ways of ministering are united around our common call to be "ministers of reconciliation". How can brothers and priests together share the implications and calls of this ministry in our area?
2. Reflect in your community or mission on any ways of differentiating between priest and brother oblates that may lessen their sense of personal dignity, belonging or ministerial worth. If such discrimination exists, what are you willing to do about it?



**Rule 4.** Faithfulness to our Oblate vocation must guide us in our missionary enterprises and in accepting pastoral assignments.

Each Province will apply this concern as a guideline in establishing its priorities and in determining which ministries to accept within its own boundaries. The same concern will also serve as a criterion in the periodic re-evaluation of our apostolic commitments.

**Rule 5.** The acceptance of a new mission and the approval of general contracts between a Province and a local Ordinary pertain to the Superior General in Council.

The approval of the Superior General in Council is required for a Province to take charge of a major seminary or educational institution, to assume a parish in perpetuity, to accept some work which is not customary among us, and also to relinquish any of the above. Proposals are submitted by the Provincial in Council.

**Rule 6****THE LAITY**

We shall support lay people in the discernment and development of their own talents and charisms, encouraging them to undertake ministries and apostolic commitments and thus to shoulder the responsibilities which are properly theirs in the Christian community.

**Scripture for Prayer:**

1. Exodus 3, 1-5      "...I have witnessed the afflictions of my people. . ."
2. Luke 12, 49-56    "...I have come to light a fire on the earth. . ."
3. Romans 12, 4-8    "...so to we. . .are one body in Christ."
4. Ephesians 4, 11-16    "...In him who is the source of my strength I have strength for everything".
5. Isaiah 61, 1-6      "...The spirit of the Lord God is upon me."
6. Luke 24, 13-35      "...Were not our hearts burning inside us. . ."
7. 1 Cor 12, 12-30    "...if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. . ."

Church Documents:      Apostolicam Actuositatem 7  
    Gaudium et Spes 37

**Topics for Reading and Reflection:**

Ministries in the Christian Community, Discernment of Charisms, and Services, Faith and Political Commitment, Training Lay Leaders, Animation of the Laity

**Theological Reflection:****THE LAITY**

An Oblate today is called to be an animator of a more fraternal type of interpersonal relationship in the Church, heir to centuries of clerical domination. The voice of the laity, always the vast majority of the baptized, is practically unheard in many parishes and dioceses. Rule 6 challenges Oblates everywhere to support that voice, to be a source of light, courage and confidence for those who - like ourselves - have a sacred vocation to sanctity and to mission: the laity.

The reawakening of the laymen and laywomen for their vocation in recent years has been an undeniable source of blessings and of hope for the Church. At times, however, a certain tone of aggressivity on the part of some has provoked a defensive attitude in those who see the clergy as the sole recipient of sacred power in the ecclesiastical institution. Vatican II and subsequent theological and biblical reflection, as well as pastoral practice, have modified much; but such attitudes run deep and are difficult to change. It will remain a fundamental missionary challenge for many years to come.

At the outset, one thing seems evident: we can only support the laity if we are close to them, that is, if we are in deep and lasting relationship with them. We have to discover ways of creating bonds of solidarity with them on the level of their deepest needs, anxieties and aspirations. This insight has motivated more than a few Oblates to seek a greater insertion in the midst of the people, especially in poorer, working class neighborhoods or milieux. This continuous and often painful contact has led many among them to discover the "evangelizing potential of the poor" (Puebla, N. 1147). In many parts of the world we encounter the paradoxical situation of a religious people being evangelized by a secularized clergy! When we allow ourselves to get close to them (and when they allow us to do the same), or in other words, when the conditions are created that permit a sincere and mutual confidence, we can begin to appreciate the true value of the Incarnation. Without trying to canonize anyone prematurely, but having the courage to admit and accept the facts, countless laymen and women flesh out in their daily lives such essential Gospel values as: undying hope in the midst of suffering, authentic hospitality, profound dedication to the cause of justice and human dignity, to the point of total oblation.

It seems to be especially true among the poor. The Word of God constantly presents the poor as the first recipients of the divine call, the privileged protagonists of his historical project for humanity. Today, as in biblical times, it is the poor who reveal to us in a very special way the human and evangelical face of Christ. In itself, however, the notion - "the poor" - is ambiguous. From a socio-economic point of view the poor are not necessarily those closest to sanctity. They are rather the "impoverished", i.e., those made poor by the dehumanizing and unjust structures of society. From the point of view of Scripture, however, the poor, the defenseless, are God's favorites, those he always chooses to be his starting point in the evangelization of the world. This, in fact, is the most "revolutionary" aspect of the witness of Jesus, one which can be rediscovered and put into practice here and now.

Where priest and people struggle together to change the death dealing forces at work in society, where they celebrate fraternally their hope in the coming Reign of God's love and his justice, then both evangelize, and they evangelize each other! They support each other and help each other discern their own charisms and ministries in the Body of Christ. This rich and rewarding process gradually opens up new and more challenging horizons, for example, when lay leaders freely hand over liturgical or catechetical roles to other members of the Christian community in order to assume more difficult functions in a social or political field - "responsibilities properly theirs in the Christian community". And it is especially here that the laity count on the support, encouragement and motivation of the priest in discerning their specific evangelical contribution to the transformation of the world.

**Questions for Personal Reflection:**

1. What are my attitudes towards lay ministries?
2. Have I done anything to prepare or promote the preparation of lay people for a more total involvement in the life and ministry of the Church?
3. How many lay persons have I personally encouraged to take a more active part in my ministry as an Oblate?

**Exercises:**

- I. Make a list of the various ministries and activities you are involved in for one week of your life. How many of these activities could be carried out equally as well, if not better, by lay people in the Parish, mission or ministry? How many of these activities are you tied to? How many could you let go?
- II. What methods do you use to support the laity in the development of a sense of personal responsibility and cooperation with their talents in the work of the Church?

**Rule 7 a****PROCLAIMING THE WORD I**

In proclaiming the Word, it is our tradition to be simple and direct and to speak a language adapted to and easily understood by our hearers.

**Scripture for Prayer:**

1. 2 Cor. 4, 5                   “...it is not ourselves we preach but Christ Jesus. . .”
2. Col. 1, 24-29               “...to preach among you his word in its fullness. . .”
3. Eph. 6, 18-29              “...pray. . .that I may courageously make known the mystery of the gospel. . .”
4. I Cor. 2, 2                  “...speak of nothing, but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. . .”
5. I Cor. 2, 3-5                “...my message had. . .the convincing power of the spirit. . .”
6. I Cor. 9, 16-17             “...I am ruined if I do not preach it. . .”
7. II Tim. 3, 14:4, 5          “...I charge you to preach the word constantly. . .”

Church Documents:        Dei Verbum 21, 24, 25  
                                   Evangelii Nuntiandi

**Reflection:****PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD**

The Word of God has to be understood by the people! It is not a word reserved only for the learned and gifted, but destined for all men, especially the humble and poor frequently forgotten by today's technical and computerized societies. The Word of God is not a word to be confined to the pages of a nicely bound Bible, but the saving word of the Lord, destined to be lived out in real life. God spoke and revealed Himself through his son Jesus, so that men might have life, and a full and complete life (John 10:10).

The goal of God's word is people, concrete people and their hearts and attitudes: to change, convert, challenge or confirm, build up or transform men and the structure that men construct around themselves. To free them from all that ties them down and impedes them from constructing together the Kingdom which Jesus announced: a Kingdom of justice, peace, fraternity and solidarity among all men, sons of the One Father and brothers in the Lord.

This powerful, efficacious, penetrating and saving word (Heb. 4:12), pronounced by the Lord to raise up and liberate, to transform men into active followers of Christ (Acts. 1:8, Mt. 28:18-20) and not just nominal or statistical Christians — this word is entrusted to us! We are “the ambassadors of Christ” (2 Cor. 5:20).

This is what the world needs, what men need! And it is ours (rightly understood: Cf. EN 15, 78) in the Lord, to offer to all, especially to the poor, suffering and abandoned (Luc. 4:16-21, EN 12).

Thus, our Oblate tradition of trying to have the word understood in the best way possible; in the simplest, most direct manner; related to the daily life and real problems which our people face; interpreting and enlightening the signs of our times according to God's project (Lucas 12:54-56). Our goal is that after hearing us preach or explain God's word at Mass, in a novena or devotion, or at a pastoral meeting, the people will be able to go home and transmit the essentials of the message to their families and friends and be able to live the message! And not only that they be capable of repeating to others God's word, but that they actually have the desire and drive to do this!

The ministry of the word is too important, too essential, for us not to try to prepare ourselves in the best manner possible for this important mission. The Word is for people to grow. Therefore, we have to mull it over ourselves before the Lord, assimilating it and allowing it to help us, ministers of the word, grow, before we present ourselves before the people as official preachers of the same challenging and powerful word.

Biblical, theological and homiletic resources all help: - we should not neglect them. But, the people become bored with a theoretical or heady sermon or explanation! Such sermons are a waste of time to everyone: - to the people, to the preacher, and to the Lord - because we have a moment of Grace (Heb. 12:15A) that cannot be worked!

The people want, and have a gospel right to, simple, direct, and liveable explanations of the word of God. They can tell the difference, by gospel instinct, between a preacher who is not prepared or up to date and who just babbles on, truncating the power and the life that God's word can give. And they can tell when the preacher is trying to live out what he preaches, and when he touches reality and life. Because the word of God is not complicated words or unrealistic and unattainable theories, but it is the very bread of life for all!

Our preaching, as our life, must be "incarnated," as was Jesus. He incarnated his preaching. Very few people did not get what Jesus was saying! Whether they accepted it or not is another question. He used everyday, commonplace examples and expressions from the people's life and experience. We are called to do this also: - incarnate and relate our preaching to real life, directing the focus of the word on the peoples' problems and sufferings. Transmitting to the people what Jesus thinks of their lives, difficulties and strivings, and what the Lord thinks of the structures (social-politic-economic) (on different levels) which many times enslave men! (cf. EN 29).

The Word of God is too important for us. It is hope - a permanent "moment of grace" which we have no right to let pass in vain (Heb. 12:15A) for the people who look to us for a word of enlightenment, courage, understanding and hope!

The Word of God, at least on his side, eventually attains its goal and fulfills its mission (Is. 52:7). But we, preachers, can either hasten His Word along, or hinder its progress, by the way we handle and preach it!

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. In my preaching ministry, do I get the message across to the people? What means do I have of verifying if my sermons are simple, direct, inspiring and "liveable"?  
Do I give attention to this point? Why?
2. Am I tired of the "same old routine" of preaching? Do I have the sensation of having seen it all and said it all, and to what avail? What would Jesus do or how would he react in your shoes?
3. Do I prepare for my sermons, by letting the Word of God sink in and penetrate in me first, as I mull it over; or do I read and study the Bible only thinking of what to say to others?

### Exercises:

- I. Try to exchange ideas with the members of your community (OMI, or depending on your particular mission situation, with others), during the week, about the Readings for the coming Sunday. Listen deeply to what the others say.
- II. Ask, in all humility ("the truth will make you free" - John 9:32), another Oblate or objective lay person to sit in on your Sunday sermons for a few weeks, and ask him for a feed-back evaluation on how and what your preach. Or, use a tape recorder to tape your sermon. What do you honestly think of it? How can you improve it?

## THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

Why has Jesus Christ. . .

entrusted us with this word of reconciliation, if not in order that it be effectively applied to sinners. . .

and that they be truly reconciled with God? "God has given us the ministry of reconciliation; he, in Christ, reconciled the world to himself, no longer reckoning mankind's sins, but planting in us the message of salvation."

Woe to the fainthearted minister. . .

who would hide in the earth the talent which he has received so that it may bear fruit, and who would shut off. . .

this abundant fountain for the rebirth of souls which Jesus Christ has put in him.

Let the missionaries always welcome sinners with an inexhaustible charity, give them courage. . .

by showing them an understanding heart; in a word; treat them as they themselves would wish to be treated if they were in their unfortunate condition.

## Rule 7b

## PROCLAIMING THE WORD II

In all our ministry, but especially in that of reconciliation, we will reflect the understanding, patience and compassion of the Saviour.

## Scripture for Prayer:

1. John 8, 1-11 " . . . Nor do I condemn you. . . "
2. John 4, 4-29 " . . . He would have given you living water. . . "
3. Matt. 6, 14-15 " . . . If you do not forgive others. . . "
4. Luke 15, 11-32 " . . . Rejoice, this brother of yours was dead and is come to life. . . "
5. 2 Cor. 5, 16-21 " . . . and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. . . "
6. Col. 1, 15-20 " . . . it pleased God to reconcile everything in his person "
7. Col. 3, 12-15 " . . . forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. . . "

Church Documents: Dives in Misericordia : Pope John Paul II

## Reflection:

## RECONCILIATION

In his second Letter to the Corinthians Paul is very positive about what God has done in Christ - He has reconciled all things to Himself. Paul calls us to see our ministry in this light, as one of introducing people to the experience of this reconciliation in Christ, of sharing with them the joy of a new relationship with our God.

Reconciliation can truly be seen as the restoration of loving relationships. Jesus sought to call the whole world into unity with the Father, at the same time empowering them to live at peace within themselves and with one another. His own life exemplified the message of his "reconciliation" stories, the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan, the Lost Sheep, the Merciless Servant. His own encounters were healing forgiving and reconciling. He reached out to sinners, lepers, the sick in body, mind and heart: the woman caught in adultery (John 8, 1-11), the tax collector (Luke 19, 1-10), the paralytic (Mark 2, 1-12), the good thief (Luke 23, 39-43) - even Peter, in spite of His denial. How poignant his greeting to Judas in the garden, " Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss" (Luke 22, 48).

The mission of Jesus, moreover, had an even deeper purpose. Through his compassion for the sinner he sought to challenge the evil that lies at the root of all sin and separation. He did not come to condemn but to liberate. He was deeply conscious of the powers in the world, of the Prince of this world, the evil one, who could have no hold over him but ever sought to split apart the Kingdom of his Father. He knew the diabolic forces of divisiveness that surface in prejudice, injustice, greed and selfish fear. His mission was to challenge this evil, to call together, to restore." to bring all things in the heavens and on earth into one under His headship" (Eph. 1, 7-10).



As his ministers of reconciliation we are called to be ever conscious of the positive aspects of this ministry and of its deeper implications. We are not called to condemn, to denigrate, to punish, to lay on people impossible burdens of guilt. We are called to free people, to release them in the power of the spirit and truth from the bonds of sinfulness and of evil. We engage in this ministry as Christ did, with compassion, "not crushing the bruised reed or quenching the smouldering flax" (Isa. 42, 43) Like him, we are called to be peacemakers, to share his peace and the power of that peace, which is his gift.

We are sent into a world where people may reject us and our message. We will encounter resistance, resentment and even positive animosity. We will experience these things because of the evil that is in the world. We will be tempted to anger by injustice and callousness and indifference and our own inner need for peace and an understanding forgiveness will become very real. So we need to ask of Christ the gift of compassion, both with ourselves and with others. As we deal with the brokenness of others, we need also an ever deepening awareness of our own frailty and sinfulness.

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. How has my approach to the Sacrament of Reconciliation changed over the past ten years? Am I comfortable with "face-to-face" confession? Do I still think of this sacrament as Confessions or in terms of the larger theme of Reconciliation?
2. How have I changed in regard to my own personal participation in the sacrament of Reconciliation? During a communal penitential rite, do I also confess my faults to another and received the absolution or am content with just ministering to others? Do I have a regular confessor or director with whom I personally seek God's forgiveness and reconciliation?

### Exercises:

1. Reread and reflect on those incidents in the Gospels where Jesus calls sinners back to the Father's love, e.g. The Woman at the Well (John 4), the woman taken in adultery (John 8). Study the approach of Jesus to the sinner? Write down the qualities of compassion, understanding, acceptance, etc. you perceive in his approach. Ask yourself how you have dealt with similar situations in the past.

2. In preparation for the next communal penitential service in your parish or community, draw up an outline with your own chosen passages from the Scriptures, hymns or songs and petitions for forgiveness that reflect the sinfulness of our times and the positive aspects of God's loving mercy. Ask how you can arrange this so that those participating will be moved to acknowledge solidarity in sinfulness rather than just concentrate on a list of personal, petty faults.

**Rule 8****ENRICHED BY THE POOR**

We will let our lives be enriched by the poor and the marginalized as we work with them, for they can make us hear in new ways the Gospel we proclaim. We must always be sensitive to the mentality of the people, drawing on the riches of their culture and religious traditions.

**Scripture for Prayer:**

1. Matthew 11, 1-6 " . . .the poor have the good news preached to them. . ."
2. 2 Cor. 8, 1-6 " . . .their overflowing joy and deep poverty have produced an abundant generosity. . ."
3. Luke 1, 46-55 " . . .for he has looked upon his servant in her lowliness. . ."
4. Luke 6, 20-26 " . . .Blest are you poor; the reign of God is yours. . ."
5. Mark 12, 41-44 " . . .but she gave from her want. . ."
6. Matthew 25, 37-40 " . . .as often as you did it for one of my least brother. . ."
7. Colossians 3, 12-17 " . . .instruct and admonish on another. . ."

Church Document: Evangelii Nuntiandi 15

**Reflection:****THE POOR EVANGELIZE US**

Oblate Rule 8 offers us a new challenge and a different way of approaching the task of evangelization. This is not so much a question of preaching a message; rather it requires a change in us and a different pedagogy. The civilizing effect of the Church's missionary thrust throughout the centuries is undeniable. We are not judging the efficacy of the Church's effort in imparting the Word of God. We must always remind ourselves that the Gospel is "the power of God" (Rom 1:16); its saving effect does not rest on our merits. This is sometimes difficult to accept, especially when we are succesful in preaching the Word. We are always tempted to measure our efficiency by the number of schools and hospitals built, or by the number of communions given. One of the greatest Capuchin missionaries in Brazilian territory tells us that, between 1762 and 1764, he gave 128, 523 communions in one of his mission trip ("Viaggio di Africa i America portoghese, fatto da P. Annibale da Genova, missio. apostco."). Great missionaries of the past gave themselves totally to the cause of the Gospel under unthinkable conditions.

In today's world we are faced by different problems; these problems, in turn, shape our consciousness. Vatican II document on the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World sets the tone. "While an enormous mass of people still lack the absolute necessities of life, some, even in less advanced countries, live sumptuously or squander wealth. Luxury and misery rub shoulders" (GS, No. 63). The same document gives us a directive. "Hence, numerous reforms are needed at the socio-economic level, along with universal changes in ideas and attitudes" (GS, No. 63). It is not within the Church's field to put forth economic theories and programs. It is her obligation to bring forth the "universal changes in ideas and attitudes". The civilizing effects of the message of salvation are not measured today by schools and hospitals. These are State obligations and fruit of economic development. They are measured by the degree and depth of individual and

communitarian conversion to Christ and his Kingdom. One of the signs of this conversion is to "let our lives be enriched by the poor and the marginalized". They do not have hegemony over the direction of history; they have no power, either economic or political. Yet we are challenged to believe that our role is to draw "on the riches of their culture and religious traditions" thought of by worldly standards as of no value or alienated.

Jesus Christ's life was a constant confrontation with the seat of power; conflict and crisis are dominant in his public life. His mission, understood as God's will, was viewed from the poor and marginalized of Palestine. His social position within the complex reality of Palestine was coherent with his mission. His preaching was not a product of a well-thought-out premises; it came, rather, from the type of life he lived and from his understanding of the best religious tradition of Jewish history. His mission -the will of the Father was not only his death and resurrection and the salvific effect thereof; the will of the Father was the whole of his life. His way of positioning himself in the issues and conflicts of his time is normative to christian life. There is no indication of sterile discussions about the rich and poor in the Gospels; rather, we have someone who takes a definite stand. This gives consistency and content to his practice. In the midst of the marginalized He heard the voice of the Father; this was possible because "he did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave. . ." (Ph. 2:6).

Jesus' life was a constant discernment of the will of the Father in relation to his mission. This discernment did not take place only in the quietude of isolated places (Mk 1:9-11; 1:29-34; 2:18-22; 3:20-22; 8:1-10; 9:38-41; 14:32-42; 16:14 and many others). It led Jesus to find his social place in the conflict-ridden society of Palestine. It led him to proclaim the message of the Kingdom as the heart of his preaching. His proposal was one more along many others, all of them promising liberation, some through violent means. His teachings about the Kingdom were put forth in parables. We can take any parable at random (Lk 18:1-8 -the unscrupulous judge and the importunate widow;- Lk 16:1-8 -the crafty steward;- Lk 16:19-31 -the rich man and Lazarus;- Lk 10:29-35 -the good Samaritan); they all are flashes of everyday life, social conflict), and how one should position himself in order to be on the way to the Kingdom. Jesus' ministry carried out from the poor's viewpoint and implying judgement and change of life. He is the presence of Yahweh who "stands up to give judgement and to save all the humble of the earth" (Ps 76:9-10).

Oblate Rule 8 is a call to "hear in new ways the Gospel we proclaim". This Gospel is not primarily a doctrine nor a theological system. It does not proclaim a god among others nor God hidden and away from human problems. It proclaims God revealed historically in human history whose Son is the only way to Him. Jesus Christ can only be understood and followed inasmuch as we adhere to his concrete ways of going about through the tensions and crisis in society. Secondly, that Gospel is better proclaimed when it leads us to discover the riches hidden in the manner the poor communicate with God. Pope Paul VI's "Evangelii Nuntiandi" is the first papal document to elaborate on the popular religiosity and speak of it as one of the ways God communicates with man. The religious practices of different peoples are no longer an obstacle but a richness, a hermeneutic place in which to re-think the content of the evangelical message and the

pedagogical approach in presenting that message. The religious traditions of different peoples and cultures must be seen as a creative expression of faith, rite and theology. This is certainly an appeal for Oblates everywhere to reorient their pastoral approach, to go to the deepest roots of ones traditions and culture, and there to find new ways of preaching the message. Very often the religious practices of the poor are a way to resist the oppression they suffer, a way to endure the injustices they hear. Those practices are 'a wisdom' that came from experience and give them class consciousness. Popular religiosity is a religious interpretation of the world; it has its own logic and coherency and it provides for vital functions for the people in their daily struggle for survival. For those who have another interpretation it becomes difficult to penetrate in the religious world of the people. This world presents itself as strange and mysterious, little articulated and explicated, and more often than not closed to the understanding of those outside that world. In carrying out the rituals and practices of their faith, the poor become subject of their religious experience; those rituals and practices turn out to be a system ever present and penetrating the daily lives of the poor. It is their place where knowledge is theirs.

Oblate Rule 8 is also an invitation to ecumenical dialogue. The great world religions the Oblates have been in contact with for decades must be viewed as one of God's ways to reach mankind. They must be studied from within and their values preserved and bettered. Conversion to the Gospel should not be the only and sole standard by which to judge our efforts. These religions have their own internal consistencies and they pervade the lives of hundreds of thousands of peoples. Our efforts should aim at transforming the world through the values of the Kingdom: sharing, justice, equality among men, faith in God present in the struggle of mankind. Closeness to a people, their culture and their religious traditions, finding there in the seeds of God's presence and his kingdom, is the condition for letting shine forth the light of God, the Father of Jesus Christ.

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. What are the values that I have learned or re-learned from the Poor?
2. Do I really love the poor, not only as a social group but as persons?  
Do I treat them with dignity and respect?
3. On how many occasions and in what sense have I been evangelised by the poor? What concrete changes have been caused in my life by a poor person?

### Exercises:

1. Make a list of all the possible ways that the poor can make us hear the Gospel.  
After each encounter with a poor person, check off those Gospel values that you have perceived. Reflect on how you can apply them in your own life.
2. In an examination of your past experience, ask to what degree you have been sensitive to the mentality of the people with whom you lived and worked. In what ways have you used the riches of the culture and religious traditions of the people in your pastoral work with them?

## Rule 9

## JUSTICE

Action on behalf of justice is an integral part of evangelization. Responding to the call of the Spirit, some Oblates identify themselves with the poor, sharing their life and commitment to justice; others are present where decisions affecting the future of the poor are being made. In each case, a serious discernment in the light of ecclesiastical directives will be made and the Oblates concerned will receive their mission for this ministry from their Superiors.

Whatever their work, Oblates will collaborate, according to their vocation and by every means compatible with the Gospel, in changing all that is a cause of oppression and poverty. They thereby help to create a society based on the dignity of the human person created in the image of God.

## Scripture for Prayer:

- |                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 1. Exodus 3: 7-9; 14, 30-31 | "I have witnessed the affliction of my people."       |
| 2. Jeremiah 22: 13-17       | "Woe to him who builds his house on wrong."           |
| 3. Luke 4: 14-22            | "He has sent me. . .to proclaim liberty to captives." |
| 4. Luke 6: 20-26            | "Blest are you poor: the reign of God is yours."      |
| 5. Matthew 25: 31-46        | "Lord, when did we see you hungry?"                   |
| 6. I John 4:19 - 5:4        | "Whoever loves God must also love his brother."       |
| 7. Revelation 21: 1-8       | "He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes."      |

Church Documents: "Redemptor Hominis" - John Paul II:III  
Redeemed Man and his situation in the Modern World.

## Reflection:

## ACTION FOR JUSTICE

"This pattern (difference of rich and poor nations) represents, as it were, the gigantic development of the parable in the Bible of the Rich Banqueter and the poor man Lazarus . . . We have here before us a great drama that can leave nobody indifferent." (J. P. II—RH, 16).

Action for justice is the answer of all people of good will to this appeal. All followers of Christ, and especially religious, bear a special responsibility to a faith response which does justice with mercy. What, in fact, is action or ministry for justice?

## What it is not:

- a) Simply social-political-economic action for change: Although this is the space where it operates, it is not limited to this. It reaches human beings in their spirituality, corporality, in their universe and society, both human as well as divine.
- b) A moral-ethical stance of judging from outside the situation:
- c) A new pastoral strategy to recuperate lost membership or to restore lost power.
- d) Personal social service limited to solving cases without reaching the underlying causes.

**What it is:**

- a) **Faith oriented:** Faith is understood to include three elements:
  - 1) Firm conviction based on knowledge to discern the presence of God's will in a socially analyzed situation.
  - 2) Commitment in concern for others as the one way of following Christ.
  - 3) Trustful reliance on God who wills good and not evil for humanity.
- b) **Kingdom oriented:** The object is the Kingdom of God, to be built continuously in this world until its fulfillment at the end of time. It is the Church as service to this Kingdom.
- c) **Ecumenical:** It is participation with all peoples, with or without religion, in building a better world.
- d) **One in objective but multiple in application:** From a local housing project to international peace movements, the variety portance is the building of local christian communities where by the poor, especailly, gradually become subjects of their own history.
- e) **Solidarity with the people who are suffering:** Solidarity, the fuit of a living experience with the oppressed, creates an authentic understanding of Christ's option for the poor and despised, the result of his "Abba" experience of the Father. This proximity brings about a conversion of the dichotomy-evangelizer/evangelized- to mutual-evangelizers/evangelized. The poor can be God's instrument for our salvation.
- f) **Oriented to the structural:** Although the personal and interpersonal are important dimensions of pastoral, the emphasis here is on the structural, that is, human beings as influenced, controlled and, at times, enslaved by their envoronment-political, economic, cultural, etc. Social analysis is, therefore, a necessity for an understanding action which leads to change.
- g) **Characteristic of all ministry:** "Constitutive, lay movements, etc. But at the same time a special ministry: It is directly concerned with the discernment and commitment for a changing world, to help the poor especially become aware of their dignity and become conscientious actors in their struggle for a better life.
- h) **Communitarian:** Solidarity and communion among the many part in discernment and action is indispensable. This is especially true in times of difficulties and even persecution. The death of Christ was a consequence of the life he led and the word preached.

**Conclusion:** "The present situation of the world, seen in the light of faith, calls us back to the very essence of the Christian message, creating in us a deep awareness of its true meaning and of its urgent demands. The mission of preaching the Gospel dictates at the present time that we should dedicate ourselves to the liberation of man even in his present existence in this world. For unless the Christian message of love and justice in the world, it will only with difficulty gain credibility with the men of our times." (Synod of Bishops: Justice 1971).

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. What are the explanations used most frequently and accepted by the greater number of people in your milieu about the inequality between the developed and undeveloped countries? And about the movements for independence and attempts at organization among the undeveloped countries?

What opinions contrary to these have you heard and understood? Have you tried to criticize one or the other?

2. In your country are there classes or regions which are rich and others poor? Do you understand the causes for these differences?

Is there an oppressed minority in your country? (foreign workers, racial or religious minorities, etc.)?

In what group do you place yourself as regards your style of life?

3. The people who have been "touched" by your apostolate during the last ten years ---are they really at the service of social justice, moving elements for greater justice?

### Exercises:

1. "The liturgy which we preside over and which is the heart of the Church's life, can greatly serve education for justice. . . The Liturgy of the word, catechesis and the celebration of the sacraments have the power to help us to discover the teaching of the prophets, the Lord and the Apostles on the subject of justice." (Synod: 1971-III)
  - a. Plan a penitential service with this in view.
  - b. Organize a Eucharistic celebration to show that God made all creation for all people, equal in dignity and His children and saved in Christ.
2. All are responsible for the local Church as a community, with the right to communion and participation. Plan some creative steps, necessary on your part, to make this reality in the areas of your parish, community, etc.
3. Make a list of all the local civic-social organizations involved in one way or another with local problems. (Youth, Drug addiction, handicapped, Women's movements, etc.)
  - a. Personally and through others in parish or community visit the organizations, obtain information, etc.
  - b. Select two or three of these with which your community can cooperate.

**Rule 10.** In all our ministries, prophetic voices must not be stifled. When they arise, they will be heard, tested, and supported.

## Chapter Two

### APOSTOLIC RELIGIOUS LIFE

#### Article II

#### THE KINGDOM ABOVE ALL

Our mission is to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to seek it before all else (cf. Mt 6: 33). We fulfill this mission in community; and our communities are a sign that, in Jesus, God is everything for us. Together we await Christ's coming in the fullness of his justice so that God may be all in all (cf. 1 Cor 15:28).

Growing in faith, hope and love, we commit ourselves to be a leaven of the Beatitudes at the heart of the world.

#### Scripture for Prayer:

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| 1. Isaias 65, 17-25  | "Lo, I am about to create new heavens and a new earth." |
| 2. Ezek. 36, 22-28   | "You shall be my people and I will be your God."        |
| 3. Mark 4, 26-29     | "This is how it is with the reign of God."              |
| 4. Matthew 5, 1-16   | "Blest are the lowly: they shall inherit the land."     |
| 5. Matthew 10, 6-8   | "The reign of God is at hand."                          |
| 6. Matthew 13, 44-46 | "The reign of God is like a buried treasure."           |
| 7. Acts 2, 42-47     | "Those who believed shared all things in common."       |

Church Documents:      Gaudium Et Spes 45

#### Reflection:

#### OBLATE COMMUNITY—SIGN OF THE KINGDOM

In principle, an Oblate community should always be a clear sign of God's Kingdom. Our houses should provide sufficient space so that human growth can happen. They should be privileged places to encounter the Lord; places where committed adults can find an atmosphere of mutual support so essential for the following of Jesus, and where they can recuperate the physical, emotional and spiritual energies necessary for the mission of transforming the world within.

We know that this ideal, expressed in Art. 11 of our Constitutions, is lived out to a greater or lesser degree in practice. Each of us can give personal testimony of Oblate community life. Admitting our evident weaknesses, we nevertheless have managed to maintain one of the most sacred traditions of our Congregation: that of sincere hospitality. Wherever there exists an Oblate community, one can always count on an open door and a warm welcome. There is nothing new in genuine Oblate fraternity.



What perhaps is a bit new, fruit of recent biblical reflection, is the realization that we encounter God's Kingdom in the liberating practice of the man, Jesus; and that the following of Jesus is the following of a poor and hospitable person. Thus, in recent years we have seen our traditional Oblate hospitality become deeper and gradually open itself to embrace not only other priests and religious, but also lay people, "other evangelical workers" in the words of R. 26. We are being invited to open our doors to the laity, especially the poor, so that they may share with us the bread of friendship, faith, reflection and prayer. (R. 26). All our houses should be "characterized by a special sense of hospitality." (C. 41)

Jesus' pastoral method was first of all to draw close to the most rejected of his brothers and sisters; he chose to befriend sinners and outcasts. This attitude of openness, of receptivity, did not just happen. It was, and still is, the simplest way to make the Father's love visible. His miracles were so many "signs" of the Father's powerful reign over men, liberating them from everything that oppresses or enslaves: sin and suffering, division and death. This practice is basically religious, but not in a restricted or "privatized" sense. By its very nature the sphere of the religious overlaps and invades that of the social and the political, so that each time Jesus intervenes in the religious sphere He provokes social and political consequences.

Thus, Jesus' practice is liberating and not just reformist; his Reign is radically new and absolute. Gradually we have come to see that the Kingdom of God is not merely a spiritual reality or one that will exist only in the future. It already exists, here in our midst: mysterious, dynamic, missionary. It is the seed of everything that will exist definitively beyond the limits of history. It is the central reality of biblical faith, the core of Jesus' missionary proclamation, actually present in the Christian community, questioning and relativizing all human relationships. Its presence, here and now, is mystery. It transforms domination into communion, oppression into liberation. It furnishes us with the fundamental criteria to judge the world and also the Church: justice, fraternity, communion and participation. How do our local Oblate communities stand up to these criteria of the Kingdom? Does our missionary method reflect the attitude of the humble Messiah of Zach. 9, who always tried to transform, never to patch up or repaint?

Jesus relativized the pretended absolutes of Hebrew Law and tradition; he freed men from the structures of religious domination. He did not hesitate to shock the doctors of law and the professional religious of his time by affirming that each person, no matter how insignificant his appearance, is more important than the most sacred law or tradition. (Mc. 2, 23-28) He had the courage to proclaim that one enters the Kingdom or not, depending on the concrete attitude one takes when confronted with the need of one's neighbor. His conclusion was shocking to the Scribes and Pharisees: a person's access to the Kingdom of God, the only Absolute, is not necessarily by means of religious cult or formal prayer, but rather by one's service of the poor, in whom God reveals and also hides himself. (Mt. 25, 31-46)

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. How open am I to befriend, as Jesus did, sinners and outcasts? Do I tend to approach marginal people judgementally or with love?
2. If I were asked to give my view about who belongs in the Kingdom or who does not, how would I respond?
3. What recent personal encounter have I had in which I experienced being freed by or freeing another to more deeply spptvisyr the freedom Christ came to other?
4. How do I react when I hear a phrase such as "the person is more important than the law"?

### Exercises:

- I. Read one of the synoptic gospels and make a list of the various Kingdom values you come across. Reflect on these and reflect on your local community in the light of these Kingdom values.
- II. Read the story of the encounter of Jesus with Mary Magdalen, Matthew the tax collector, Zachaeus, the children, the Pharisee. Imagine yourself in any or all of these encounters. How do you think you would act?
- III. List down any occasions in the past week or month that called for compassion. As you reflect on these, how did you react?

## SECTION I

## THE EVANGELICAL COUNSELS

## Article 12

## RADICAL DISCIPLESHIP

Our mission requires that, in a radical way, we follow Jesus who was chaste and poor and who redeemed mankind by his obedience. That is why, through a gift of the Father, we choose the way of the evangelical counsels. Community is the life giving reality fashioned by the vows which bind us in love to the Lord and to his people. Thus we become a living cell in the Church in which we strive together to bring the grace of our Baptism to its fulness.

**Scripture Readings:**

- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| 1. Gen. 12, 1-4    | "...Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk. . ."                                     |
| 2. Deut. 7, 6      | "...He has chosen you to be a people peculiarly His own. . ."                         |
| 3. Psalm 15 (16)   | "...Apart from you I have no good. . ."   |
| 4. Luke 9, 23-25   | "...Whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. . ."                             |
| 5. John 17, 17     | "...Consecrate them by means of truth. . ."   |
| 6. I Cor. 7, 25-35 | "...I want to promote what will help you devote yourselves entirely to the Lord. . ." |
| 7. Col. 3, 7-14    | "...Christ is everything in all of you. . ."  |

**Church Documents:**

Lumen Gentium 44. 45 Perfectae Caritatis, 1, 5  
Evangelii Nuntiandi, 69

**Reflection:****CALLED AND CONSECRATED**

All great religious traditions have had their Masters and Disciples. The master was one acknowledged as skilled in living out and enunciating a particular philosophy of life which attracted others, who found in him possible answers to their search for meaning in life. In a sense his way of being present to life elicited their yearning for a deeper significance in their lives and he was sought and followed as a "significant other."

Jesus was regarded as a Rabbi or Master in the context of the Jewish tradition. In that tradition, the would be disciple first sought out a Master, was accepted as a disciple, and, after a period of association discipline, training and learning, became in turn a master for others. Jesus rejected this tradition. Mostly He called his disciples and he chose his apostles from among them. He told them that they must avoid being called "rabbi" - they had only one master and were all brothers, only one Teacher, the Christ. (Matt. 22, 10). He promised to send them His Spirit and that he would remain with them always. He invited them into a unique relationship with him, assuring them that they would live because he lived. (John 14, 19). He called them to unity with him and with the Father, consecrated them in truth, and prayed that the love with which the Father loved Him might be in them, that he might be in them (John 17).

The relationship then, to Christ, of all those whom he calls to be his disciples, is one of a radical belonging to him, and through him to the Father. As religious we express this relationship through the vows. It is not the vows that create the relationship; they are but the way in which we express and realize the call and the consecration of ourselves in total self-surrender to him. *Perfectae Caritatis* says we “imitate Christ, the virgin and the poor man, who, by an obedience which carried him even to death on the cross, redeemed men and made them holy.” (P. C. 1). It is not so much that we consecrate ourselves but that, through our relationship to him, we are consecrated to the Father.

The root of this call and consecration is in our Baptism. There we become a “new creation”, and life receives a personal, transcendent, eschatological dimension in the paschal mystery. Our vows, then, express this new being and new direction. Through them we offer to God all the fundamental dynamism of our being, the totality of our free and responsible life. The vows both recognise the radical needs of the human person and point to a way of realizing these that can draw those who so commit themselves to the very source and fulfillment of those needs, to Life Itself. They are paradoxical. Recognising life itself as a gift, they challenge the greed and manipulation of those who seek a pseudo self-sufficiency in wealth and in the material: they point to fulfillment, not in power and self-determination but in service and obedience to the God who loves; and they recognise that love as a gift, “that God has first loved us”, and so they seek to share that love as they are possessed by it.

Those in vows dedicate, consecrate, radically give over their whole being in love to Love and to loving others as Christ loved.

A consecration such as this is inevitably a call to service. Both in the community and in ministry the vowed person makes his own the salvific design of God, and of Christ-to reconcile and restore all things in the unity of the Kingdom. If it ever be regarded as a separation from the “world”, it can only be for the sake of a more profound relationship with it. The vow can only call and enable people to love and serve people in a new way, with a detached and totally generous heart and a true compassion.

Radical consecration empowers true liberation. The vows do not bind in any dehumanizing sense. Rather, they call us to be free, free to give and to care, to listen and to respond, to dare and not to fear, to love because we know we are loved. They call us to live out the paschal mystery as an already joyous and promising reality.

“Religious have in their consecrated lives a privileged means of efficacious evangelization” (Evan. Nunt. No. 69). Truly, with John, they can say, “what we have heard, what we have seen, what our hands have touched. . .we proclaim to you that you may share life with us.” (1 John, 1).

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. What do I consider “radical”, that is, rooted in Christ and the Gospels, in my own following of Jesus?
2. What are the concrete ways in which I consider that I belong to Jesus?
3. What do I feel is most lacking in my life in order that my consecration become a total surrender? What would be a good starting point for improvement?

**EXERCISE:** Reflect on each of these three constitutive areas of religious life: Experience of God, Community Life and Apostolic Mission. Use the framework below to examine your way of concretely living and expressing these elements of consecration.

Area for Reflection.

1. Structures which support or express this item. What am I doing?	2. Present inspiration the theory that justifies my attitude and action: Why am I doing this?	3. New inspiration the theory that should inspire me. What do I believe?	4. New structures what actions or attitudes should be abolished? Which should be kept? What new actions initiated?

## Article 13

## MARY OUR MODEL

Mary Immaculate, in her faith response and total openness to the call of the Spirit, is the model and guardian of our consecrated life.

## Scripture for Prayer:

1. Isa. 42, 6 " . . . Fear nothing for I am with you. . . "
2. Luke 1, 38 " . . . As you have spoken, be it done. . . "
3. I Cor 1, 27-28 " . . . God singled out the weak to shame the strong. . . "
4. John 1, 10-12 " . . . Anyone who did accept him. . . became children of God "
5. Mark 3, 31-35 " . . . who ever does the will of God. . . is mother to me. . . "
6. Eph. 1, 17 " . . . I pray that you may know the hope to which he calls you. . . "
7. Luke 1, 46-55 " . . . my spirit finds joy in God my Saviour. . . "

Church Documents: The Cult of Mary : Pope Paul VI, 1974

## Reflection:

## DISCIPLESHIP OF MARY

The root and foundation of our consecration to the service of the Lord is the gift of faith. It is that gift which draws us into an ever deepening relationship of love and commitment to Christ as Master: it is that gift which enables us to accept His invitation to leave all and follow him- to become his disciples.

Both the Gospels of Mark and Luke relate the incident where Jesus is told that his mother and brothers are in the crowd seeking to have him come out to them. At first we are puzzled with his rhetorical response, "who are my mother and my brothers?" It was the occasion for Jesus to give testimony to his mother's faith in him, "My mother and my brothers hear God's word and keep it." We must understand the incident in the light of its whole context. The Jews placed great emphasis on race and family. Salvation for them at that time had to do with belonging to the children of Abraham. We recall the dispute in the early church about letting Gentiles become christians before they first embraced the Jewish faith. This whole issue was clarified in the prologue of John's Gospel, "to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, children born not of natural descent but of God." (John 1, 12-13).

Belonging to the Kingdom and discipleship is based on faith and on our response to the Word in Jesus. Who belongs? Those who hear the Word and keep it. Mary is the exemplar of this faith. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to thy Word." She is THE DISCIPLE of Jesus. Before Jesus was conceived, during his earthly life and after his resurrection, Mary respond in faith to the mysterious plan of God for all of us, the plan that was made real and visible in Jesus, her Son. The Gospels clearly show her to be the first disciple of the new covenant. .the one who first hears fully God's saving Word and makes salvation possible for all, in Jesus.

It was Augustine who first presented this image of Mary as a faith disciple. "The Blessed Mary, by believing, conceived Jesus, whom believing, she brought forth." In that faith, Mary said the definitive "Yes" to salvation for herself and for all of us. She fulfilled the collective hope of her people for a Messiah: she is that moment in time that God waited for so that His Word could come among us in the flesh: she is the fullness of the response that God calls all of us to give to the coming of His Kingdom. "Blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled."

Faith is not a gift that enables us "to see" things more clearly than others. It is rather a trust, one that is tested in time of trial, doubt, unclarity. That was true of Mary. At the Annunciation she listened and questioned. She was told to trust and not to fear. She lived in this kind of trusting faith: in exile in Egypt, when others called her son a fool and one possessed, at the foot of the Cross.

She modeled that faith and trust for the disciples, gathered behind locked doors for fear of the Jews, waiting for the promised gift of the Spirit. She was for them, as she is for us, the model of faith that all disciples must have, those who consecrate themselves to the Kingdom that is and is yet to come.

Pope Paul VI, in his Exhortation "The Cult of Mary" (1974) spoke of this quality of discipleship of Mary. "The figure of Mary does not disillusion any of the profound expectations of the men and women of our time, but offers them the perfect model of the disciple of the Lord". Mary, he goes on to say, was one who builds up the earth while still a pilgrim, one who works for justice for the oppressed and charity for the needy,; above all, one who is an active witness of that love which builds up Christ in the hearts of people.

Mary embodies the three qualities of all true disciples. She was one who heard the call of God, who responded in trusting faith and who brought the good news of Christ to others. We, as Oblates, have no better model in living out our own call and consecration.

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. Recall three occasions in which you felt called by God to do respond in some way more fully, and in your own way said. "Yes let it be done", in spite of fear of the unknown outcome?
2. Reflecting on the discipleship of Mary what do you see as the essential qualities of your own discipleship?
3. How developed is your sense of belonging to the christian family as contrasted with your own ethnic, familial origins? Have you become over the years a more "universal" person?

### Exercises:

1. Read through the Gospel incidents where Mary is mentioned. Make a list of the words and attitudes of Mary as you perceive them e.g. listening, discerning, response attitudes.

Which of these attitudes do you need to grow in that you can feel more more at one with Mary as disciple of Jesus?

2. Read the Exhortation of Pope Paul VI "The Cult of Mary" (1974).

How does this deepen your sense of Mary's role in the Church not only as Mother but also as disciple of Jesus?

How can this affect your own devotion to Mary?



## CHASTITY

### Article 14

### A SPECIAL INVITATION

### Article 15

### A LIBERATING CHALLENGE

**A. 14 -** In answer to a special invitation from Christ, we choose consecrated celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom (cf. Mt. 10:12).

**B. 15 -** By this option we consecrate ourselves to the Lord and, at the same time, give ourselves to the people we serve; we thereby free ourselves for a love which reaches out to everyone and challenge the tendency to possess and use others for selfish purposes.

#### Scripture for Prayer:

1. Matthew 19:12      "...and some there are who have freely renounced sex for the sake of God's reign. . ."
2. I Co. 7:32-35      "...I should like you to be free of all worries. . ."
3. I Co. 12: 8-10      "...It is one and the same spirit who produces all these gifts. . ."
4. Matthew 22:30      "...when people arise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage. . ."
5. I Jn. 4, 1-12      "...let us love one another. . ."
6. Col. 3:3      "...your life is hidden now with Christ in God. . ."
7. Matthew 19, 28-29      "...you who have followed he shall take your place. . ."

Church Documents:      Lumen Gentium 42, 43

#### Reflection:

### CELIBACY FOR THE KINGDOM

Christian life is an adventure in faith. It is a life long journey in which one seeks to find and share meaning in and through Jesus Christ. Religious share this pilgrimage with all Christians and with them they seek out Gospel values as the priorities behind their choices and actions. In the expression of Christian living particular to religious life there are certain Gospel values that are privileged and pursued in a radical way. These values give shape in a fundamental way to the life and the spirituality of religious. They are grounded in the personal conviction that the Gospel of Jesus is worth staking one's whole life on. At the heart of these privileged values we find chastity as expressed in celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom.

Religious have always been celibates. There is a rich literature attesting to the gospel motivation for religious celibacy. And there are numerous commentaries on the implications of celibacy. There is no doubt that it is seen as a positive value, that it has to do with a way of being in relation that creates personhood. Assuredly, there are basic characteristics of celibacy that are expressed as absences. No matter how you talk around the subject, you can not ignore the fact that it is clearly marked by the renunciation of marriage as well as by the absence of genital intimacy. But, these are not ends in themselves. They are consequences that flow out of the unique life project of a religious to make of his life an expression of special love for the person of Jesus. This love assumes primacy over any other love. And because of this love to care about the mission of Jesus in a radical way and to be open to unrestricted love for others. Like Jesus to be devoted in a special way to evoking a love response from those who are most in need of love and to be genuinely committed without reservations to whomever one has occasion to deal with in the name of Jesus.

Building on this understanding of the vow of celibacy, contemporary theologians have highlighted its witnessing dimension. Fr. Rahner points out that as in the life of Mary, whose virginity was a manifestation in her flesh of the transcendent origin of God's Son, so those vowed to celibate life witness to their belief in the transcendent character of God's grace. There are other theologians reflecting on the vow of celibacy and its witnessing value around the issue of social justice. Celibacy has to do with the orientation of our power to love. It is at the heart of our relatedness to our brothers and sisters wherever we share life with them. This ability to love gives rise to human community. The way we love as celibates can be a strong witness to non-exploitive love, non-possessive love, one open to a responsible intimacy that creates the trust and respect necessary for life giving communities.

Celibacy can at times be seen too exclusively as a corporate reality. It is often referred to as the characteristic of a group. We say and hear things like: "religious are celibates" or "you have to be celibate to be a religious". Of course this is true. However, such statements can distract from the profoundly personal nature of celibacy. It is above all a personal invitation from Christ, it is a personal choice that has to be continually deepened. No doubt there are a variety of motives that lead us to choose religious life. Some are conscious, some are unconscious. Part of the journey of religious life is to appropriate more and more this choice to be with the Lord and with our brothers and sisters in a special way.

#### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. How is celibacy a positive value in my life as an Oblate?
2. Am I clear about the absences involved in this vow?
3. How am I pursuing intimacy with the Lord?
4. How am I seen as a loving person in my life and ministry?

#### Exercises:

- I. In dialogue with a friend, chart out the history of your call and response to celibacy.
- II. Write and share with a married couple your personal manifesto on the value of celibacy. Seek out how they see celibacy as a value for us as Oblates.

**Article 16****A CALL TO LOVE**

Consecrated celibacy calls us to develop the riches of the heart. It is an affirmation of life and love: it expresses our total gift of self to God and to others with all our affection, with all the life giving powers of our being. Our celibacy allows us to be present where the most urgent needs are to be found, to give witness as a group to the Fathers' love for us and to our enduring love for Him.

**Article 17****THE VOW**

In our religious consecration we choose by vow to remain celibate and to live chastely.

**Scripture for Prayer:**

1. Luke 20, 35-36 " . . .they . . .are children of the resurrection. . ."
2. Matt. 4, 17 " . . .the Kingdom of heaven is close at hand. . ."
3. Matt. 6, 21 " . . .where your treasure is, there your heart is. . ."
4. John 15, 9 " . . .live on in my love. . ."
5. I John 4, 7-19 " . . .anyone who fails to love can never have known God. . ."
6. I Cor. 13 " . . .If I give everything, but have not love, I gain nothing. . ."
7. Rev. 14, 1-5 " . . .they are the ones who have kept their virginity. . ."

**Church Documents:**

Vatican II : Religious Life: 1, 5, 6  
Priestly Formation: 8, 10

**Theological Reflection:****CELIBACY: GROWTH IN INTIMACY**

One of the aspects of life most commented upon these days is that it is developmental. We are more and more aware that we go through many somewhat predictable stages of growth, each having its own many somewhat predictable stages of growth, each having its own developmental tasks. Many different models of this are available.

Behind any developmental theory is the basic assumption that our lives are motivated and guided by values. These, by definition, are those major priorities that individuals and groups choose to act on to creatively enhance life. These values are also gifts and opportunities made available by the Spirit. Essential values always remain, but since life is developmental, their qualities alter. Concepts of faith and mission deepen as persons grow spiritually. New insights around chosen values and how they can be expressed, emerge. New challenges are experienced and new developmental tasks must be addressed. This is certainly true of the value of celibacy as we seek to live it out today. It is developmental. It is an essential value in religious life and it should always be calling us to grow in love, love of God and love of each other.

There is no absolutely typical story around celibacy. We are dealing with a graced encounter, with the opening up of two histories to each other, ours and God's. However, there are some similarities in the major lines of development that this value pursues. When one first comes in contact with the possibility of espousing celibacy as a life value, it is not always clearly chosen for itself. Often it is buried with the other values perceived in the call to become a religious. There are advantages seen somewhat conceptually, and expressed rather broadly as favouring availability for mission. Attempts are made at relating celibacy to a semi-spousal relationship with the Lord. But what one is probably most conscious of at this time are its implications in terms of not marrying and abstaining from genital intimacy. This points to an early developmental task around celibacy in its institutional dimension. There are bottom lines: there are parameters. The fact of not marrying and abstaining from genital intimacy has to be faced and understood.

A basic understanding of human sexuality is needed, basic because the existential implications will continue to be a growth challenge and a life-long issue.

The roots of this call to vowed chastity lie deep in the mystery of God's love for those to whom He gives it. It is an invitation to the total giving of ourselves to Love, to Him as Love, and to the fullest sharing of that love with others. It is a fragile gift, it implies great risk, it is a challenge that calls for the fullest human, spiritual growth.

#### **Questions for Personal Reflection:**

1. Where am I in terms of growing intimacy with Jesus?
2. Am I growing positively in the acceptance of my sexuality and its many implications, challenges and gifts?
3. Those who are called to a life of vowed celibacy are called not only to intimacy with God but also with others. What does such "intimacy" connote for you? Do you feel that the call to give all to God excludes true human friendships or makes such not only valuable but a good way of assessing growth in God's love?

#### **Exercises:**

1. Together with a friend, make a day of recollection to reflect on and trace out the depth of your companionship with Jesus. Keep a journal to trace the growth of this sense of companionship.
2. Read the Gospels with a focus on the friendships of Jesus, His loving care of the disciples and others? Make a list of those occasions when Jesus expresses and shows His loving care for others.

## Article 18

## FIDELITY IN LOVING

We will find our support in friendship and in fraternal life, in apostolic commitment to all, in self-denial and in prayer.

## Scripture for Prayer:

1. John 15, 9 " . . . As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. . . "
2. John 17, 9-17 " . . . in them I am glorified. . . "
3. 2 Cor. 12, 1-10 " . . . my grace is enough for you. . . "
4. 1 thess. 3, 6-10 " . . . he has given us good news of your faith and your love. . . "
5. Col. 3, 12-15 " . . . over all these clothes, put on love. . . "
6. Phil. 1, 4-7 " . . . I am so delighted and comforted to know of your love. . . "
7. 2 Tim. 1, 15 " . . . I long to see you again to complete my happiness. . . "

Church Documents: Vatican II: Religious Life No. 12  
Priestly Formation, No. 10

## Reflection:

## THE CAPACITY TO CARE

Human growth and maturity, as well as spiritual growth, are based on mature acceptance of our sexuality. Development in celibacy does not by-pass this need and it must be met in the day to day relationship in our community and in our ministry. Celibacy then is a call for a deep caring for the persons with whom one lives in community. It opens up the dimension of affectivity and intimacy that should mark the growth life of a chosen celibacy. From this there comes an outgrowth of caring for the persons to whom the community is ministering. To some degree we are dealing with external motivation and role expectations. The challenge is to develop appropriate caring behaviour for the members of one's community and for those one is serving.

Somewhere along the line in the life of a religious, the need for personal intimacy becomes a developmental issue and challenge. Intimacy here is understood as the ability to share, at a deep level, who we are, our hopes and aspirations, our fears and pain, our dreams and disillusionments, our victories and defeats. Intimacy implies acceptance and mutuality. This stage of development is critical in the life of every person and, especially, of the celibate. There is intensity around this need and it must be faced in an open way. Denial and repression can only complicate one's life. Repression of our need, taking refuge in forms of 'workaholism', isolation, and other avoidance techniques, can only allow one's sexuality to assume a form of quasi-independent existence that will lead to undue stress, tension and a true dissipation of our energies and integrity. There can be times when the challenge will include a period of doubt about one's choice of celibacy. This is so if we had a tendency to see celibacy as a "natural" orientation rather than as a

choice how one will be in relatedness. Appropriate celibate intimacy can and must be expressed. It must be responsibly and positively integrated into one's life. It marks a high period of internal motivation that opens up to and is supported by a deeper intimacy with the Lord. It can be a time of exceptional spiritual growth: it can bring about a new quality of presence towards other people in our lives. But such development always presumes a basic acceptance of our human sexuality, an honest coming to terms with its implications and a continued choice around our celibacy.

It is of great value to have the support of a good spiritual director and of a community where there is sufficient trust and respect, and an atmosphere that allows one to be open and honest about what is happening in one's life. Initiatives have to be pursued to bring about a good healthy personal integration. This is key to celibate growth at this stage.

The simple truth about celibacy is that, after all is said and done, it can be life giving only if it has some contemplative roots. This means a prayer life that helps develop a true sense of intimacy and companionship with Jesus. The following quotation from William Connolly, S.J. (Studies in the Spirituality of the Jesuits, May 1978) explains well this kind of on-going relationship.

"This sense of companionship is not a feeling, although feelings at times accompany it. It is not an idea although it gives birth to thought. It is stable but not static. It is not a form of prayer, although it is often most fully recognised in private contemplative prayer. Indeed its development, when I have heard people speak of it, seems to take place most palpably in this kind of prayer. It is the recognition of a relationship itself growing intimately with the Lord and of the Lord shaping the person as a celibate man or woman. It is a sense of relationship that must grow if the person is to be able to withstand the pressure of other life forces that work at this deep life level, and will themselves dictate the shape of his life if he lets them."

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. Do I have a spiritual director, companion or intimate friend with whom I can honestly and fruitfully share my growth stages in my celibate commitment?
2. How conscious am I of the relationship between healthy growth in human relationships and growth in my spiritual life? Is it possible that my friendship with God, my prayer life can become an escape from the challenge of honest, open friendship with others?

### Exercises:

1. Join or even initiate a group discussion in your own community or with other religious men and women on the various stages and implications of growth in celibate maturity. Make it both a prayerful and honest sharing.

**Rule 11****GROWTH IN MATURITY**

In living their consecration, Oblates will endeavour to help each other to grow in maturity. Aware of their own frailty, they will seek spiritual direction and exercise self-discipline.

**Scripture for Prayer:**

1. Ephesians 4, 15-16 " . . .grow to the full maturity of Christ the head. . ."
2. Mark 4, 30-32 " . . .the smallest of all the earth's seeds. . ."
3. I Peter 2, 1-3 " . . .pure milk of the spirit to make you grow unto salvation. . ."
4. Hebrews 6, 1-3 " . . .advance to maturity. . ."
5. Matthew 20, 20-28 " . . .anyone among you who aspires to the greatness must serve the rest. . ."
6. John 6, 66-69 " . . .Lord, to whom shall we go? . . ."
7. John 15, 8-17 " . . .Live on in my love. . ."

Church Document: Redemptor Hominis 14  
Perfectae Caritatis 12

**Reflection:****MATURITY, HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

The mature person is characterized by the capacity to establish affective relations with himself, with others, with the world and with God.

**1. Affective Relations with Oneself:** The mature person feels happy in manifesting the gift of life either under the masculine or feminine form.

He considers the body as a gift and feels good about it, knowing that it is through the body that the personality is revealed, that he lives and moves and manifests God to others. He is conscious of the gifts received and works to make them bloom, leaving aside complaints and expressions of self-pity in order to value the positive.

He considers his personal and family past as a valuable asset. His parents and brothers and sisters are gifts received and were the right persons for him during the first years of his life.

He has an attitude of understanding of self and works with joy to integrate whatever negative things may exist so that he may become a person who is evermore present towards all he meets. He is responsible for his decisions and is happy in carrying out what he has determined to do.

**2. Affective Relations with Others.** The mature person is able to have a cordial relationship with persons of both sexes. He likes others as different persons and, in the differences that he discovers, he sees the wisdom of God. He cultivates concrete friendships and with them he makes a growth journey, perceiving how God acts in each human being. He sees how God leads people in a history that is typical and characterized by communion.

In living with others, he discovers that it is possible to live well, even in conflict. To do this he develops an ability to listen to the truth as perceived by the other and has the courage to manifest what he thinks without aggression. When divergences arise, he finds one or more points to unify the community efforts. There will be moments when he will have his opinion over-ruled but, just the same, he will collaborate in group decisions. In fraternal living, sincerity will predominate and the mature person will be affectionate with people inside or outside of the community, thus avoiding one "I" for the community and another "I" for export.

In community, he maintains a relationship of equal to equal neither putting people down nor accepting to be put down.

**3. Affective Relations with the Universe.** The mature person finds motivation to live happily in any geographic location. He appreciates nature, plants, flowers and animals. He is enchanted with the phenomena of nature: heat, cold, wind, rain, everything is a variety of the divine beauty. He likes the objects which he uses and with which he works. At the same time he assumes his function with a caring attitude. He considers his work, his tasks, as a privileged place where he reveals God to persons.

**4. Affective Relations with God.** Knowledge of God begins for us through the similarities and differences with our parents and the people who educate us. As the years pass the mature person discovers that it is better to abandon the childish fantasies and accept God present in the universe, in persons and in us, all ruled by the wisdom of divine law. He comes to know and relate to God who reveals Himself through His word. As this wisdom is more and more understood, the desire to manipulate God is left behind. He understands that he is a partner with God, walking with Him, finding Him everywhere, present in the wisdom of events, in the hearts of people and in the events of daily life.

In face of this discovery, the mature person will exult in hymns of praise and gratitude because, for every age, God reveals Himself in such a fascinating way that there is a desire to be united to Him forever.

### **Questions for Personal Reflection:**

1. If someone would ask me, "How free are you to minister to me?"  
How would I respond?
2. How do I rate my self-esteem on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is unsatisfactory and 10 is very satisfactory? Why have I chosen this rating?
3. What are the signs of immaturity in my life?



**Exercises:**

- I. Consider each of the five possible areas of un-freedom. List the specific items in which you feel un-free in each area: authority, sexuality, sociability, emotional response and degrees of depression.

- II. Complete each of the following sentences three times:

1. One of the things I fear most is \_\_\_\_\_

2. I am beginning to realize that \_\_\_\_\_

3. If I were to be completely honest I might say \_\_\_\_\_

4. If I were willing to be vulnerable I might admit \_\_\_\_\_

Reflect on your completed sentences. What was of value for you in this experience. If you wish, share this with someone.

**Rule 12****SINCERE FRIENDSHIPS**

Sincere friendship can foster the growth of an apostolic person, enabling one to love others as Jesus loves them. Developing this gift of love more and more, the Oblate will devote himself to others in frank and honest affection, without being either fearful or rash.

In his relationships he will keep in mind the customs of the country and the sensitivities of the people among whom he lives and works.

**Scripture for Prayer:**

1. Sirach (Ecclesiastes) 6, " . . . a faithful friend is beyond price. . . "
2. John 15, 12-15 " . . . you are my friends. . . "
3. Ecclesiastes 4, 7-10 " . . . if one falls, the other will lift up his companion. . . "
4. I Cor 13, 4-7 " . . . love is kind, love is not jealous. . . "
5. I John 3, 16-18 " . . . let us love in deed and in truth. . . "
6. Matthew 18, 19-20 " . . . Where two or three are gathered in my name. . . "
7. Romans 15, 5-7 " . . . accept one another, then, as Christ accepted you. . . "

**Church Documents:**

Testificatio Evangelica 13, 14, 15

**Reflection:****FRIENDSHIP**

Chastity is not a rejection of love. The special condition of chastity, which entails a life of celibacy, is a way of expressing love in the total consecration of that love to God. Through celibacy the Religious is called to bear witness to God's love through his very lifestyle. So it is not primarily abstinence from marriage. It is a gift from God that reserves the love of the religious for God but does not limit the manifestation of that love to the strictly vertical, spiritual realm. The love of neighbor can never be absent from the heart of the celibate for the sake of the Kingdom. If we are to experience being loved by God and loving God we depend on our experience of being loved by human persons and loving human persons. St. John has told us this: "Anyone who says, 'I love God' and hates his brother is a liar, since a man, who does not love the brother that he can see, cannot love God, whom he has never seen". (1Jn. 4:20).

St. Paul expresses celibacy in terms of a positive relationship and a life orientation to service. It is a direction given to one's life and a dedication of one's person. "the unmarried man is busy with the Lord's affairs, concerned with pleasing the Lord."

On the deep level of serving the mission of the Kingdom and of union with the Lord in love, no other love can limit or interrupt fidelity to Jesus. Celibates' obligation to love the Lord in this way differs from any other Christian's, married or single, in that the consecrated celibate makes this search for the love of Christ his very lifestyle.

The love of the Lord is lived in this world and is manifested in fulfilling the second commandment, love one's neighbor as oneself. Jesus himself manifested this love for his disciples through his relationship with them. "I do not call you servants but I have called you friends". He had many friends and among these, special, sincere and intimate friends whom he loved in different degrees. There were, among His friends, those with whom he shared confidences and affection - John, James, Peter, Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary. Religious, also, are not usually exempt from a dependence on human love and friendship in their search for God.

A person, in order to enjoy the beauty of life, feels the need to establish, maintain and develop an affective relationship with someone. To have friends and to feel oneself loved makes life one of the most fascinating wonders.

With the re-emphasis of the human values within interpersonal relations, the number of persons consecrated to God who commit themselves to great friendships has increased.

Our human relations are marked by our condition of being man or woman, Sex, more than serving procreation, regulates our way of being and doing. We are masculine or feminine to the very marrow of our bones.

Of all human relations, those that unite persons to one another most intimately are friendship and love. In friendship as well as in love, the person vibrates and exults with his whole being.

There are various degrees of friendship. For many, friendship is limited to a natural reciprocity of likes and interest in work and everyday life. Living thus, people come to a natural reciprocal knowledge, without detours, since they live in each other's presence.

Others consider friendship as existing only when deeper sentiments arise that begin to recreate reciprocal effective bonds. This affection seeks deeper knowledge and causes the desire for presence. In this case friendship can find itself faced with two paths, one which seeks constant physical manifestations of affection and the other in which these manifestations are limited in quality and meaning.

It is the latter path that must be followed in any deep friendship shared by a Religious who has consecrated his life to God. As Father Brian O'Leary, S.J. says: "As we move across the spectrum from acquaintance to friendship to close friendship to deep, intimate love, the reality of our celibacy becomes more and more pertinent."

It is true that in loving a person our whole being becomes emotional and that reciprocal attraction of both sexes, one for the other, is so rooted in our nature and in our instinct for pleasure that the risk of seeking sensible satisfaction can occur. It is here that discernment enters, through prayer and reasoning enlightened by faith, to help us decide the motivation and the objective of this friendship and to help us determine the safeguards necessary to the growth and permanence of the fundamental option already made.

If consecrated persons begin a friendship with the objective of a greater mutual growth in the love of God and then limit themselves to seeking one or another sensible manifestation it is probable that they are ignoring the meaning of chastity. If this is so, they have not properly discerned the development of their friendship in accord with their spiritual identity which brought them to the fundamental option of total consecration.

On the other hand, in the history of the Church, we find many examples of consecrated persons who have had great friendships. For this to happen, it is necessary to understand that to love a person is normal. In friendship, consecrated chastity assumes control, directs the affective faculties and orients them to the most intimate core of our being.

Chastity becomes the expression of respect for ourselves and for others. Chastity directs, governs and spiritualizes all the relations between the persons who are friends. A friendship allows the spirit and the heart to remain open to further friendships.

Father Brian O'Leary in an article on Celibate Friendship reflects on certain conditions which help a religious to feel free to sustain and foster relationships of deep, intimate human friendship in Religious Life. The person must be mature, comfortable with his own sexuality, desiring an adult relationship between equals, not one of emotional dependency. He must be well rooted in his celibate calling. This calls for a strong personal attachment to Jesus, to the Church, to the Congregation and to his apostolate. All of this presupposes a life of prayer. There must be an awareness and understanding of the other person's sexuality, and of his or her capacities, weaknesses and needs. The religious must also affirm and desire the growth of the other in his vocation. The relationship must not be exclusive. It must be open to God and to spiritual directors, superiors and mutual friends. Any tendency to hide a relationship, to secretiveness and furtive behaviour is a danger signal.

The relationship of a deep friendship is intimately connected to all aspects of the celibate's life. If the friendship is healthy, life giving and creative it will influence positively the person's prayer, community life, and apostolic commitment aiding the growth of the person.

When two persons are mutually attracted and any idea of conjugal love is excluded, it is at that level of deep affection that meaningful friendship is established. In this relationship the friendship grows in as much as each one perceives the harmony in the difference of the sexes. It is in the discovery that one makes of the other that the reciprocal union of spirits, hearts and lives is realized.

Friendship between persons of the same sex can also become deep but it cannot have the same characteristics of friendship between persons of different sexes. In friendships between persons of different sexes there is a complementariness in the psychological, intellectual and spiritual aspects.

Friendship causes each one to have a permanent dwelling in the other. Each one is in the other with total trust. He knows that he can count on the other, that he is always accepted as a friend because of himself and not for any other reason. The certainty of being received by the other is not based on sentiment but on true confidence.

Friends come to the perfect possession of their own identity; every thing integrates itself in them. They are secure in the certainty of perfect independence. One rests in the other without the desire to possess and they are always free in this union.

Persons who come to this degree of relationship know that their union is founded on the creative power that gives it life. They discover in that great force that unites them, the Person of Him who is the source and the dispenser of life. The perfection of this human relation, as it leads a person to his own inner self, makes him discover that God is the first person who created us in his image and who asks us to give that image hidden in us a human face.

#### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. What do you feel are the three most important elements in a deep sincere friendship?
2. In what ways have your closest friends helped you to grow as an apostolic person?
3. How do you think you have contributed to the growth of your friends?

#### Exercises:

1. In a book on Friends and Friendship, the authors (Jerry and Mary White) list eight important benefits of friendship: emotional encouragement, help in trouble, personal stability, spiritual help and counsel, freedom of expression, protection from loneliness and isolation, love and acceptance, and opportunities to give ourselves to others.
  - a. Can you add any other benefits to these?
  - b. Which of these have you experienced in any of your closest friendships?
  - c. Which of these are the most important for you and why?
  - d. How many of these have you been able to offer to friends?

- II. Take time to write a letter to a close and intimate friend. Thank that friend for the gift of friendship and express one or two aspects of the friendship that you especially appreciate.

**Rule 13.** As the generous example of married or single lay persons often inspires us, Oblates in turn, by their own genuine affection and fidelity, will inspire them to faithfulness in the face of their struggles and difficulties.

### APOSTOLIC POVERTY

*"If you wish to be perfect," says our Lord,  
 "sell what you have."  
 The first Christians followed that counsel  
 faithfully to the letter.  
 They still had fresh before them  
 the example of their divine Master,  
 who chose to be born in a stable  
 and to die upon the cross,  
 after having lived deprived of everythin,  
 for he was without the small coin  
 needed to pay Caesar's tribute,  
 and did not even have a place to rest his head.*

*Since it is our aim in the Institute  
 to follow in the footsteps of those first Christians,  
 we have more than enough reason. . .  
 for resolving to embrace  
 this fundamental point of religious life and perfection.*

*. . . Since covetousness  
 is among the vices  
 that do most damage to the Church,  
 our Institute's spirit,  
 which is one of atonement,  
 leads us in some way to offer to God  
 the compensation for this vice,  
 by adopting voluntary poverty  
 as the saints have practised it before us.*

## POVERTY

### Article 19

### POOR LIKE JESUS

We follow a Master who became poor for our sake. "If you wish to be perfect", He said, "go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor. . . Then come, follow me" (Matthew 19:21). In answer to his call, we choose evangelical poverty.

#### Scripture for Prayer:

- |                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| 1. Phil. 2, 5-11     | "...he emptied himself. . ."                               |
| 2. 2 Cor 8, 9        | "...he made himself poor though he was rich. . ."          |
| 3. Luke 2, 1-20      | "...there was no room for them. . ."                       |
| 4. Luke 4, 16-20     | "...He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor. . ." |
| 5. John 13, 1-8      | "...you must wash each other's feet. . ."                  |
| 6. Matthew 11, 28-29 | "...Come to me. .I am gentle and humble of heart. . ."     |
| 7. Matthew 5, 3-12   | "...How blest are the poor in spirit. . ."                 |

Church Document:      Perfectae Caritatis 13

#### Reflection:

### EVANGELICAL POVERTY

The motivation behind our vow of Poverty is the response to a call. It is not a call to look for or desire the sufferings of poverty caused by Nature - the result of disasters, accidents, sicknesses or natural phenomena. It is not a call to accept as a cross and to rejoice in the poverty of the indigent, the people in need of the bare essentials to survive with human dignity, this poverty caused by the greed, selfishness and oppression of unjust persons and unjust societal structures. Certainly our call will bring us to a response to this type of poverty. Nor is it simply a natural inclination which causes us not to be attracted to material things, a lot of comforts or an accumulation of possessions. Our call is to follow Jesus who became poor for our sake "though he was rich, so that (we) might become rich by his poverty" (2 Cor. 8,9). It is a call to evangelical poverty, the poverty of Jesus and of the Gospel. It is poverty, first of all, of "Being" but, none the less, a poverty of "Having".

The most explicit call to live evangelical poverty is made to us by Paul: "Your attitude must be that of Christ. . he did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at, rather, he emptied himself and took the form of a slave. .obediently accepting even. . death on the cross!" (Phil. 2, 5-11). This is the real motivating force behind poverty. It is poverty of BEING - or poverty of meaning - poverty of spirit. To some this may seem an excuse or an escape to reject the sacrifice of material poverty. Rather it is the very essence of evangelical poverty.

The first element of the poverty of Jesus was self renunciation - becoming man, he became "poor" having nothing before God - no power, no security, no abundance except his dependence on the Father. Man has an innate poverty which is natural to his creaturehood. Poverty of Spirit is the voluntary acceptance of this natural impoverishment. It is the recognition of God's gratuitous action to reunite us to Himself through Christ.

The elements of this evangelical poverty then are the acceptance to live in continual dependence on someone else, the acceptance of self as we are as creatures. This includes a self-surrender. Poverty of spirit asks for a concentrated commitment of all one's capabilities and powers in total dedication to service. It demands that we live on gifts - we receive-but it means also that we give. So true poverty of spirit leads to a sacrifice of external material poverty, in freedom from the tyranny of possessions, of having, and of pure and simple self promotions, in a simplicity of the life-style that lends to sharing, in solidarity with those who suffer poverty as a condition of life imposed by nature or injustice.

Why we should do this is simply because Jesus did it - it is evangelical poverty. He demonstrated this in his life and in his words.

He emptied himself to become a man. From cradle to the cross material poverty was the style of his life. His poverty was not the extreme of destitution or misery, but the lot of the majority of the people of his time and place. He chose to come into the world among persons who belonged to the pre-gospel poor of spirit, the faithful ones of the Lord, the Anawin, the remnant. Among these were many, his mother, Joseph and the majority of the apostles he called. Wealth to him was an obstacle to the Kingdom. His poverty of spirit, poverty of being, lead him to a poverty of having. He had no fixed income but lived from the help of others the women who provided for him from their own means. He had no place to lay his head. He was available to the poor and generous with his gifts, to bring the good news, to heal, to free, to serve. He was priced as a poor man at birth and at death - a pair of turtle doves to be presented in the temple and thirty pieces of silver for betrayal. He identified himself with the hungry, the immigrant, the naked, the homeless, the prisoner. He called the poor blessed.

This is the type of poverty we are called to profess. An interior poverty of being, which comes from an experience of God which brings us to serve and obey and be dependent upon God. But the only place we can do this is in and through our brothers. Thus evangelical poverty also calls for an external living in material poverty which brings us to a simplicity of life in solidarity with those who suffer non-evangelical poverty.

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. What does the vow of poverty mean for you?
2. What effect does evangelical poverty have on your relations with the other members of the community and the other persons involved in your apostolate?
3. What do you find most difficult about living evangelical poverty.

### Exercise:

- I. Page through the gospels and note down all the elements of evangelical poverty which are pointed out by the events of Jesus' life and his words, actions and attitudes.
- II. Write out your own descriptive definition of evangelical poverty.



## Article 20

## WITH HIS POOR

Our choice of poverty compels us to enter into a closer communion with Jesus and with the poor, to contest the excesses of power and wealth and to proclaim the coming of a new world freed from selfishness and open to sharing.

When faced with the demands of our mission and the needs to be met, we may feel weak and helpless. It is then that we can learn from the poor, especially making our own their patience, hope and solidarity.

## Scripture for Prayer:

1. Matthew 19, 16-22 "...sell your possessions and give to the poor. . ."
2. Matthew 6, 19-25 "...where your treasure is, there your heart is also. . ."
3. Luke 16, 9-15 "...no servant can serve two masters. . ."
4. Luke 16, 19-31 "...while Lazarus was in misery. . ."
5. Luke 21, 1-4 "...this poor widow has put in more than all the rest. . ."
6. Acts 3, 1-10 "...I have neither silver nor gold, but what I have I give you! . ."
7. 2 Cor. 9, 1-9 "...Everyone must give according to what he has inwardly decided. . ."

Church Document: Redemptor Hominis 21

## Reflection:

## SOLIDARITY

Jesus has told us that communion with the Father and communion with himself can only be accomplished through communion with our brothers. "I and the Father are one". "What you did to one of these my least you did to me". He has shown us by his words and his attitudes, that his predilection is for the poor.

Our profession of evangelical poverty brings us to an unequivocal option of "a closer communion. .with the poor". Our following of Jesus which involves evangelical poverty, demands of us a solidarity with the poor. Pope John Paul II in his visit to Mexico clearly emphasized this call. It is a love for the poor that is not inspired by social-economical or political reasons. It must be a "preferential love", based on the Gospel which is one of the aspects of "great vitality in religious life." It's model is the love which Jesus had for the poor. The deeper theological foundation for this preference is that Christ is in them. The littlest brothers, the poor, the needy, the marginalized are "those who reflect in their lives the sorrowing face of the Lord". The Holy Father told the workers in Mexico "If the spirit of Jesus dwells in us, we must have as our primary concern those who do not have sufficient food, clothing, housing or access to the benefits of culture." Above all the Holy Father supported his message with his personal witness among the poor and his clear denunciation of the lack of respect for the poor, the economic maneuvers that strip the poor of the little they have, the injustices that reduce them to inhuman levels.

Solidarity with the poor is more than feeling sorry for them or providing assistance in sporadic programs. Solidarity is defined as a certain unity, of opinion, purpose, interest, feeling, etc. It is an "understanding of" and a "feeling in" that is not just theory but carries with it a "commitment to". It is unity with commitment. The first requirement of solidarity is that we accompany in order to understand the life of the economically poor and the marginalized. We wish to be their friends and their allies in their grief, their failures, as well as in their joys and celebrations. We wish to share with them our whole life process which may be a human failure but, with the help of the Lord, a victory which He has promised to all those who believe in Him. We must live close to them so that mutually we can bring the good news to one another. We wish to receive them in our communities so that we may give witness with our simple way of life and thus animate them to continue having hope in the Kingdom that we are building together with the Lord.

Solidarity is to identify ourselves with the poor so that we can speak in their favor and defend their interests, because their favor and interests are ours. Everything must be done to advance the course of the poor, the abandoned, the marginalized. Solidarity brings us to share with the poor - ourselves, our desires, our dreams, our hope for the Kingdom, our love for the Lord in them, our human values and talents. It is also to share our material goods. So we will administer our material possessions as "the patrimony of the poor" and we "will not hesitate to make use of what (we have), even of what is necessary for (the community's) sustenance, to benefit God's poor" (Rule 14).

It is with and for the poor, among the poor and in solidarity with them that we find the "where" and "how" of the practice of Poverty of Spirit.

Father Johannes B. Metz shows the importance of this in order to give witness to the world. "If today poverty as it is lived by the religious orders is often no longer experienced as poverty at all, and is not even any longer perceived as a symbolic demand (for the reason that superimposed on the poverty of the individual religious is very often the wealth of the collective security of the religious community as a whole and the fact of its being well provided for), then taking the evangelical counsel of poverty literally shows taking a way: the way of standing by those who are radically poor and in misery because of the demands exacted of them by society."

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. How do you see the relation between "a life of voluntary poverty" and "the option for the poor"?
2. John Paul II has said:  
 "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of 'heaven. . . It is amazing how in this fundamental beatitude we find the whole essence of the Church's teaching on man and on a just society. When we listen to it for the first time, that may not seem possible, yet it is so."

How do you interpret these words?

What are the consequences for your life and work?

3. The Oblate Cross is the symbol of our perpetual consecration expressed by the vows. What does the crucified Christ teach us about the vow of poverty?

**Exercise:**

- I. Read the account of the Last Judgement in Matthew 25, 31-46.

List the works of mercy mentioned in the text: to give food to the hungry: to give a drink to the thirsty, to welcome the stranger, to clothe the naked, to comfort the sick, to visit those in prison

How many of these works have you personally fulfilled? With what attitude and motivation did you fulfill them? What opportunities do you have to fulfill each of these?

- II. Read Rule 70. Make a plan to understand, through study or consultation, the socio-economic conditions of the poorest people in your area.

## Article 21

## COLLECTIVE WITNESS

The Spirit prompted the first Christians to share everything. Under the influence of that same Spirit we hold all things in common. Our members adopt a simple lifestyle, remembering that it is essential for our religious institute to give collective witness to evangelical detachment.

We are to avoid all luxury, all appearance of luxury, all immoderate gain and accumulation of possessions. Subject to the common law of labour, and each in his own way contributing to the support of the community and its apostolate, we gladly accept the fact of not having at our disposal the comforts we might like.

**Scripture for Prayer:**

1. Matthew 6: 25-34 " . . . Seek first His Kingship over you."
2. Matthew 10: 6-10 " . . . The gift you have received, give as a gift."
3. Luke 9: 57-58 " . . . The son of man has nowhere to lay his head."
4. Luke 6: 29-35 " . . . Lend without expecting repayment."
5. Luke 12: 13-21 " . . . To whom will all this piled-up wealth of yours go?"
6. Acts 4: 32-35 " . . . Everything was held in common."
7. Phil. 4: 10-14 " . . . I have learned how to cope with every circumstance."

Church Document: Perfectae Caritatis 13, 15

**Reflection:****A SIMPLE LIFE—STYLE**

A simple life-style in our present moment of history is called for by four reasons which are closely connected one with the others.

**1. Example of Jesus of Nazareth:**

A simple life-style has traditionally been set forth as the model for Christians, especially for those who have chosen to live their Baptismal grace in a more radical way in the religious life. The example of Jesus was the sole reason given and the only one necessary. It continues to play a central role. From a consideration of His life in the gospels and the reflections of the other writers of the New Testament, poverty was presented as essential to the true follower of Christ. Today that example still draws people to it as it did St. Francis, if not in so dramatic a manner.

Today, other reasons are presented for the adoption of a more simple life-style by religious, either living among the poor or those who work in the more developed and technological areas. These motives find their fundamental source in an ever-widening understanding of what is central to the Gospels: the building of the Kingdom of God of Justice and mercy.

## 2. Personal growth through freedom from manipulation:

John Paul II in "Redemptor Hominis", (no. 16) wrote the following about manipulation:

"Indeed there is already a real perceptible danger that, while man's dominion over the world of things is making enormous advances, he should lose the essential threads of his dominion and in various ways let his humanity be subjected to the world and become himself something subject to manipulation in many ways - even if the manipulation is often not perceptible directly - through the whole of the organization of community life, through the production system and through pressure from the means of social communication."

If much theological thought has gone into the individual and the interpersonal dimensions of the human being, very little has been done in the third dimension until recently, that is, the human person as influenced and formed by his social-political-economic-cultural-religious environment. We only have to look at our possessions to ask: Why did I (we) buy such a TV, camera, pair of shoes, etc? How to become aware of the influences of my milieu on my style of life is central to any deep conversion to Christ.

**3. Ecological responsibility:** Nuclear energy and waste, disappearance of the rain forests of Indonesia and Brazil, the oil crisis, the starvation and hunger coupled with the expansion of multi-national food corporations, e.g., Philippines and Mexico, etc., have raised the consciousness of many people to the relationship between humanity and nature. How long can we continue to waste in such great quantities the goods of God's creation, especially when hundreds of millions are dying for lack of the minimum for existence? How widespread is the forgetfulness of the words of John Paul II: (RH: 16):

"The essential meaning of this 'kingship' and 'dominion' of man over the visible world which the Creator Himself gave man for his task, consists in the priority of ethics over technology, in the primacy of the person over things, and in the superiority of spirit over matter."

**4. Global responsibility for the oppressed poor of the world:** No longer can anyone who retains a minimum of humanity be indifferent to the massive suffering around the world. The assertion of FAO that with the best implemented plans there will still be five hundred million starving people in the world in the year 2,000 should make us think. The socio-theological decision of "letting-go", that is, of a simpler life-style, becomes more urgent. The struggle of the poor for their liberation, that is, a more human participation in the goods of this world, must be paralleled by the letting-go by the more privileged. My salvation is indissolubly linked with the better life for everyone in the "Global Village" in which we all live and are meant to live as brothers and sisters.

**Conclusion:** A simple life-style is a christian obligation for these four reasons: 1) the example of Christ Himself; 2) my own growth in freedom from the manipulation of my environment; 3) my responsibility as co-creator to preserve the universe for future generations; and 4) my responsibility that all God's children may share in the benefits which the love of the Father has given to them.

### Questions for Personal Reflection :

1. Do the habits of consumption in our community or in our personal lives always lead to an ever-increasing consumption that is blind and uncritical, or to a true freedom from the models of consumption in our society?

What are the consequences of these two possible attitudes of consumption to yourself and to the economic system of your country?

2. If we have living conditions superior to those of other, social classes, are we aware of the conditions which made these privileges possible?

What are the privileges we safeguard the most and why?

Do we place these privileges at the service of those who are underprivileged among our people?

3. How would a poor person classify our house, apartment, our building at the local, provincial or congregational level?
4. How would you develop a talk on the theme : "Live simply so that others may simply live?"

### Exercises:

After a personal or community reflection, fill out the following grid. Make a larger copy and place in a conspicuous place in your room or the community bulletin board.

WHAT CAN I (WE) DO TO SIMPLIFY MY (OUR) LIFE?					
	Food	Clothes	Energy	Recreation	Transportation
e a s i e r	1. 2.	1. 2.	1. 2.	1. 2.	1. 2.
d i f f o r c e u l t	1. 2.	1. 2.	1. 2.	1. 2.	1. 2.

## Article 22

## THE VOW

By our vow of poverty we commit ourselves to a life of voluntary poverty. We renounce the right to use and to dispose lawfully, on our own authority, of anything of monetary value.

All we acquire either through our personal industry or through the work of the Institute belongs to the community. Likewise, anything we receive as a pension, title to which has been acquired after first religious commitment, or as a subsidy or from insurance and other benefits, excepting what comes to us by way of inheritance, belongs to the Congregation.

## Scripture for Prayer:

1. Mark 11, 22-24 " . . . put your trust in God. . . "
2. Luke 16, 9-12 " . . . you can also trust him in greater. . . "
3. Luke 12, 22-31 " . . . seek out instead his kingship over you. . . "
4. Luke 10, 3-9 " . . . the laborer is worth his wage. . . "
5. Psalm 133 " . . . how good it is where brethren dwell at one! "
6. Acts 4, 32-35 " . . . everything was held in common. . . "
7. Proverbs 22, 9 " . . . for he gives of his sustenance to the poor. . . "

Church Documents:      Evangelii Nuntiandi 69  
                                  Perfectae Caritatis 13

## Reflection:

## BELONGING - TRUST - CORRESPONSIBILITY

The true living of the evangelical counsel of poverty is neither motivated by nor restricted to the fulfillment of the canonical prescriptions of the vow. The interior sentiments and values motivated by the Gospel do, however, have concrete expression in the use and sharing of the material possessions of the members and the community.

Our basic attitude towards this aspect of sharing will come from a lived value of "belonging". This is the value through which we feel that we truly are part of this community at all its levels, local, provincial and congregational. This "being a member" creates in me a relationship to all the other members. There is no situation of "me" and "them" but of "we". I am an Oblate. This expression doesn't permit me to ask then, what have "they" done for me, what do I need from "them". Rather, it calls me to a total sharing of my life, including material possessions and needs. So my belonging, rather than some legal determination, motivates me to give all that I receive to the community and in return to receive from the community what I need.



My sense of belonging creates in me a fundamental trust. I can firmly believe in the honesty, integrity, reliability, justice and concern for me that my individual brothers, my local, provincial and congregational communities have. This trust will be an expression of my trust in the providence of the Father, in His love for me. "Put your trust in God" (Mark 11, 22). My total surrender to the Lord can help me put feelings of insecurity aside. My trust in my community makes it unnecessary for me to be over concerned about my health, my old age, my material needs. Even if the community's possessions are limited, I know I will have the care and concern of my brothers. Private funds, the accumulation of material possessions, the excessive attachment to comforts, more than an infringement of a law, are a violation of this sense of belonging and my spirit of trust both in God and in my brothers.

Both belonging and trust generate in the community a corresponsibility and a mutual accountability. It is not enough to get the approval of authority to use and dispose of things of monetary value. Our poverty of spirit already discerns the need we have and the proper use of material goods, which are the patrimony of the poor, before we present petitions. Our corresponsibility will bring us to be concerned about the care, repair and proper use of material things as well. Machinery, houses, property can easily be ignored and deteriorate if an interest is not maintained by all. The acquisition, and use of funds is the concern of all. The law of labor requires us to put in a full day's work, to be professional in our mission tasks, to be worthy of our hire. The gift of sharing with the poor is also a part of this corresponsibility.

#### **Questions for Personal Reflection:**

1. Do I truly consider what I earn or receive as gifts, and my possessions, as really belonging to the community?
2. Do I share my possessions with my brothers and does my community share its surplus and possessions with the province?
3. How would I describe my sense of belonging as an Oblate?

#### **Exercise:**

- I. Make a study of the latest financial report of your province in order to have a better understanding of its financial resources, obligations and responsibilities. Read Luke 16, 1-15, the parable of the Wily Manager.
- II. Make a list of your present fears and insecurities regarding your present or future material welfare: How do these reflect on your sense of trust, belonging and commitment to the congregation?

**23. PERSONAL PATRIMONY:** Before his first commitment, a candidate entrusts the administration of his property and possessions to a person, or persons, of his choice; and he freely determines how they and their revenue will be used. Prior to making perpetual vows, each Oblate will make a civilly valid will disposing of his present and future possessions.

Any change in these arrangements, as well as any other decision concerning an Oblate's personal patrimony, requires the permission of the Major Superior. In an emergency, a will can be modified with the permission of the local Superior.

With the permission of the Major Superior in Council, a perpetually professed Oblate may divest himself of his present and future, possessions, with the consequences foreseen in the Church's common law.

**Rule 14.** Since the community's possessions may be considered the patrimony of the poor, they will be administered carefully. The community, however, placing its trust in divine Providence, will not hesitate to make use of what it has, even of what is necessary for its sustenance, to benefit God's poor.

**Rule 15.** The houses and Provinces will be solicitous in sharing their resources with Oblates working in poorer areas and in missions with fewer material goods.

**Rule 16.** Each Province will determine how the goods of its communities are to be administered and how the day-to-day needs of the members in their life and apostolate are to be met.

**Rule 17.** If, after making first commitment, an Oblate acquires property by way of inheritance, he will freely appoint an administrator and determine who will use such property and its income.

In determining how his personal patrimony is to be used, an Oblate may stipulate that any income produced there from may be added regularly to the capital.

All such arrangements are null if an Oblate leaves the Congregation. A clause to this effect will be added to the document.

## OBEDIENCE

### Article 24

### ATTENTIVE TO THE FATHER'S WILL

Christ's food was "to do the will of the one who sent him" (John 4, 34) He "became obedient unto death, even death on the cross" (Phil. 2, 8). Called to follow Jesus, we too listen attentively for the Father's voice so that we may spend ourselves without reserve to accomplish his plan of salvation.

#### Scripture for Prayer:

- |                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| 1. John 4, 34   | "...Doing the will of Him who sent me...is my food..."  |
| 2. John 1, 1    | "...The Word was in God's presence..."                  |
| 3. John 5, 16   | "...My Father is at work until now..."                  |
| 4. John 6, 38   | "...I have come...to do the will of Him who sent me..." |
| 5. John 6, 39   | "...It is the will of Him who sent me..."               |
| 6. John 17, 4   | "...By finishing the work you gave me to do..."         |
| 7. Matt. 26, 39 | "...Let it be as you would have it..."                  |

Church Documents:                      Perfectae Caritatis No. 14

#### Reflection:

### ABBA, FATHER

The central focus of the life of Jesus was his relationship with his Father. His experience of God as intimate, loving, totally giving, made him use the term "Abba", which he taught to his disciples. His loving response was one of listening and doing the will of Him who sent him. "Obedience" comes from the Latin "ob-audire", meaning to "listen to". So Jesus is seen as a listening, obedient person. His life, words and acts all reflect the mind of the Father. His ministry to the people and his final choice to remain with them even when death became inevitable, is a revelation of the total self-giving that is the love of the Father.

We usually think of "obey" as compliance with an order or request and it generally applies to the action itself. Hebrew has no such word but expresses the concept in the form of "listen to the voice of" or just "listen to". The WORD must first be received into the "soul" of the person. If the word is good for the one receiving it, it will almost be carried out automatically, and have good consequences. If a bad word is "listened to", it will have bad consequences. Because Adam "listened to the voice" of Eve, what he heard was not a good word and the consequences were evil. When one listens to the voice of God, blessings follow.

Obedience is a mystery of faith. It needs a prayerful and reverent approach. It is theology on its knees. Without prayer it is not possible, for it is through prayer that the heart listens.

The archetype of this prayerful listening is Jesus. In loving communion with His Father to the end, he calls us to listen to the same Word in our hearts, to be open, without reserve in our total self-giving to God's will.

As Jesus reveals the Father, so the Church reveals Jesus. The way will be the same- listening obedience that we too may have "the mind and heart of Christ". A life consecrated in obedience must be a listening life.

#### **Questions for Personal Reflection:**

1. Am I a listening person?
2. Do I try to listen to God in my prayer? in the voice of others?
3. How much do I really desire to have the mind of Christ?

#### **Exercises:**

1. List some of the times of "critical" decision in your life around options you had to respond to a call to a particular ministry. Take some instances from the Gospels where Jesus too had to make critical decisions. Do you see similarities in your openness to the Father?

**Article 25****LIVING THE FREEDOM OF THE GOSPEL**

By obedience we become the servants of all. Challenging the spirit of domination, we stand as a sign of that new world wherein persons recognise their close interdependence. Religious obedience is our way of making real the freedom of the Gospel, in common submission to God's will. (Gal. 5, 13). Our life is governed by the demands of our apostolic mission and by the calls of the Spirit already dwelling in those to whom we are sent. Our work makes us dependent on others in many ways; it requires real detachment from our own will and a deep sense of the Church.

**Scripture for Prayer:**

- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| 1. Gen. 12, 1-5    | "...Go forth from your father's house. . ."                   |
| 2. Exod. 3, 12     | "...Lead my people. . ."                                      |
| 3. Matt. 7, 17-21  | "...Any sound tree bears good fruit. . ."                     |
| 4. John 14, 15     | "...If you love me obey the command I give you. . ."          |
| 5. Matt. 20, 25-28 | "...Anyone who aspires to greatness must serve the rest. . ." |
| 6. Rom. 6, 16-19   | "...You became the slaves of justice. . ."                    |
| 7. Hebr. 5, 7-9    | "...He learned obedience from what he suffered. . ."          |

Church Documents:      Vat. II: Decree on Religious Freedom: no. 8: note 22

**Reflection:****ADAPTATION TO GOD'S WILL**

Obedience, like the truth, is meant to set us free. In a certain understanding of obedience this is hard to credit. Many religious see both realities in conflict, with obedience being given at the expense of freedom and vice-versa. But there is more to obedience than submission to the will of another; this is far too narrow an approach. In the Christian view of life, and especially in the religious life, obedience is a necessary concomitant of freedom. In fact freedom comes through the very act of obedience itself. At heart, the obedient, the "listening" person, seeks something more than his own way or will. He recognises and responds to something greater than himself, to the vision of a whole of which he is a part. He seeks to challenge the spirit of domination, both in himself and in the world, that lies at the root of all aggrandizement and injustice. He recognises that only a mutual approach to life is meaningful, a spirit of interdependence that unites himself and others around a common task and goal.

For the Christian and for the religious follower of the Gospel this task is clear: it is the task of reconciling all things to God in Christ. Obedience then is better described as an act of adaptability rather than surrender or renunciation. We adapt our will, our energies and our talents, to the extent required, in response to a call greater than our own personal needs. In this we find our own needs fulfilled because we recognise a common need.

To adapt oneself in this way will involve an element of surrender, of self renunciation, of giving-up, of giving all. But this adaptation is a positive, personal, creative action and choice: it is not the annihilation of the will but the use of the will to choose to be responsible to the call of God in the Spirit for the sake of those to whom we are sent.

Our "listening" obedience also springs from our awareness of our own limitations. Interdependence recognises that we do not have the "whole picture" nor all the skills, talents and gifts we might wish. The Spirit gives a variety of gifts and calls. We share in some of these and so do those whom we serve in our ministry. We are dependent on others, as they are on us. Listening, adapting, and acknowledging the gifts of others calls us to service to others. As this article points out, this will often require real detachment from our own will and the development of a deeper sense of Church.

Freedom then calls for judicious judgement and the obedience of a heart that is open to the needs of others. The Vatican II Decree on Religious Freedom points this out: "The Council calls attention to the paradox of the moment. Freedom today is threatened; Freedom today is itself a threat. Hence the Council calls for education both in the use of freedom and in the ways of obedience. When freedom is truly responsible, it implies a rightful response to legitimate authority." (No. 8, footnote 22).

Jesus in the Gospels is the model of the totally free person. He was free to give, to listen, to serve, to heal, even to die. Even in the moment when he seemed most unfree he could say, "I lay down my life of my own accord, no one takes it from me". He was both the suffering servant and the hope of the enslaved.

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. What recent experience have you had where working in a mutual dependence with others gave you a new sense of freedom?
2. In what ways does a response in obedience threaten your sense of security?
3. Are you really in touch with the gifts that others have to offer, both to you and to your ministry?
4. Think of one instance of choosing detachment where you really experienced freedom in your heart?

### Exercises:

1. Go through a daily newspaper or weekly news magazine. What items reveal the "spirit of domination" of which this article speaks? How much self-seeking, individual or corporate do the news items reveal? Do any of them reflect my own behavior? How can I challenge such trends through my own spirit of obedience? How do the unfreedoms they reveal contrast with the promised freedom of the Gospel?

## THE VOW OF OBEDIENCE

*The saints regard this vow  
 as the most important and essential of all. . .  
 By the vow of obedience  
 more is offered to God than by the other vows. . .  
 The closer something approaches the end  
 for which it was made, the more perfect it is;  
 and since it is obedience which brings the religious  
 more closely in union with the purpose of his Institute,  
 it is also the most perfect of the vows.  
 Obedience is the most meritorious of the virtues;  
 it is the bond of union in every well-ordered society;  
 indeed, the continuance of even  
 the best constituted bodies  
 depends on its faithful observance.  
 To produce such great good, however,  
 it must be the kind of obedience  
 which the saints have practised  
 and prescribed for others  
 in the various institutes  
 with which they have enriched the Church.  
 . . . Obedience in our Institute  
 will be prompt, humble, complete.*

*In following the directives of superiors  
 let our members keep before their eyes  
 God himself,  
 for it is out of love for him that they obey  
 and to him alone that they submit  
 in person of their superiors.*

— 1826 (and 1818) —

## Article 26

## OBEDIENCE AND INITIATIVE

As individuals and as a community, we have the responsibility to seek the will of God. Decisions which express this will are best reached after community discernment and prayer. In the superior we will see a sign of our unity in Christ Jesus; through faith we accept the authority he has been given, We will give our loyal support once a decision has been made and, in a spirit of cooperation and initiative, we will devote our talents, our activities, our very lives, to our apostolic mission in the Church. Any new undertaking which involves serious commitment on the part of the Congregation should be submitted to the competent religious Superior before proposing it to ecclesiastical or secular authorities. Likewise, before an Oblate accepts any new or additional tasks offered by ecclesiastical superiors or by others, he will ask permission from his own Superior.

## Scripture for Prayer:

- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| 1. Hosea 2, 16-25  | "...I will speak to her heart. . ."                             |
| 2. John 15, 1-8    | "...he who lives in me. . .will produce abundantly. . ."        |
| 3. Acts 4, 32-35   | "...the community of believers were of one mind and heart. . ." |
| 4. 2 Cor. 5, 16-21 | "...we implore you be reconciled to God. . ."                   |
| 5. Rom. 5, 12-19   | "...through one man's obedience all shall become just. . ."     |
| 6. Eph. 4, 4-13    | "...there is but one hope given all of you by your call. . ."   |
| 7. 1 Pet. 2, 1-10  | "...you are a people God claims for His own. . ."               |

## Church Documents:

Vatican II: The Church No. 4  
Renewal of Religious Life No. 14

## Reflection:

## COMMUNAL DISCERNMENT

At the heart of any Christian community is the mutual sharing by the believers in the life of the Spirit of Christ; present in each individual and in the whole body together. Religious obedience, then, must be understood as the calling of a community to respond to the will of God with Jesus. This can only happen if all in the community together listen to the movement of the Spirit within the community itself.



Our deepest experience of unity is our sharing in the mission of Christ, as sent from the Father. We all receive and share the selfsame mission, specified by the Congregation. As we deepen our awareness of this it begins to affect our family consciousness, so that it becomes our experience as a whole Congregation. Everyone is sent as the Father sent the Son, each with his unique experience, all bonded in unity by our obedience to the same Call. The deeper we go into this awareness of mission the more we find each other, and the closer we come to each other, united by an inner-experience.

Not only do we share the mystery of being called, we have each been chosen to join THIS community. . . a tremendous faith reality. We need to express this to each other. This truth brings an inner collectiveness and togetherness . . . a certain urgency and availability to respond to the needs of our world. It is not just a practical availability but a profound readiness and radiance.

The primary essential relationship is an intimate companionship with God. It is this that must take expression in apostolic activity and gives the Oblate a particular quality of presence. What develops is a global atmosphere of community which stretches way beyond physical presence. . . a strong sense of being present to each other around the world, united in being sent. We begin to think of the whole community (not just the General Administration), commonly seeking and searching the will of the Lord for us now.

Obedience finds its place in the context of communal discernment. Oblates, sensitive and obedient together, courageously facing head-on the signs of our times, and responding to the best of our ability to the large issues facing us today throughout the world.

Together, we discover what goes on in an obedient heart, and develop a creative docility in serving. We listen to God's voice in situations and people and relate our obedience to authority, in a climate of mutual dependence. Accepting the material and the human as mediating Divine experience we do not try to detour the dull, routine and monotonous . . . all are part of the revelation of God to us. This is not easy or automatic. In our brokenness there will always be a problem with obedience: there is not always continuity between God's will and mine. We have to know what we are giving over: to know mature freedom and want to give it over, in a submission born of realism. Obedience and faith are one.

The Superior establishes the fundamental contact with the Divine plan which calls all the members together. He should not be seen primarily as the person from whom authority proceeds, but rather as the focal point of the commitment of the entire community and of its desire to respond to the call of the Gospel today.

**Questions for Personal Reflection:**

1. How does my community normally go about discerning the will of God in specific challenges and issues?
2. What holds my community together? Is it an inner sense of unity around our common call or just an external function in which we all participate?
3. Have we honestly discussed the role of the Superior in our community? Can we appreciate that he is responsible not only to us but to the whole congregation and the Church also?

**Exercises:**

1. Individual and community discernment lie at the root of our spirit of obedience. Together with our Superiors we are all called to discern God's will. How familiar am I with the dynamics of the discernment process? What skills are needed to make such discernment fruitful? Is there anything I can do to further these skills, reading, study, actual involvement in a discernment process?

**Article 27****THE VOW**

By our vow of obedience we assume the obligation to obey the Holy Father and our lawful Superiors in any matter pertaining directly or indirectly to the observance of the Constitutions and Rules. The vow binds gravely when we receive from our Superior an order expressly given in the name of obedience.

**Scripture for Prayer:**

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| 1. Exod. 24, 3-8    | "...All that the Lord has said...we will heed..."                   |
| 2. Mark 4, 35-41    | "...who can this be that the wind and the sea obey him?..."         |
| 3. John 2, 5        | "...Do whatever he tells you"                                       |
| 4. Acts. 9, 1-9     | "...Get up and go...where you will be told what to do..."           |
| 5. I Cor. 12, 12-30 | "...the eye cannot say to the hand I do not need you..."            |
| 6. I Pet. 2, 13-17  | "...because of the Lord, be obedient to every human institution..." |
| 7. Phil. 2, 5-10    | "...He humbled himself, obediently accepting even death..."         |

Church Documents: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Chap. 1, Nos. 1 & 3

**Reflection:****LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY**

God speaks to us according to the basic christian reality of Incarnation. He formed a people and gave a covenant through Moses. He speaks to us in the Scriptures, through the Spirit within ourselves and in the events of our lives, and through our communities. But in a special way God speaks to us in the Church, through our Superiors, ecclesiastical and religious, who mediate his authority and that of the Christ he sent. Our vow of obedience is, at root, made to God, but also to those whom the Church calls to speak in His name.

As Oblates we commit ourselves radically to the service of God, the service of the Church and the service of the Vicar of Christ. For Ignatius of Loyola, Founder of the Society of Jesus, the service of God and of the Church had to be concretized in obedience to the Vicar of Christ, the Pope, He called the Jesuit vow of obedience to the Vicar of Christ "our principle and foundation-stone".

While our own Constitutions may not be so specific, the same intent is there in our commitment to serve God in the Church. (Const, 6 & 27). It is only this kind of commitment that will truly allow our service to the poor to be universal, with flexibility, mobility and availability.

One persistent tendency in the Church across the pages of history, and true also today, is that which seeks a perfection of true christian life while staying outside of or in opposition to the Church of Christ - living on the fringes of ecclesiastical teachings and institutions. No one questions the reality that those who have authority in the Church have at times abused this. Some of the great saints worked to remove such abuses, but they did so while still remaining loyal to the Church and keenly aware of its nature as an institution that had authority. We too must learn to distinguish between the existence of legitimate authority and the abuse of that which occurs from time to time.

Another trend that has continued throughout history is the desire for an invisible church, stripped of all juridical structures. It may indeed be possible to conceive of a few individuals who are so far advanced spiritually that they do not need structures. But for most of us the human 'condition' still prevails and any form of meaningful participation in, of being together for the sake of mission and of service, will require structures and a focus of authority if it is to be viable.

Reflection on this article should really challenge us. It is understandable that, at first, we may react negatively. The struggle for room to grow personally, to be able to exercise our own gifts, for better forms of participative decision-making, all of these may seem to be threatened at first reading. In writing of the necessity to fuse both the spiritual and juridical elements of Constitutions, Pope Paul VI had this to say: "If the principal charters of Institutes are to have stable roots and be imbued by the spirit of truth and an order which breathes life, then both the spiritual and juridical elements must be fused in them. It is for this reason that all must avoid producing a purely juridical text or one given over to exhortation"

Our Constitutions and Rules have a true spiritual dimension. But they also recognise that our call as a group is within the Church and for the service of the Church. We cannot do this honestly unless we recognise that we exist because of the authority of the Church and of the Vicar of Christ. We recognise this authority, not reluctantly but with reverence and a deep awareness that we have no genuine mission without it. We also recognise that our own legitimately elected and approved Superiors are also responsible to that supreme authority. We invite them to assume the responsibility of giving direction to our charism in these times and in consonance with the movement of the Spirit in the Church.

When they agree to assume this responsibility, they deserve, they have a right to our respect and to our obedience. Religious institutions are normative organisations, as distinct from utilitarian or coercive institutions. The members choose freely to live by the Gospel values incarnated in this group, neither compelled to do so by an authoritarian system nor by a desire to be like others in the group. We make individual choices to belong. In doing so we commit ourselves to a set of perennial christian values and to a way of living these out together. Our present structures offer us many ways of dialogue, discernment and

process towards decision making. But all these approaches can only lead to frustration if the basic commitment does not sincerely embrace the conviction that Christ has established legitimate authority in His Church for the service of his people and the sake of the Kingdom.

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. What does this vow mean to me today? Is it still a question of permission or is it one which truly urges me to seek God's will in and through my Congregation?
2. What events in my life help me to reflect on the vow? What are its concrete consequences in my ministry? Does my sense of consecration through the vow strengthen my sense of being called, sent, really working with Christ that the Father's will be done?

### Exercises:

1. This article calls me to live according to the Constitutions and Rules. Can I really do this if I do not know them, if I have not absorbed their true spirit? How often do I read them? Could I resolve to do so fully in the coming months?
2. In the past year or so, what decisions in my Province have I fully supported even though I did not agree with them personally? Make a list of those decisions and examine your attitudes to them in the spirit of obedience.
3. Reflect on your present attitudes to your Superiors? To what extent do you feel you may still have an authority complex? Think of some recent conversations, exchanges you have had with your Superiors. How did you feel after them?

**28. RULE OF LIFE.** Members will conform their lives and their missionary activities to the Constitutions and Rules of the Congregation. They will make them the object of their reflection in prayer and fraternal sharing.

**Rule 18****MAJOR DECISIONS - DISCERNMENT**

In major decisions and in matters concerning the life and mission of the whole community, there will be a process of discernment conducive to consensus.

**Scripture for Prayer:**

- |                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1. Romans 8, 14-17            | "...All who are led by the Spirit of God..."        |
| 2. I Corinthians 12, 4-30     | "...you...are the body of Christ..."                |
| 3. I Thesalonians 5, 12-22    | "...do not stifle the Spirit..."                    |
| 4. Wisdom 9, 13-18            | "...For what man knows, God's counsel..."           |
| 5. Numbers 11, 16-17<br>24-30 | "...as the spirit came to rest on them..."          |
| 6. Deuteronomy 29, 28-30, 20  | "...Choose life, then that you...may live..."       |
| 7. Galatians 5, 13-26         | "...The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace..." |

**Church Documents:**

Lumen Gentium 12, Gaudium et Spes 11

**Reflection:****DISCERNMENT**

Spiritual discernment opens a person, or a group, to the paschal mystery, because discernment is not necessarily knowing what to do, or being prudent in one's decision-making; it is rather following the call of God. This at times implies not really seeing everything clearly, but at the same time being sure that one has found the Lord, and thus, found also his call. Discernment gives second place to all other considerations and seeks above all to know God's will which is contained in his call to a person or group.

Discernment does not only mean reaching a good decision based on God's will, but the best decision possible; that is, the best possible act of love of God and neighbor. Furthermore, it is choosing between several good choices. Choosing between good and bad should not require discernment. In discernment we ask "which is the best possible choice; where is God to be found; what does God expect of us?"

Discernment, then, implies being very open and sensitive to God's movement in us and among us. It is the discernment of "spirits". The word "spirits" stands for all interior motions or movements that a person can have and feel, facing the options. These movements can be inclinations, desires, passions, emotions, impulses, sentiments, motives; they will include aversion, joy, sadness, anger, worry, fear, suspicions, ideas, insinuations, attractions, repugnance. . .Each person must ask the Lord in prayer for interior freedom, so as not to be guided by the motions produced by the evil spirit, not by his own spirit, but rather by the good spirit; by the Holy Spirit which has been given us.

To recognize the movements of the Spirit of Christ in us and in others and not be confused by other spirits, prayer is absolutely necessary. It is also necessary if one is to recognize His workings in daily events and in others. Prayer is absolutely essential to discernment; it has to be present before, during and after spiritual discernment.

If we are to discern, it is also important to know who we are; what one's identity before God is, for God will call us according to what we are: according to what he expects of us, and according to how he has called us in the past. God is terribly consistent in this, even though we must rediscover the novelty of the Gospel each time. For a religious congregation, its identity, the consistent element, is its charism. Knowledge and unity around one's charism is essential. . . This communion of the members is a prerequisite for discernment; it is the spring-board for any process of discernment, and it should determine the outcome since the group has to be faithful to God's call to BE and DO (cf. Theological Reflection - Article One).

Before one can know what God is calling an individual or a group today, all pertinent circumstances and data must be accounted for and examined. We must take history seriously, and answer questions posed by society, for events are the existential word of God; they are the signs of the times. Any technique that helps weigh all the evidence is welcome as long as finding God and his will is foremost. Time spent listening to one another is most valuable. The Holy Spirit will manifest himself through those who have been asking for his wisdom in prayer. The most striking new evidence will be found in this mutual listening.

Group discernment is a process that takes time and requires the involvement and cooperation of everyone. Communication at all levels is required. Spiritual discernment takes for granted the good will of everyone. Humility and serenity, openness and honesty on everyone's part is required and presupposed because we are searching together in freedom and trust; all are indifferent to everything, except God's will. Politiking and campaigning for a certain outcome is contradictory to the discernment process. It also presupposes the acceptance of the final option on every one's part and even an enthusiastic promotion of this option as Oblates responding to a new situation in the Spirit of Christ and our Oblate spirit.

A religious community that adopts a genuine discernment process in making important decisions will deepen its communion and commitment. Moved by the Spirit it will be following in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus as did the apostles and so many evangelical laborers. To live as Christians, therefore, means to live in communion with the Spirit of God; to be animated by the Spirit of Christ. Our "yes" to the Holy Spirit and His inspirations has to be renewed repeatedly as long as we are still in the desert of life and have not given our definitive "yes" to God which will be our pasch to his glorious presence.

#### **Questions for Personal Reflection:**

1. How do I find the will of God in my daily life?
2. When was the last time I obeyed my superior or my community to do God's will instead of my own will?
3. Do I feel that spiritual discernment would have to be part of a mature and healthy religious community?
4. Am I convinced that I need to discern individually in order to discern in community?

## Exercises:

- I. Reflect personally and do the following:
  - A. Write down where you think this community is now with respect to fulfilling the three prerequisites for communal spiritual discernment (prayer, common agreement around our charism, corporate commitment around the option).
  - B. List the concrete steps needed to initiate a process to move from where we are to fulfilling the prerequisites, if necessary.
  - C. Suggest what you can do as the best step to begin with right away to interest the community in an attitude of discernment.
  
- II. If you are having difficulty in getting together with the members of your community, consider the following in a spirit of discernment:
  - A. Do I really understand the other side?
  - B. Has the other side made a clear effort to understand my position?
  - C. If I am in the minority:
    1. Do I find that a significant majority disagree with me?
    2. Do I trust their considered judgement ahead of my own concerning what the community is called to here and now?
    3. To promote unity in the community, am I willing to carry out the majority's position with enthusiasm?
  - D. If I am in the majority:
    1. Is the majority significant; i.e., experiencing the same call as seen in the same reasons and motives and not just in the number of votes?
    2. Do I recognize that though the presumption of correctness goes with the significant majority, the minority voice may be showing us all something significant; e.g., what God may be leading us to some day in the future, or an area in which those in the minority will deserve consideration as they attempt to implement enthusiastically the group's decision?
    3. To promote the unity of the community, am I willing to accept responsibility for the majority's decision: not "what they decided", but rather, "what we decided"?

**Rule 19.** Superiors will consult those who are to be appointed to new responsibilities, giving them an opportunity to express their own views. While respecting the requirements of the common good, they will take an individual's personal gifts and callings into consideration before a decision is made.



## PERSEVERANCE

### Article 29

### A SIGN OF FIDELITY

Jesus “always loved those who were his own in the world,” and to the very end “he showed how perfect his love was” (John 13:1). His Spirit inspires all Christians to constancy in their love. The same Spirit develops in us a close attachment to the Congregation. Our perseverance is thus a sign of Christ’s fidelity to the Father.

We will help each other find joy and fulfillment in our community life and in our apostolate, supporting one another in our resolution to be faithful to the Congregation, whatever the circumstances which could provoke its dispersal or tempt us to withdraw from it.

### Article 30

Although the determination to persevere is already included in the three vows made and received in the Congregation, we add a vow of perseverance, thereby publicly attesting our attachment to our religious family and our definitive commitment to its mission.

#### Scripture for Prayer:

- |                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| 1. Psalm 62            | “...He only is my rock and my salvation. . .”                  |
| 2. II Timothy 1, 6-12  | “...stir unto flame the gift of God. . .”                      |
| 3. Philippians 3, 7-15 | “...my entire attention is on the finish line. . .”            |
| 4. Psalm 139, 1-18     | “...O Lord. . .you know me. . .”                               |
| 5. Luke 22, 39-46      | “...Pray that you may not be put to the test. . .”             |
| 6. 1 Peter 1, 13-21    | “...set all your hope on the gift to be conferred on you. . .” |
| 7. Mark 13, 32-37      | “...Be on guard. . .”  |

#### Reflection:

## PERSEVERANCE

Typically the vow of perseverance is spoken of as a matter of personal determination. However, unless our choices concerning Oblate life and ministry are seen in the light of God’s action in us, determination alone can prove inadequate. The vow of perseverance may be described as a call to growth in conscious awareness of God’s action in our lives and making purposeful choices accordingly. The decision to associate ourselves with the Congregation implies that we make Oblate goals and values our own. Our personal identity is then recognized in relation to the community, and our daily choices will either help to support or to erode this identity.

Often through the experience of apostolic service and community, we are led to an awareness of a spiritual power at work in us and in those we serve. These are the experiences of love, forgiveness, healing. . .the Paschal Mystery made real. Personal identity is no longer adequately sought in asking "Who am I?" Rather reflection tends more toward "Who is God, and what is God doing in my life?" Growth in awareness of God may lead to recognition of such things as how the mystery of salvation is being worked in our lives, or how God has used us as his instrument of proclamation in spite of personal image of self. Prayerful reflection may also lead to moments of desolation when the absence of God is felt or to know also the experience of the Magnificent story where God has looked upon personal poverty in great tenderness. The story of God's work varies greatly from person to person, yet we can not speak of personal identity without seeing ourselves as part of God's mercy. As members of a missionary congregation we stake our personal and corporate identity on this spiritual power at work in us and in those we serve.

The vow of perseverance is a call to fidelity in listening to the presence of God as mediated through Oblate life. The desire to listen to God requires that we distinguish those moments in ministry and community which dispose us to seek the Lord's will and those which hold us back. At times it is very obvious as to what holds us back from being the person the Lord calls us to be, and at other times it becomes difficult to recognize what keeps us from responding. Yet the inability to respond may well be the occasion for the Lord to heal areas of blindness. Community life and apostolic service may have their moments of pain which make it difficult to hear God's word spoken to us. Efforts to cover this pain can be a cause of blindness to God's presence in community or mission. Like Paul, we stand before God knowing what we should do and want to do, yet actual performance indicates something less. It is precisely in these moments that the vow of perseverance comes to our aid. The vow recalls to us the memory of God's fidelity shown throughout the history of the Congregation enabling us to turn to God and to one another in forgiveness and healing.

#### **Questions for Personal Reflection:**

1. How strong is my own attachment to the Congregation at this time?  
Has my involvement in ministry, in other forms of community experience, in personal friendships weakened my sense of belonging?
2. How do I show this sense of belonging in my words, actions, spirit of sharing, in my presence to others in my community or Province?
3. Do I experience my being an Oblate a strength or a liability in my ministry?

#### **Exercises:**

- I. Make a list of those Oblates you have known or know whose example or presence to you make you feel proud that you are an Oblate. How have they enhanced your sense of brotherhood and belonging?
- II. Is what is happening in the Congregation at large of continuing interest to you or not a matter of interests? Do you read Oblate publications? Read the recent issues of "Information" or of "Documentation" and catch up with what we as Oblates are saying and doing. Or list the new missions we have opened in the past ten years.

## TO BECOME ANOTHER JESUS CHRIST

*The missionaries ought,  
as far as the weakness of human nature allows,  
to imitate in everything  
the example of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
as chief founder of the Society,  
and that of his Apostles, our first fathers.*

*In imitation of these great models,  
one portion of their life will be given over  
to prayer, interior recollection and contemplation  
in the privacy of God's house,  
wherein they will dwell together in common.*

*The other portion will be entirely consecrated  
to outside works requiring the most active zeal  
such as missions, preaching, confessions,  
catechizing, directing young people,  
visiting the sick and prisoners,  
giving spiritual retreats and other similar exercises.*

*However, their chief concern will be,  
as much when out on missions as when in the house,  
to make progress in the paths  
of ecclesiastical and religious perfection;  
they will especially cultivate the virtues  
of humility, obedience, poverty, self-denial,  
the spirit of mortification, the spirit of faith,  
purity of intention, and others;  
in a word,  
They will strive to become other Christs,  
radiating everywhere the fragrance  
of his lovable virtues.*

## Section Two

### Article 31

### LIVING IN FAITH

#### UNITY OF LIFE

We achieve unity in our life only in and through Jesus Christ. Our ministry involves us in a variety of tasks, yet each act in life is an occasion for personal encounter with the Lord, who through us gives himself to others and through others gives himself to us. While maintaining within ourselves an atmosphere of silence and inner peace, we seek his presence in the hearts of the people and in the events of daily life as well as in the Word of God, in the sacraments and in prayer. We are pilgrims, walking with Jesus in faith, hope and love.

#### Scripture for Prayer:

- |                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| 1. John 1, 1-18   | "...The word became flesh. . ."  |
| 2. John 15, 1-10  | "...I am the true vine. . ."   |
| 3. Rom. 14, 7-9   | "...Both in life and in death, we are the Lord's. . ."                       |
| 4. Gal. 6, 14-18  | "...May I never boast of anything but the cross. . ."                        |
| 5. Phil. 1, 12-26 | "...to me, life means Christ. . ."   |
| 6. Phil 3, 7-16   | "...I have accounted all else rubbish, so that Christ may be my wealth. . ." |
| 7. I John 1, 1-4  | "...What we have seen and heard we proclaim. .to you. . ."                   |

#### Church Documents:

Redemptor Hominis: John Paul II: Chap. 2

#### Reflection:

#### UNION WITH CHRIST

An integrated personality is interiorly unified, and there is in it a force that ties together its different elements, prevents one from being attracted in all directions by a multiplicity of commitments or by the gap between one's convictions and one's behaviour.

The obstacles to interior unity are evident. Dispersion caused by different occupations can prevent living in peace, and a task fulfilled with dedication can engage the whole range of consciousness, to the detriment of other relationships in life.

The Oblate strives to realise the unity of his life through his union with Jesus Christ. Even though that demands from him some effort, and even though it favors his psychological equilibrium, he wants above all one who is always present, with whom he can live in ever deeper intimacy. To have this he must convince himself of the continual presence of Jesus-Emmanuel, "God with us", and be assured of his promise that, "I am with you till the end of times." (Matt. 28, 20).

The greeting of the angel to Mary, "The Lord is with you", expresses a truth that concerns each Oblate personally. With that presence of the Lord, whatever works he does, whatever their diversity, they are done with Christ and for him. They get their full meaning from his union with Christ. Even more deeply, the Oblate knows that he gets his life from the life of Christ. The divine life of Jesus, received in Baptism, gives a new meaning and an eternal value to what he does. He can say, "for me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1, 21), or, still more, "the life I live now is not my own, Christ is living in me." I still live my human life, but it is a life of faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2, 20). For Paul, union with Christ is so strong that he uses such expressions as "to put on Christ" (Rom. 13, 14) and he frequently says, "in Christ" or "in the Lord"

Union with Christ allows us to experience his intimacy as an increasingly renewed gift. Christ, present at all times in the life of his chosen ones, surrenders himself to them in many ways. Every encounter is a grace. It is a gift offered with respect by Christ. "Behold I stand at the door and knock" (Rev. 3, 20). He does not impose himself; he simply asks us to be open to welcome him whole heartedly, and to live with him.

To be united with Christ is to commit oneself to follow him, to be guided like him by love and mercy. Union with Christ is not achieved once and for all; it is a constant search. Along the way with him, man learns to know him better. We could view life as a pilgrimage seeking union with Christ. Being a pilgrim with Christ is to walk decidedly in his steps towards Jerusalem, to a baptism of fire and of love. (Luke 9, 51-12, 40-50) It is to go looking for the lost sheep to save it: it is to go ahead boldly, "with a look firmly set on the one who is the initiator of faith" (Heb. 12, 2): it is sometimes also to "go and meet him outside the camp, bearing one's humiliation" (Heb. 13, 13), which calls us to be with those we often reject and keep outside the camp. All these instances are different aspects of our pilgrimage with Christ: he is the one who first opens the way.

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. How do I reflect on the truths of faith to support my union with Christ?; on the certainty of divine life received in Baptism?; on the life of Christ who dies and rose again, a basic reality that must bear fruit?
2. How often do I reflect on my religious consecration? Am I totally committed to the following of Christ as my life project?
3. How about the imposition of hands received by many of us, that made us into the likeness of Christ in our service of humanity? Does my conviction of this reality help me live more fully with Christ?
4. To what extent can I apply to myself these words of Paul, "to do everything in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to the Father through him".
5. In his homily at the beatification of our Founder, Pope Paul VI called him "a man passionately devoted to Jesus Christ". Does that same passion animate me?

**Exercises:**

1. Start with the assertion of the Preface to our Rule; the task of the Oblate is to tell me “who Jesus Christ is”. In order to make him known to the world, we need to know him personally and live in his intimacy. Listen to the Gospel petition, “we would like to see Jesus”, as if it were addressed to you today. Reflect on a few recent experiences in your ministry and ask how you have perceived in others the need they have of Christ; how have you made him known to them through your speech and your life?
2. Draw up a plan for reading and re-reading the Gospel, aiming solely to get to know Christ, just as if you were listening to a friend telling you about himself.

## Article 32

## OUR LIFE A PRAYER

It is as missionaries that we worship, in the various ways the Spirit suggests to us. We come before him bearing with us the daily pressures of our anxiety for those to whom he sends us (cf. 2 Cor 11:28). Our life in all its dimensions is a prayer that, in us and through us, God's Kingdom come.

## Scripture for Prayer:

- |                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| 1. 2 Cor. 11, 28-29      | "...my anxiety for all the churches. . ."                     |
| 2. John 17, 9: 20-23     | "...I do not pray for them alone. . ."                        |
| 3. Hebrews 2, 10-18      | "...he had to become like his brothers in everyway. . ."      |
| 4. Matthew 25, 40-45     | "...as often as you did it for one of my least brothers. . ." |
| 5. Colossians 4, 2-4     | "...pray perseveringly, be attentive to prayer. . ."          |
| 6. Philippians 11, 27-30 | "...it is your privilege to be Christ's past. . ."            |
| 7. 1 Cor 9, 19-27        | "...I have made myself all things to all men. . ."            |

Church Documents:

Redemptor Hominis 15, 16, 17

## Reflection:

## LIFE AS PRAYER

There are many ways of understanding our life as prayer. It is defined as "being in the presence of God", searching for God in all things, "to find God in action", "discovering God in the Sacrament of the world, of our brother", "making of one's life a pleasing cult to God. . ." etc.

If we fix our eyes on Jesus, the apostle (Hebr. 3, 1), perhaps we will find a specifically apostolic way to make our life in all its dimensions a prayer so that the Kingdom may come to us and through us.

The Life-Prayer of Christ. The life of Jesus is permanent communion. A loving communion with the Father, such that he says that he is identified with him. "He who sees me, sees the Father". "The father and I are one". Merciful communion with those whom the Father has given to him, to the point of saying that he is identified with them. "As often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did for me." "They and I are one." Redeeming communion, since it is communion which fulfills the loving will for the Father responding to the needs of his brothers, paying, by his total surrender, the price of liberation and of the arrival of the Kingdom. (Heb. 2, 10-18).

Saint John in his gospel helps us to understand more deeply the loving communion of the One sent with Him who sent him. "I am never alone. . ." "My words are not my own. . ." "My works are not mine. . ." He fulfills perfectly the definition of the Apostle valid in his time: "The One sent and He who sent him are one."

The Synoptics help us to see the merciful communion of Jesus, manifest by the "shuddering of his innermost being", his life each day more committed to the despised, his preference for the most needy. His gaze tells us how the Father sees us, sick and as sinners, victims of Satan, who keeps us oppressed. Jesus also tells us how and where he sees the presence of the Kingdom and that of the Prince of this world, the action of the Father and that of the devil in the hearts of persons.

In the synagogues on the sabbath days, is perhaps where the triple component of his life of communion is more clearly manifested. The people unite to celebrate the God who has a heart of mercy and because of that hears the cry of a handful of slaves, and frees them. Jesus, celebrating this God of mercy, when he trembles seeing the sick in the assembly, is most in communion with the Father. Thus he is less in control of himself and dominates himself the least. He intercedes, touches, acts, heals, frees, accepting to commit himself, to be rejected, condemned, as he accepts the risk of being used and manipulated. Jesus consciously pays the price of the love, that liberates, confronting all the powers of Satan, prince of this world. His entire life is communion so that the Kingdom of God may come.

Times of intimate prayer nourish the permanent communion of Jesus with the Father in his action, Jesus is nourished by the will of the Father like the birds of the air. But also, in his very action, Jesus manifests this intimate communion spontaneously "in the various ways the Spirit suggests": Joy through the consciousness of his mission (the Spirit of God is upon me - Luke 4); thanksgiving for the fruits of the mission ("I give you thanks, Father. . ." - Luke 10, 21), praise and petition for "those whom you have given me" (John 17), but also supplication in the apparent absence of God in this world ("Say, Father. . . may your Kingdom come"). And even more the intimate communion of Jesus is manifested in his capacity to see the finger of God, the Father, acting as much in human hearts as in the world and his capacity to act with Him and like Him, whatever it may cost. The life of Jesus is permanent communion. It is prayer: intimate loving union.

Companions of the life and mission of Jesus. Like that of the Apostles (Art 3 - CC & RR; Mk. 3, 14), our vocation is a call to a companionship of life and of mission with Christ living and present. ("I am with you always" Matt. 27, 20). This companionship can bring about the unification of our life, transforming it, like that of Jesus, into communion so that "the kingdom may come to us and through us."

To this end, we have to make our own this threefold component of the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

The loving communion with Jesus living and present is the basic dimension. To follow Christ is to go with Someone, who always precedes us, accompanies us, who never leaves us alone. We are companions of Jesus living in the history of humanity, Lamb of God, Lord of History. Our life in all its dimensions is living communion with them who first loved us and is always with us.

This state of communion is not always on the level of explicit consciousness. Rather, habitually, it is, as it were, "below conscious" within the heart, right below the conscious when it is busy. It spontaneously blossoms in the field of consciousness when it is not busy. An example of this state of communion which transforms us interiorly is that of a



woman, a faithful, dedicated and ever loving wife, working beside another wife, also faithful and dedicated, but whose love is lukewarm. They do not live nor work in the same manner. It is easy to know and to notice that the woman in love works with a heart filled with a presence which transforms it even gives it another way of thinking, of seeing, of acting, of suffering. All of her being says. "I am never alone."

This permanent communion with Christ necessarily is transformed and prolongs itself into a merciful communion towards all those who are inseparable from Him. He gives them to us to be seen, with him and as he sees them. Giving us his "listening heart", and even more the capacity to see his presence and the presence of the Father in persons and events. Christ gives us the capacity to see with him and like Him and to love with him and like him. Spontaneously like the loving wife, either we see everything with Jesus present or we turn towards him to ask him how he lives, sees, loves. . .

Christ makes us see the conditions of life in this world with Him and as He sees them.

The interior transformation that the loving communion with Jesus brings about causes all of life to be a pleasing worship to God. Christ lets us react with and like Him and with his gaze and merciful heart. He takes us to complete commitment. To do the will of the Father is to live a life that is willing to pay the price of love in a struggle against the forces of evil that oppress the sons of God. It is a redemptive communion.

### **Questions for Personal Reflection:**

1. Do your strong moments of personal prayer help you to continue your prayer in your action?
2. Have you experienced this type of prayer in action which helps you to see the events and people of each day with a vision of faith?
3. What have been some of the diverse inspirations of the Spirit which have helped you to praise the Lord?

### **Exercises:**

- I. Spend a period of prayer over the experiences of a particular day.
  - a. Choose a text of scripture - spend some time letting the word of God enlighten your life.
  - b. Gather together the experiences which you had during the day, or the week or in a concrete event. Think of the events, the persons, the struggle or outcomes.
  - c. Ask for the light to see things as God sees them.
  - d. Ask to understand and/or accept God's will in that day or event.
  - e. Praise, thank, pardon, ask pardon.
  - f. Renew confidence in God.
- II. At the end of a week make a list of the anxieties that you have which arise from the needs or sufferings of your people. Bring each of these in prayer to the Lord.

## Article 33a

## SPIRITUAL RESOURCES I

The Eucharist, source and summit of the Church's life, is at the heart of our life and action. We will live such lives as to be able worthily to celebrate it every day. As we participate in its celebration with all our being, we offer ourselves with Jesus the Saviour; we are renewed in the mystery of our cooperation with him, drawing the bonds of our apostolic community ever closer and opening the horizons of our zeal to all the world. In gratitude for this great Eucharistic gift, we will seek the Lord often in his sacramental presence.

## Scripture for Prayer:

1. Acts. 2, 42 " . . .they devoted themselves. . .to the breaking of the bread. . ."
2. Rom. 8, 37-39: 12, 2 " . . .we are more than conquerors. . ."
3. I Cor. 5, 6-8 " . . .let us celebrate. . .with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. . ."
4. Col. 2, 6-7 " . . .continue to live in Christ Jesus, the Lord. . ."
5. Eph. 3, 14-21 " . . .may Christ dwell in your hearts. . ."
6. I Cor. 11, 23-26 " . . .This is My Body. . ."
7. col. 3, 1-4 " . . .your life is hidden now with Christ in God. . ."

Church Documents: Vatican II: Sacrosanctum Concilium 47: 48  
Lumen Gentium 34

## Reflection:

## THE EUCHARIST

Since apostolic times, the primary spiritual resource that has consistently nourished all Christians has been the celebration of the Eucharist.

We live in the existential context of being sinful people and yet redeemed. We will come at some time in our life to ratify one or other state. We hope, with the gift of the Spirit of Jesus, to live out our redemption in faith, to really choose to belong to God's new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5, 17). It is, above all, our participation in the Eucharist that symbolizes, confirms and strengthens that option.

Our own call as Oblates is not only to follow Christ but to be one with him in his self-offering or oblation to the Father.

Every moment of the life of Jesus is one of redeeming love, of choiceful self-emptying, to come to fullness of life in God. Like him, with him and in him, we are also called to this obedience to the Father - to choose to be in God or fall off into nothingness. To "do this in memory of Me" is to make that radical choice for life in God. In the Eucharist we join Christ in giving our unqualified 'yes' to all that God would be for us. Jesus is God's loving Word to us, His healing Word, His affirming Word, His Word of Love. His life is a constant invitation to us to become an everlasting gift to the Father.

The Eucharistic meal is a celebration that weaves together sadness with festivity. It calls us to face life in depth, in faith and in all its reality. It is sad because life is as yet unfinished, incomplete, ever yearning, an apparent death. It is festive because it celebrates hope in all life, and it enjoys, in faith, both presence and belonging. In the Eucharist, the moment we celebrate is death, but the meaning is life.

The Eucharist is also the symbol of our oneness in redemption, of our common union, our communion. As 'Lumen Gentium' says, "in the sacrament of the Eucharistic bread the unity of all believers is both expressed and brought about" (no. 3). It is the Eucharist that gives reality to that we call Church; in it we can most truly say that Christ founded a church. He realized it first in himself, in that self-oblation that brought about our reconciliation. It is that oneness with him that we both express and seek when we gather around the table in his name.

To take part in the Eucharist is to allow ourselves to be taken into communion with the Lord and with one another. "Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body, for we all participate of the same loaf" (1 Cor. 10, 17).

#### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. How much time and attention do I give in preparation for the Eucharist? Do I experience its celebration as a daily renewal of my own oblation?
2. Does the community celebration of the Eucharist provide me with the opportunity to share my own reflections on God's word with my brother Oblates? Do I welcome such an opportunity?
3. Do I see the Eucharistic celebration as the focal point of daily life in community or of Oblate meetings and gatherings?
4. Do I see the celebration of the Eucharist as the occasion and the invitation for reconciliation with my brother Oblates?

#### Exercises:

- I. Reflect on how, over the years, my attitude to the Eucharist has changed. How far have I moved from viewing it as a personal encounter to seeing it also as a truly communitarian celebration? Do I welcome the opportunity to concelebrate?
- II. When is the last occasion I took time to prepare a really meaningful liturgy of the Eucharist for my community, taking care with the choice of readings, music, setting, etc? Could I do this soon again for some oblate occasion or gathering?

The Word of God nourishes our spiritual life and apostolate. We will not only study it diligently but also develop a listening heart, so that we may come to a deeper knowledge of the Saviour whom we love and wish to reveal to the world. This immersion in God's Word will enable us to understand better the events of history in the light of faith.

The liturgy of the Hours is the prayer of the Church, the spouse of Christ. In it we praise the Father for his wonderful works and invoke his blessing on our mission. Each community will ordinarily celebrate part of the Hours in common. Where possible, the faithful will be invited to join us in this public prayer of the Church.

In the prolonged silent prayer we make each day, we let ourselves be moulded by the Lord and find in Him the inspiration of our conduct. Following our tradition, we devote an hour each day to mental prayer, part of which is spent together in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

#### Scripture for Prayer:

- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. Matthew 4, 4         | "...not on bread alone is man to live..."                 |
| 2. Luke 12, 11-12       | "...do not worry about...what to say..."                  |
| 3. John 17              | "...that they may be one in us..."                        |
| 4. Rom. 8, 15-16: 26-27 | "...the spirit himself makes intercession for us..."      |
| 5. Phil. 2, 5: 12-13    | "...Your attitude must be that of Christ..."              |
| 6. Heb. 7, 24-25        | "...Jesus...has a priesthood which does not pass away..." |
| 7. Isaiah 55            | "Come to me...that you may have life..."                  |

#### Church Documents:

Sacrosanctum Concilium: 51, 52, 83, 84  
Optatam Totius: 5, 13, 18

#### Reflection:

### PRAYER

How do we, especially in these times, respond to the invitation of Jesus that, "we should always pray and not become discouraged", (Luke 18, 1)? How can we develop a life-style that is consistently prayerful, one that can help us become a presence decisive for the Kingdom?

The First Letter of John invites us powerfully to reflect on how we too can witness to what we have heard and seen and touched — the Word of Life. How do we reflect on and harmonize all that we experience and bring that to the mind and heart of Christ?

Before we can develop such a presence we must learn to live in the Presence. Paul invites us to do this when he writes, "Since you have accepted Christ as Lord, live in union with him. Keep your roots deep in him, build your lives on him and become ever stronger in you faith" (Col. 2, 6-7).

The ability to do this is the gift of the Spirit. For our part, it is a question of desire, the wish that God will transform us inwardly, by a complete change of heart, tht we can 'see' life with the inner eye of love.

Prayer seeks two things: a deepening experience of a loving God at the ground of our being, and a gradual sharing in the Divine Consciousness. It should begin with the child's sense of wonder, wonder at the love that is at work in us and in our world. Wonderment is really being open to meaning.

Too often, we find our prayer concerned with purpose, a calling on God to help us achieve a goal we have ourselves set. It should, rather, be focused on what is happening in our lives, and how the Spirit invites us to see God at work in such events. For the focus of prayer is not purpose but meaning.

This is far from adopting a passive stance. It takes great courage to let go and let God be God for us. It can be a fearful process. For it invites us to stand outside ourselves, in a form of 'ecstasy', to experience a real loss of control, to positively hand over our life to God. As Jesus did, we mus be prepared to lose our life to find it.

Prayer seeks to find meaning rather than make it. It is the basic expression of our belief that God loves us and that we do trust Him. Without such trust, we shall always be tempted to put our own interpretation on life's events; we shall consistently find ourselves asking God to deliver us from that which is meant to call us to fuller life in Him.

Our call to be men of prayer, of the Word in our life, invites us to take the reality of our life, the affective depths where we are most present to ourselves, and find God at work there.

To do this we need, consistently, to choose sacred time and sacred place, that we may discern in the Spirit, the gift that God is now giving, the Word that is now being spoken.

To live without prayer, is, as T.S. Eliot puts it, "to have had the experience and missed the meaning."

**Questions for Personal Reflection:**

1. How much time do I spend each day in prayer? Is that time a priority among my many activities?
2. To what extent is my prayer directed to discerning God's Word to me in the events of my day? Do I value making an examen of consciousness to discern the movement of the Spirit in my life?
3. Is the Liturgy of the Hours still a meaningful prayer for me? Do I sometimes pray the Hours together with other Oblates? Do I spend any time in shared prayer with the Scriptures?
4. Do I sometimes have a spiritual director with whom I can discuss my prayer life?

**Exercises:**

- I. Place yourself with Jesus in some Gospel setting. Share, with as much imagination and feeling as you can, his experience there and share your own with him.
- II. Ask another Oblate to pray with you from Scriptures and then share the fruit of this experience.
- III. In time of trial or struggle or doubt, make an 'Emmaus Walk' with another oblate and try to experience the presence of Jesus with you.

Examination of conscience is important in helping us become aware of the ways in which the Lord calls and is present to us throughout the day. In this examen we evaluate the faithfulness of our response to him. Charged with proclaiming the joy of God's pardon to the world and acknowledging our own sinfulness, we will have frequent recourse to the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

#### Scripture for Prayer:

- |                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1. 1 Kings 3, 5-12            | "...Give your servant an understanding heart. . ."         |
| 2. Isaiah 55, 1-11            | "...Listen, that you may have life. . ."                   |
| 3. Wisdom 7, 7-10:<br>9, 1-12 | "...I pleaded and the spirit of wisdom came to me. . ."    |
| 4. Romans 8, 1-13, 18-27      | "...The spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed you. . ." |
| 5. 1 Cor. I, 17-25; 2, 10     | "...The spirit scrutinizes all matters. . ."               |
| 6. Galatians 2, 20-21         | "...Christ is living in me. . ."                           |
| 7. 1 John I, 1-7, 4, 1-6      | "...Do not trust every spirit. . ."                        |

#### Church Documents:

GS 17, 24; UR 17; PO 17; AG 4, 13, 24

#### Reflection:

### SPIRITUAL AWARENESS

God loves us as persons, as individuals and not only as members of a group. In fact, God is the only one that has loved us from eternity as individuals and has willed us to be as we are. He knows each one of us by name; he never for one instance is absent-minded about us. His thoughts are thoughts of peace, kindness, reconciliation. He is so fond of each one of us that he is always near; he is within us. He is at the center of our being where each one of us is his real true self. God never leaves us alone; he does not let us walk through life alone.

God is constantly "nudging" each one of us in the special personal way that he has chosen to relate to each one of us. He inspires, he illuminates, he strengthens, whispers, pushes, holds back, etc., constantly to help us along the way. We are all aware of this interested presence of God in our life, but our awareness is somewhat unconscious. If one could become more consciously, more profoundly aware of God's movements and inspirations at every moment, one could also respond more adequately to his love. If one could recognize that good inspirations come from him, one could be more alert in taking up these suggestions he is giving.

It is possible to sensitize oneself to this constant loving presence of God in one's life. I could ask him to help me see things as he sees them. And, of course, I will have to thank him for all his help in the past and in the present. Then one could review all the events of the day to see where the Lord showed his presence in a special way, even if I was not aware of it at that moment, and was showing me the way to be and to do. That was and is his call to me. When I am in a similar circumstance again, it is probable that I will be more aware of God's presence and motion in me at that very moment and able to go with his shove or hold back with his pull. If I keep up a daily review of the events of each day, I will be more able to find God more often during the day.

This exam of consciousness will also make me aware of where I have failed. But this is not its main purpose. It is not intended that a person spend a lot of time on the negative aspect (what I have done wrong), but rather on the positive aspect (when, where, how was God present to me in a special way today so that I can better respond to his love tomorrow). One will be aware, nevertheless, of failings. If a failing surfaces, one should simply ask God's forgiveness confidently without dwelling on it, and then go on to the positive aspect again, since this is the main objective of spiritual awareness.

Probably the most important element of being spiritually aware is maintaining a high level of trust and confidence in God. "If God is with us, who can be against us"; "what can separate us from the love of Christ?" (Romans 8, 31, 35). The christian has plenty of reasons to hope. He can say, "tomorrow will be a better day and if not tomorrow, then it will be better because I am the object of God's love." One should never let a thought or feeling contrary to this trust dwell very long in one's heart. That would be un-christian. I should not "be sad as those who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4, 13).

Time spent in becoming aware of God's ever-loving interested presence is real prayer for it takes God seriously wherever he is to be found; it makes one aware of who one is and how the Lord sees one; it responds to God in the daily historical events of one's real world - it tries to invent nothing - it responds to God; it lets God propose and one listens with his heart, with eyes of faith and with trust.

But one must not forget that this prayer period, which is becoming spiritually aware, needs other types of prayer, especially contemplative prayer. Contemplative prayer helps one keep his gaze fixed on the Lord and not on oneself. In turn, the examen of consciousness helps contemplative prayer keep its feet on the ground, for this daily particular examen is finding God in all things; in the real things of one's real life.

One of the most probable and immediate results of my awareness of god's presence will be confidence, joy, peace at the bottom of my heart, satisfaction; it will also be a lasting result.



### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. Is my daily life congruent with who I am before the Lord?
2. Do I respond to what the Lord inspires in me, or do I do all the thinking and planning by myself alone?
3. Do I respect the necessary and healthy pluralism in my community/province?
4. What is my personal call within the corporate Oblate call?  
What can I deduce about my personal spiritual identity?  
Who am I before the Lord, how does God see me and what does he expect of me specifically, individually?

### Exercises:

- I. For two weeks spend at least 15 minutes daily making the following examen of spiritual awareness, and continue it if it helps.
  - A. Ask for light from the Lord to be able to see yourself as he sees you. Recall that you are a mystery that only he fully comprehends, and that you need his help to see yourself truly, objectively.
  - B. Be grateful to the Lord; you know your own poverty and that all you have is a grace of God. In this exercise perhaps you will see with greater clarity what you have received from the Lord. Probably, this will come as a spontaneous reaction to your awareness of his love.
  - C. Review what has been happening in you; how the Lord has been working in you; what he has been asking.  
Questions you can ask yourself are: Have I been listening? Do I let the Spirit move me (cf. Romans 8, 14)? What feelings, moods, attractions, motivations influence my life? Can I recognize a certain pattern of God's action in my life?
  - D. Contrition and sorrow. We are sinners in need of conversion. Repent for your lack of honesty and courage in responding to the call of God.
  - E. Look at the future without losing heart and without fear. The christian person is a person who hopes always (cf. Phillipians 3, 7-14).
- II. See Jesus responding to God's movements in John 2, 1-12; Matthew 11, 25. Write down your observations. If you do this in a group, share your observations with the members of the group.
- III. How aware am I as to where my moods, impulses, desires, wishes, ideas, thoughts, feelings, inclinations, motivations, attractions, repugnance, invitations, insinuations, come from and where they lead me?  
Do I attribute them to a call from God, from myself (egoism, vainglory, power, prestige, possessions, pleasure) or from the evil spirit (temptation to sin)?  
Do I connect them to my religious life-path; to my personal identity; to my personal call from God, repeated each moment of my life?
- IV. In what type of situation, place, circumstance, creature (e.g., people, music, nature, etc.) do you find God more easily and feel more sure of his presence and his call? What is your image of God? What is your world-vision?

## Article 34

## SUFFERING AND PENANCE

Faith moves us to accept for love of the crucified Lord our personal sufferings, the various trials of the ministry and the daily demands of community life (cf. 2 Cor 12:10). Moreover, we will heed the invitation of the Lord when he calls us to practice other forms of voluntary penance.

## Scripture for Prayer:

1. Isaias 52:13–53:12 “...suffering servant...”
2. Col. 1:24 “...complete the suffering of Christ...”
3. Mark 8:31–33 “...the Son of man had to suffer much...”
4. Luke 9:23–26 “...take up your cross...”
5. Luke 6:22–23 “...blest shall you be when men hate you...”
6. 2 Cor. 11:16–33 “...imperiled in the city, in the desert, at sea...”
7. Psalm 73 (72) “...I suffer affliction day after day...”

Church Documents:      Presbyterorum Ordinis 22  
                                  Evangelii Nuntiandi 1, 6, 8, 10

## Reflection:

## THE CROSS AND MISSION

In this life, everyone suffers; no one escapes this fact of human existence. But the faith response of a Christian is sure and confident: — No panic, no despair. At the same time, people do not go looking for suffering, as trials and difficulties come our way without our seeking them out. (cf. Matthew 6:34).

All the more so then, are we, missionary Oblates to the poor and abandoned, called to accompany Christ as He continually seeks to reach to those who most suffer in today's world: — the sick, elderly, confused and skeptic youth, the oppressed workers and poor in 3rd world and other areas.

We are willing because of Christ's love in us, to join our own personal and ministry-related set-backs and trials, even infirmities, to the sufferings of Christ for the redemption and liberation of the people and of the world to whom we have been sent (Colos. 1:24). The Oblate unites himself to Jesus of Nazareth, weak and defeated on His cross, to rise with Him, victorious over sin and death, and the results of sin, in His resurrection. (Rom. 6:3–13). As disciples of Christ, we see the mystery of the cross continuing on in our own lives and in the lives of so many peoples in today's world; — and we try to unite ourselves to the suffering Christ for the redemption of all mankind. (Is. 53:4–5B, 10–12)

Just as Jesus of Nazareth gave of himself totally to the Father, assuming our dramatic human condition, and did not swerve away from laborious consequences and implications of this mission so too we. Jesus was very clear and explicit that He would have to suffer (Mark 8:31–33), and has promised us the same.

In the Gospels, Jesus openly promised us that the servant, the disciple is not above the Master (Matthew 10:24–25). If we follow Him, the same fate awaits us (in different degrees), the Cross (Luke 21:10–15). He insists that his followers, his disciples “take up the cross and follow me” (Luke 14: and Matthew 16, 24–55). “Blessed are you when you are persecuted” because of the Gospel and justice (Matthew 5:10–11, Luke 6:22–23)!

The Apostle Paul perceived the mystery of the total conformity of the disciple to the Master. He knew that he had been sent as a herald of the Gospel, and exactly because of this, he suffered (2 Tim. 1:11–12A). He realized that when he (Paul) was weakest, humanly speaking, was exactly when he was the strongest (2 Cor. 12:5, 9–10), and most liable to put across the true Christ and not himself (2 Cor. 4:5).

Paul was weak, worried and fearful at times (1 Cor. 2:3). He suffered in and because of his ministry (2 Cor. 11:16–33). He knew that humn frailty (2 Cor. 12:7–10) and setbacks were to be expected (2 Cor. 4:7–10). Even setbacks caused by the people and authorities in their lack of understanding or willingness to accept Christ's gospel. He even foresaw this and warned Timothy that those who really desire to fully live in Crist would be persecuted (2 Tim. 3:1–12). He also forewarned the Christians of Thessolania of the price they would have to pay for following Christ (1 Tes. 3:1–4).

But, nothing stopped Paul. He seemed to thrive and even grow stronger in the face of difficulties. He put his trust in the Lord and not in himself (2 Cor. 1:9–10). He did not remain discouraged or disanimated for long (2 Cor. 4:1), because he knew that his strength came from the Lord (2 Cor. 3:5B).

The Oblate makes his own, these sentiments of Jesus and of the Apostle Paul, because he knows and accptas through faith, that there is no other road for the disciples of the Lord (John 15:18–27). We must bear witness: if the grain of wheat doesn't die to itself, it just doesn't do anything at all for anyone, it doesn't help anyone (John 12:24).

Perserverance in the face of difficulties, form within or without, is the condition for living out fully his vocation and commitment, and reaching the goal of perfect union with the Lord (cal. 6:9, Matthew 10:22). The Oblate doesn't get tired of doing good, no mater what it costs (2 Tes. 3:13). If we are weak as Paul was weak in the Lord, we will live with Him because of the power of God which works in us (2 Cor. 13:4, Col. 1:24). We can do the impossible in Him who gives us strength (Filip. 4:9).

The Oblate knows, and cheerfully lives out in his own life, this fundamental truth of our Faith: — without the cross there is no liberation, no witness, either for ourselves or the world! (John 3:14–15 and John 12:33, Gal. 2:19–20).

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. How do you personally react to suffering and setbacks in your religious missionary life? Do you remain basically at peace, or do you get all upset, panicky, frustrated, enraged? What does Jesus think of your reactions?
2. How do you concretely heed the Lord's invitations to "voluntary penance"? Or do you limit yourself to some token penance in Lent only? Can you grow in your spiritual generosity on this point?
3. How do you handle community rough-spots? "Passing over" them or assuming them in love and commitment with and for your Oblate brothers?

### Exercises:

- I. Try to read and reflect on some of St. Paul's accounts of trials and sufferings, endured with faith and confidence, and which came from his fidelity to his mission. Is your basic attitude similar to Paul's? If so, how can you deepen your own commitment and apostolic courage? If not, why not?

Acts — accounts of missionary trips and imprisonments

1 Cor. 9:15:15–27	Phil. 1:12–26
2 Cor. 1:3–11; 1:15–2; 17	Phil. 3:4–17
2 Cor. 4:1–18	Col. 1:24–2:3
2 Cor. 6:3–13	4:2–4
2 Cor. 11	1 Thess. 2:5–12
2 Tim. 1:11–12	
2:1–13	
3:1–13	

- II. Visit the sick, especially the terminally ill, and afterwards reflect before the Lord on their attitude towards suffering. What can this teach us?

To put ourselves increasingly at the service of God in his people, we will set aside special times each month and each year for deeper personal and community prayer, for reflection and renewal. One week each year will be spent in retreat. Fraternal gatherings and an exchange on apostolic experiences could well precede or follow the retreat.

#### Scripture for Prayer:

1. Mark 1:35–39 “...He went off to a lonely place in the desert. . .”
2. Luke 6:12–16 “...spending the night in communion with God. . .”
3. John 15:1–5 “...I am the vine, you are the branches. . .”
4. Psalm 127:1–2 “...Unless the Lord build the house. . .”
5. Matthew 14:13–14 “...He withdrew. . . to a desert place by himself. . .”
6. Matthew 14:22–25 “...he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. . .”
7. James 1:5–8 “...he must ask in faith, never doubting. . .”

Church Documents: Perfectae Caritatis 6, *Lumen Gentium* 41

#### Reflection:

### PRAYER

When you are too busy to pray, you are too busy! No missionary is a machine or a pastoral computer. No one Oblate can put it all together (the work of the mission) on his own, or dispense with special moments of deeper personal and community prayer!

If I don't take time to pray, and if I am always too busy to take advantage of “peak times” or moments for renewal and prayer, then bit by bit, almost imperceptibly, the work I am doing becomes “my” work than it is the Lord's (cf. John 15: 1–8), already carrying within itself the seeds of self-defeating pastoral frustration (Psalm 126:1–2 and Acts 5:38–39). We are not, contrary to what we sometimes live and act out in practice, indispensable.

The missionary task, the people are His, the Lord's! As the words of a popular spiritual hymn remind us, “He has the whole world in His hands:” – The whole mission, parish, people, etc., even the message (EN–15).

He calls us, surely, to collaborate with Him in the work and mission of saving and liberating all men. But, we do not replace Him, no matter how intelligent we might be or qualified with all sorts of degrees and courses. Thorough us, and others (including the laity), He plants the seed (Like 8:11). The Lord also provides the sun and rain for the seed to grow (Mark 4:26–29). We are simply his co-workers, disciples: one plants, another reaps (1 Cor. 3:6–7ss), but the harvest is the Lord's.

The servant is not better than the Master (Matthew 10:24). We follow in His footsteps. Jesus made time, squeezed in time for prayer and contemplation, when He knew that He would have a busy day (Mark 1:35–39).

What was Jesus' pastoral secret? How could he take (stand) all the mess and crowds and confusion; how did he put up with the bungling Apostles and maintain an inner peace throughout all his conflicts with the Pharisees and others? Where did he find the fuel to fire his love and preoccupation for all especially the poor and marginalized? Where did he get the courage to contest the false religion of the Saducees, Sanhedrin, Pharisees?

His secret was deep union with the Father in prayer (cf. Luke 6:12; Mark 1:35–39; 7:45–47; Matthew 4:1–11; 14:22–23). He took "time out", from the busy demands of the ministry, to be alone with the Father. He even took the disciples aside for rest and prayer, because they were tired from the ministry (Mark 6:30–32).

Jesus found the means to maintain a certain peace and equilibrium in his ministry in this manner: — getting away to pray. And, He didn't always manage to get away either (Matthew 14:13–14)! Jesus balanced all the works and demands of his ministry, and the over—all fundamental reason for this ministry — the will of His Father who had sent him (John 6:37–40).

Even shrinking from the ultimate sacrifice of Himself in His passion, Jesus found strength in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemani (Matthew 26–36, Luke 22:39–46, Mark 14:32–42).

As disciples of the Lord, we Oblates do not send ourselves on the mission (Col. 1:25-26; Rom. 10:14–15; En 15, 59, 60). We do not and cannot preach anyone or anything else but the will of the Father and the Gospel of Jesus (I Cor. 3:11 and 1:17, Acts. 1:8), we are his heralds today (En 78, 15);

What is our pastoral—missionary secret? How can we measure up to the mission confided in us as His "ambassadors" (2 Cor. 5:20)? Evidently, in being a disciple of the Lord, not just in the ministry, but also in that which inspires the ministry, namely, Prayer. And not just the prayer of every normal routine day: but time off, time "squeezed in"; for stronger moments to be with the Father, as Jesus was with Him. In this point of stronger peak—times of prayer, the disciple is not above His Master (John 15:20).

An Oblate who doesn't try to follow the Lord in this aspect of his life, doesn't really have much of a chance of achieving anything pastorally that will last. The Oblate who tries to "make" time for fruitful monthly and yearly "stronger moments" of prayer and personal evaluation, becomes more finely attuned to the Lord's promptings in his work, in his relationship to others, both Oblates and the people (John 15:1–5).

We can only be missionaries if we are grounded in the Lord. He who builds without the Lord, he who has no time to "waste" in this type of deeper prayer, beats the air (Ps. 126:1–2, Luke 14:28–30)! He is just the opposite of Jesus and of Paul (I Cor. 9:26A and col. 1:29).

**Questions for Personal Reflection:**

1. Have you suspected at times that your work was turning more into “your work” rather than becoming more deeply the Lord’s work through you? How do you get around this “drift” or “tendency”?
2. Do you take time for stronger moments of personal community prayer / reflection on a regular basis (monthly—yearly)? Why?
3. Do you put off more “quality” prayer, because you know deep down that if you prayed more or better, some things in your life would have to change? What is Jesus trying to say to you?

**Exercises:**

- I. Try to spend an afternoon or a morning, alone with the Lord and His word. Page through the Bible, using your own favorite texts; and slowly, calmly ask the Lord what He wants to tell you about yourself, your work, your community, through these texts. Ask yourself at the end of the afternoon or morning, if it was worth it, or a waste of time.
- II. Do the same, but with members of your community, coming together at the end of the morning or afternoon for a short sharing session. Again ask yourself if it was worth it or a waste of time.

## Article 36

## IN UNION WITH MARY

With Mary Immaculate, the faithful handmaid of the Lord, and under the guidance of the Spirit, we enter into closer union with Jesus Christ. We will contemplate with her the mysteries of the Incarnate Word especially in praying the rosary.

## Scripture for Prayer:

1. Luke 1, 26–38 “...Let it be done to me as you say...”
2. Luke 1, 46–55 “...My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord...”
3. Luke 2, 1–20 “...Mary, treasured all these things...”
4. Luke 2, 33–40 “...and you yourself shall be pierced with a sword...”
5. Mark 3, 31–35 “...Who are my mother and my brother...”
6. John 19, 25–27 “...There is your mother...”
7. Acts 1, 12–14 “...and Mary, the mother of Jesus...”

Church Documents: Lumen gentium 57, 58

## Reflection:

## UNION WITH JESUS

The first companion and the first contemplative of Jesus, because she welcomingly received the Holy Spirit who made her his temple, Mary is the teacher of the spiritual life of the Apostles. She is our model of intimacy with Jesus and of being a contemplative in action.

Her intimacy with Jesus was not lived as a “passively remissive woman or one with an alienating religiosity, rather she was a strong woman who had no doubts in proclaiming that God is the vindicator of the humble and the oppressed who brings down the powerful of the world.” (Marialis Cultus, 37).

She introduces us to the authentic intimacy with Jesus of Nazareth and teaches us to intensify it when we learn from her not to receive the spirit we already possess, but rather to welcome more deeply and better this Holy Spirit, already received, who groans in us the content of her own spiritual experience, Mary hands over to us the secret of her life, something like a “method” and the stages of her own journey from Nazareth.

There are three key words that are, as it were, a “method of a life in spiritual growth: Fiat: a heart always disposed to surrender itself, in a loving faith, to him to whom she said “yes”, accepting the not knowing exactly to what she gave her “yes”. A heart that obeys in love. Magnificat: a heart which, keeping in memory what had happened, as disturbing as they may be, never ending the celebration of the experienced mercy. Helping oneself to maintain a heart that sings of the faithful, gratuitous love. . . a heart that glorifies. Stabat: a stable heart, lovingly firm, in its accompanying of Christ, in the bright hours as well as in the obscurity of silence and the apparent absence of God, beyond our projects. “Where you go I will go, where you live I will live.” A heart that stands and waits in hope.



There are four stages of growth for Mary in her intimacy with Christ which may inspire our own. Four "yeses" which bring her ever closer to Jesus.

The first yes, she gave in Nazareth, the yes of youth and of enthusiasm. .and of illusions. .Mary "went forth. .not knowing where (she) was going. . ." (Heb, 11, 8) but the important thing that she already knew with Whom she was going, as the magnificat witnesses. Her life of intimacy with Christ went on so disturbingly: Bethlehem, the exile, the long silence of the trivial life of Nazareth. .so many years of her youth and of her maturity badly or little spirit in the condition of any ordinary Nazarene.

The second yes can be even more disturbing. Jesus begins his public life in a conflictive way, committing himself with those most despised by the men of God. In this environment which disorients his loved ones, Jesus questions Mary: the yes given to his person, to be proven, has to grow into a yes to the family inseparable from Him: the cursed ones of the Law (John 7, 49. Mark 3, 21; 31-35). You cannot love Jesus if you do not love with and like Him. Intimacy with Jesus is intimacy with the poorest. That which leads to a life that seems carzy. "He is out of his mind." (Mark 3, 21).

The third yes, the greatest yes, is in the hour of darkness of the abandonment of God. Jesus asks that Mary accompany him even to the heights of his love. Never was Mary so near to Jesus than in this hour. Mother of the crucified, she accepted to be mother of those who crucified. She loved Jesus with the same merciful love with which he loved all when he saw from the cross. "Mother, forgive. . .". The victory of Jesus is that of his mother. It is the fullness of the apostolic love that pays with his blood the victory of love.

The fourth yes, Mary gives with and to the group of weak men whom she did not choose, in the midst of a hostile world, in face of the unknown to come. . .Docile to the Spirit, faithful servant of the Lord, she is the heart of the Fiat, the Magnificat, the stabat, in the following of the living Jesus always acting in history.

Whatever may be the actual stage of our life, we have to grow in friendship with Christ to place ourselves progressively within the mystery of the Savior, guided by the Spirit (C, 55) who froms Christ in those who follow him (C. 44) We will get there living like the apostles, living in intimate communion with Mary who has to be for us "a friend, a true companion in our missionary life" (Fr. Jette).

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. At times in your life you have said "Yes" to the Lord. In what way would your response be like that of Mary?
2. How convinced are you that growth in intimacy with Jesus goes in hand with sincere devotion to Mary?

**Exercises:**

- I. In the spirit of the previous theological reflection, list your own moments of “Fiat”, “Magnificat” and “Stabat”. Which theme predominates in your life at this time? Which is in most need of being strengthened?

**Rule 20.** New forms of personal and community prayer can help Oblates encounter the Lord; they will welcome them with discernment and accept the challenges they present.

**Rule 21****SPIRITUAL DIRECTION**

Each member is invited to seek the counsel and support of a spiritual director in order to discern God's action in his life and to grow through his personal and apostolic experiences and difficulties.

**Scripture for Prayer:**

1. Luke 12, 22-30 " . . . Seek . . . his kingship over you . . . "
2. Mark 8, 34-38 " . . . Who ever would preserve his life will lose it . . . "
3. I Cor. 9, 19-27 " . . . I have made myself all things to all men . . . "
4. Phil. 3, 7-16 " . . . I have come to rate all as loss . . . "
5. John 16, 13-16 " . . . The Spirit of truth . . . will guide you to all truth . . . "
6. Rom. 8, 14-17 " . . . All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God "
7. Eph. 4, 7-16 " . . . let us grow to the full maturity of Christ . . . "

Church Documents: Decree : Presbyterorum Ordinis, Ministry and Life of Priests,  
Chap. II, III, 18-10

**Reflection:****SPIRITUAL DIRECTION**

Everyone has a vocation to personal, integral growth. Each person, individually, has the full responsibility for the outcome of his own life. Paul VI pointed this out very clearly in paragraph 15 of "Populorum Progressio" : "in the design of God everyman is called upon to develop and fulfil himself, for every life is a vocation. At birth, everyone is granted in germ a set of aptitudes for him to bring to fruition. Their coming to maturity, which will be the result of education received from the environment and personal efforts, will allow each man to direct himself towards the destiny intended for him by his Creator. Endowed with intelligence and freedom he is as responsible for his fulfillment as he is for his salvation. He is aided or sometimes impeded by those who educate him and those with whom he lives, but each one remains, what ever be those influences affecting him the principal agent of his own success or failure. By the unaided efforts of his own intelligence and will each man can grow in humanity, can enhance his personal worth, can become more a person".

The Holy Father insists that human growth, is, as it were, a resume of our duties. We are called to surpass ourselves. "By our insertion into the living Christ, man enters into a new development, into a transcendent humanness, that brings him to reach his greatest plenitude: such is the supreme finality of personal growth".

Among the many means to help us grow integrally, but especially in our relationship to God by discerning His action on our lives, and through our own personal apostolic experiences, is a spiritual director. Responsibility for our growth demands that we discover our own spiritual self-direction. This is based on the assumption that the essence of the self is its spirit and the primordial force in the growth of a person is his spirituality. A spiritual director can never replace the personal discovery of the life direction placed within the heart of each person by God. A spiritual director, or, if you wish, guide, companion, counselor, orientator, will simply be at the service of the direction that each person has and is following in his own life.

What we are considering here is a personal, one-to-one situation, which can be formulated as: "A process, carried on in the context of faith, and of an interpersonal relationship between two people, in which one, (the director) competent person helps his christian brother grow in the spiritual life, through personal encounters that have as their explicit object the growth in the life in and of the Spirit of the person being guided". (Sister Sandra Schneiders, I.H.M.)

It should be pointed out that this individual spiritual orientation is not an egotistic exercise which causes a person to close in on himself.

On the contrary, its purpose is to deepen one's union with God and grow in one's individual experience, so that a person can be even more united to his brothers in community, share deeply with them and be more consciously at their service.

Spiritual Direction has two principal functions. First it helps CLARIFY the person's personal human-spiritual-integral experiences, his difficulties and his apostolic experiences. In talking about all of these to an experienced director, the person increases his capacity to understand, objectivize and articulate his own living out of faith, hope and love. The objectivity and expression of these experiences are never fully adequate, but the person cannot understand what is happening, what is being asked of him, how he should grow, without making an effort to express this experience. In the very expression of the experience the person begins to understand and perceive his own experience, his blocks to growth, his life of prayer, the perception and perspective of his anxieties and fears, and the root of his relations and reactions with others.

In this attempt to be objective about himself, the person better understands his experience of God, his religious sentiments, the calls of the Holy Spirit. He is also aided by the questions, support, confirmations, encouragement and at times the confrontations and questioning through which the director assists him. It is not the director who clarifies; it is the person himself who, in this process of verbalization, clarifies for himself his own experience. This clarification is necessary so that the second function of spiritual direction can be fulfilled.

The general objective of spiritual direction is the integral spiritual growth of the person, growth in the life **IN AND ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT**. To live is to grow, to live more authentically, more fully. To grow is to hear the calls of God in our life. The second function, then, of spiritual direction is **DISCERNMENT**. The person clarifies for himself in order to be capable of discerning and responding to the movements of God experienced in his life. Discernment accompanies the clarification. It is a growth in the capacity to recognise and respond to the calls of the Spirit. It demands a way of life,

a total living process, that makes a person capable of answering the question, "what should I do to respond to the WORD of God (revealed and existential), in this SITUATION, here and now?"

Spiritual Discernment, being conscious of the Presence of the Spirit who lives in me, helps me to pay attention to those spiritual impulses within me, in order to be able to distinguish those that come from the Holy Spirit. It is an attitudes of life. "It implies that I make a free decision that is a continuation of the path through which the Holy Spirit has led me." It is my life direction, "a decision that respects what I am and what God asks me to be."

Fr. William Connolly, S.J. gives us some questions that will help us choose a person as a Spiritual Director.

1. Can this person listen to me or does he already have a plan for me?
2. Can this person let me have the freedom to develop my own style of prayer?
3. Is he in contact with reality? Does he have his feet on the ground?
4. Does he inspire confidence? Does he know what he is talking about? Does he have experience?
5. Does he possess interior freedom so that he is not threatened by my opinions?
6. Can he speak about personal subjects?
7. Does he seem to be called to the ministry of spiritual directions?
8. Am I interested in being with him just to be with him because it pleases me or because he can lead me in my relationship with God?

#### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. Do I take advantage of having a spiritual director?  
Am I growing with his help?
2. If I do not have a spiritual director - Why not?

#### Exercises:

1. Make a list of positive and negative points - the advantages and disadvantages of going to a spiritual director. Investigate with someone who has a spiritual director, or who is a spiritual director, the validity of your test.
2. Make a point of speaking with someone who goes to spiritual direction about the benefits he sees in this help.

**Rule 22****A PERSONAL RHYTHM OF LIFE**

Living conditions which favour inner recollection and a personal rhythm of life which permits regular and even daily prayer are indispensable for the spiritual growth of an apostolic man. Each Oblate, with the help of his Superior or spiritual director, will give due attention to these aspects of his life, since both effectiveness in ministry and progress in religious life depend on them.

**Scripture for Prayer:**

1. Matthew 6, 5-15      "...This is how you are to pray. . ."
2. Matthew 7, 7-11      "...Ask, and you will receive. . ."
3. Matthew 11, 25-28    "...the reign of God has over—taken you. . ."
4. Matthew 25, 1-13    "...I tell you, I do not know you. . ."
5. Mark 11, 20-25      "...Put your trust in God. . ."
6. Luke 22, 39-46      "...Pray that you may not be put to the test. . ."
7. John 17, 1-26        "...consecrate them by means of truth. . ."

Church Documents:      Paul VI "Evangelica Testificatis"  
no. 33, 42-46

**Reflection:****RECOLLECTION - LIFE OF PRAYER**

"Desire for union with Christ presumes certain decisions around attitudes and conditions conducive to this goal."

Silence presupposes an openness of heart in order to be filled with the presence of God. This allows for a deeper dialogue with God, an encounter with His mysterious silence. (Rom. 16, 25). In order to recognize the voice of God present in the noise of the events of the world, a lot of delicate attention is needed to discover His action and capture the sense of His appeal. In attentive, interior silence, we become attuned to the presence of God, the way He acts and what He asks. This permits us to recognize Him later in the noise. Calm silence also manifests in the religious a waiting for God's hour, the certainty that He is going to act in a certain moment for the good of humanity: "it is good to hope in silence for the saving help of the Lord. . ." (LAM. 3, 26).

Jesus showed us the way. No one, more than He, was explicitly united to God His Father, in His active life: “. . .the Son cannot do anything by himself - he can do only what he sees the Father doing.” (John 5, 19-20), and thus he consecrates long moments to prayer in the calm of the night (Mark 1, 35. . .). This example dispenses with long dissertations about the necessity of prolonged silent prayer. Mary meditated in her heart (Luke 2, 19, 51), meaning that she tried to understand the mystery of God in all its richness and to recognize Him in the concrete events of life. The significance of our daily experience is enriched and deepened as we reflect on it in the light given us by constant re-reading of the gospels.

“. . . Apart from me you can do nothing. . . Who does not live in me is like a withered, rejected branch.” (John 15, 5-6). We are instruments of the power of the Word. We are friends called to give witness. Union with Christ, knowledge of the Word, identification demands time with Him. The organization of our daily life in order to assure time for recollection, for silent prayer, and also for study and personal spiritual awareness is a question of personal discipline. We will be motivated to that discipline only if there is an initiative of the heart that understands the invitation that the Lord addresses to his disciple. It is an invitation to live in His intimacy. This initiative is a sign that a person is taking his life of prayer seriously and that he wished to surrender himself to it.

#### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. In my personal life, what is the role of silence, attentive silence, to the action of God?
2. What relation exists between my prayer and my apostolic life? Do I contemplate Jesus Christ in the silence of a chapel as well as in the poor who suffer and struggle for their liberation?
3. Does my prayer make me really discover God as He who “loves all things” (Wisdom 11, 24)?

#### Exercises:

- I. If you have not already done so, organize your life of personal prayer either in a daily or a weekly rhythm, with an hour reserved each day.
- II. Verify the use of your time with exactness.
- III. To facilitate the relation between prayer and apostolic action update the psalms applying them to the events of today.

## Section Three

### THE APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY

#### Article 37

#### COMMUNITY AND MISSION

We fulfill our mission in and through the community to which we belong. Our communities, therefore, are apostolic in character.

The Founder left us a legacy: "Among yourselves practice charity, charity, charity - and, outside, zeal for the salvation of souls." In fidelity to that testament, each member's zeal is sustained by the bonds of fraternal charity.

By growing in unity of heart and mind, we bear witness before the world that Jesus lives in our midst and unites us in order to send us out to proclaim God's reign.

#### Scripture for Prayer:

1. Acts 2, 42-47 "They devoted themselves. . .to the communal life."
2. I Cor. 1, 10:12, "Be united in mind and judgement."  
10-27
3. Cor. 5, 16, 21 "He has given us the ministry of reconciliation."
4. Rom. 12, 9-21 "Love one another with the affection of brothers."
5. Gal. 3, 26-28 "All are one in Christ."
6. Eph. 4, 3-21 "Make every effort to preserve the unity which has the spirit  
as its origin."
7. Phil. 2, 2 "Make my joy complete by your unanimity."

#### Church Documents:

Lumen Gentium: 1: 3: 11

Gaudium et Spes: 1: 3: 4: 9: 23-26: 32:83

Perfectae Caritatis: L; 2: 5: 6: 15

#### Reflection:

#### COMMUNITY AND MISSION

More than one commentator has observed that in an age when we possess such fantastic facilities for communication, we seem less able than ever to achieve mutual understanding and unity. In fact, there is a great sense of isolation. This is not just between person and person, but also between groups and nations and cultures. In the absence of basic shared values we have taken refuge in our complexities.



Historically, christian communities were formed around shared values, in particular the Gospel values. People came together because they could not accept many of the values current in their milieu. They felt the need to challenge such values and were aware they could not do that alone.

Such communities were much more than a model to the possibility of coming together in mutual need or peaceful co-existence. They were an invitation and a challenge to a new way of living together, a challenge that came out of encounter with Christ and his gospel. While appearing to be over against the world, such communities, the monastic groups in particular, became the havens for the continuity of civilization through the dark ages. Moreover, they heralded the richness of common poverty, the deep and caring love of a chaste life, and the growth of the human spirit in hearts obedient to God's word.

We have to discover these riches in our communities today. We have to experience more than the advantages provided by communal living, the pooling of resources, the efficiency of sharing various ministries, sometimes even the escape offered by institutional anonymity from responsible confrontation with the issues of the day.

There are vital new expression of community in the church today, especially among the laity and in lay institutes. If we cannot rediscover in our own communities the needs that bring these new groups into being, and the riches they have found in being together, we shall not be meaningful witnesses in our ministry.

For there is a sense in which our whole mission is community. For we minister, as Paul tells us, "so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach unity in the faith." (Eph. 4, 12-13). We work with and in Christ for that unity, as ministers of the power of his reconciliation. So we are invited to exemplify in our own communities what we invite others to attain. Who ministers to the ministers, if we are not doing this for each other in our own communities?

Community has to do with participation. It calls us to take part in, be part of another's call and ministry and to allow others to be part of ours. The mission is ours, not mine or theirs. It is moreover, to choose to share to the full our common pilgrim journey and to discover Christ with us in this shared journey; as did the disciples on the road to Emmaus. It is a call to be in total openness to God and others, as Jesus was, to share the common frailty and suffering of others as he did, and to value this kind of vulnerability. In community, we choose to allow ourselves to run the risk of being wounded and to know the need and joy of mutual healing. The alternative is isolation.

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. To what extent do I see my vocation as a call to be “good news” to my brothers in community? How much do I contribute to community?
2. Am I able to confront, in a caring way, a brother oblate, in a matter that is disruptive to community harmony?
3. Do I find it difficult in community to forgive others or allow myself to be forgiven?
4. Do I see myself as having a ministry of reconciliation or healing to my brothers in community or province?
5. What interpersonal skills do I need to develop to be a more positive presence in my community?

### Exercises:

- I. Reflect on your past and ask if there is some brother oblate with whom you need to be reconciled. Ask what steps you can now take to do this. Pray for healing of your own woundedness.
- II. Ask yourself how you can reach out in a caring way and affirm another's gifts, especially in times when another seems depressed or in painful struggle about his call or ministry. Who most needs this today in your community or province? What are you prepared to do about it?

## OBEDIENCE AND COMMUNITY

*Those of the Society  
who are most advanced in years  
and highest in dignity  
ought to be models of every virtue,  
but above all of obedience,  
the chief bond of our unity and  
essential principle of our continued existence.*

- 1821 -

## FRATERNAL CHARITY

*They will bear one another  
in much patience and meekness,  
and strive to outdo one another  
in rendering service  
and joyfully practising charity.*

*Each will avoid whatever may wound his brothers  
and will gladly yield to the wishes of others,  
so that the peace of God  
and the charity of Christ  
may abide in them.*

*They will love each other and  
show mutual respect and deference for one another*

- 1826 -

## Article 38

## FRATERNAL INTERDEPENDENCE

Obedience and charity bind us together, priests and Brothers, keeping us interdependent in our lives and missionary activity, even when dispersed for the sake of the Gospel, we can benefit only occasionally from life in common.

Each community, whether a house or a district, will adopt a program of life and prayer best suited to its purpose and apostolate. Once set up, such a program is entrusted to the vigilance of the Superior; regular meetings will be held to praise and thank the Lord, to renew its spirit and strengthen its unity.

## Scripture for Prayer:

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| 1. Matthew 18, 19-20 | "...where two or three are gathered in my name. . ."                  |
| 2. Acts 2, 42-47     | "...those who believed shared all things in common. . ."              |
| 3. Acts 4, 32-35     | "...the community of believers were of one heart and one mind. . ."   |
| 4. I Cor. 13         | "...and the greatest of these is love. . ."                           |
| 5. Ephes. 2, 11-22   | "...through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. . ." |
| 6. Phil. 2, 1-5      | "...make my joy complete by your unanimity. . ."                      |
| 7. I John 3, 11-24   | "...we should love one another. . ."                                  |

## Church Documents:

Perfectae Cantatis n.15 - Vat. II  
Paul VI - Evangelica Testificatis 39-41

## Reflection:

## SOLIDARITY

Solidarity is a fundamental element of Oblate life. In reflecting on this, it is first necessary to consider the relationship between obedience and charity. The phrase with which article 38 begins is one that was often repeated by Blessed Eugene de Mazenod since it was very meaningful for him. Obedience calls for a firm decision to search together for God's will and to adjust our lives in accord with it. This will of God is not just recalling a series of commandments: it is above all, remembering the plan of universal salvation: "...he wants all men to be saved and come to know the truth." (1 Tim. 2, 4). It is in the context of the "our Father" that Jesus writes us to ask for the coming of the Kingdom and the fulfillment of God's will (Matthew 6, 10). The will of universal salvation is the power of God's love which wishes to draw all men together. This power of love attracts those who consecrate themselves in a special way to the advent of the Kingdom of God. God creates in each of us the same desire, which is a force for union. In this sense, it is absolutely normal, to speak of obedience and charity at the same time. What unites us is the plan of universal salvation, the power of the love of the Father which draws all together around His Son. It is this love that attracts us, unites us, causes our wishes and acts of dedication to converge. Obedience unites us in charity.

Solidarity has its roots in the gift of Christ. It is because they are branches of the same vine that Christians bear fruit and support each other (John 15, 17). Jesus brings his disciples together by giving himself to them; giving his flesh as food. (1 Cor. 10, 16-17); giving Mary as mother of all the disciples (John 19, 17); giving his Spirit (Acts 2, 14) and giving charisms so that those who receive them may give themselves in their turn. (Ephes. 4, 11).

Solidarity embraces all aspects of existence and can be lived even by those who are not always together under the same roof. It is interdependency gladly accepted, making us responsible to one another. Even though our first love may be our personal sanctification, each of us must place his values and gifts at God's service because they are given to us for the service of all.

Solidarity does not close the community in on itself. It creates in each one, an attitude of heart that opens him to the appeals of others. Progressively through ever widening circles, it takes on world dimensions, open to the cries for more justice and brotherhood.

#### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. Am I conscious of how I can support others by the sensitivity of my love and the deepening of my spiritual life.
2. Does our solidarity create in us an attitude of prayer which makes us attentive to those around us who are isolated? Is our community shut in on itself?
3. Is our community prepared to receive youth and accompany them in their vocational discernment?
4. In what concrete ways have I shown solidarity within my community?

#### Exercises:

- I. Find all the passages in the constitutions which treat of community, working together. Discover in these a "value" around which the other themes are grouped.
- II. Choose one member of your community, local, district, or provincial who seems to be isolated or marginalized and look for the message that the Lord brings to you through him.

See how you can integrate this person more in to the community.

- III. Make a list of all the possible ways you can respond to Solidarity among Oblates. Check how many of these ways are possible for you. Check how many you actually use in your responses the appeals for solidarity with your brother Oblates.

## Article 39

## FRATERNAL SHARING

A spirit of simplicity and joyfulness marks our communities. In sharing what we are and what we have with one another, we find acceptance and support. Each of us offers his friendship and places his God-given talents at the service of all. This enriches our spiritual life, our intellectual development and our apostolic activity.

In humility and with the strength of charity, we express our responsibility for each other in fraternal correction and forgiveness.

## Scripture for Prayer:

1. John 15, 9-17 " . . . love one another as I have loved you. . . "
2. Acts 2, 42-47 "those who believed shared all things in common."
3. Galatians 6, 1-5 " . . . help carry one another's burdens."
4. Philippians 4, 4-7 "Everyone should see how unselfish you are."
5. Ephesians 5, 15-21 "Defer to one another out of reverence for Christ."
6. Matthew 18, 15 " . . . you have won you brother over."
7. Colossians 3, 12-17 "forgive whatever grievances you have against one another."

## Church Documents:

Gaudium et Spes 63-72

Perfectae Caritatis 15

## Reflection:

## OUR QUALITY OF RELATEDNESS, ONE TO THE OTHER

Simplicity and joyfulness should characterize a community brought together not by external compulsion but by the sharing of the same Faith and the same ideals. "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people" (Acts 2, 46-47). This fraternal sharing is not merely of what we have, but above all of what we are. "The company of those who believed were of one heart and one soul. . . they had everything in common" (Acts 4, 32). Similarly, the variety of gifts among the members should serve the common cause and strengthen unity (1 Cor. 12, 4-11).

As witnessing to the messianic community, our Oblate communities should be characterized by the Kingdom values. Whereas ambition, pride and lack of forgiveness mar the joy and simplicity of a life lived in Christ (Matthew 20, 24-28), the forgiveness of God belonged to the list of messianic riches (Jer. 31, 34; Ezek., 36, 25-33). This messianic forgiveness was linked to the gift of the Spirit (Ezek. 36, 27; Jn. 19-23). Our communities called to bear witness to the presence of God's Kingdom in our midst should therefore be forgiving communities and bearers of God's forgiveness (Luke 17, 3-4).

We must have confidence in community life. It is the atmosphere of life that God wants for us Religious. Hence we should take positive and practical steps to build community: Community as an environment or atmosphere in which we live is much more important and meaningful to our lives than institutional structures of systems. Man is the end of institutions. Relationships keep people together much more than systems or structures. In fact, without true relationships, no institution can stand for long. Hence it is important that everyone in community be respected, accepted and loved. No one should be written off as beyond care and love.

Today, as perhaps never before, many religious are asking, "Why can't we care for one another as well as we seem to care for those to whom we minister?" Do we take one another for granted? Have our communities become no more than places out of whom we work for others while ignoring our mutual needs? We have become more aware of the various good and necessary needs of the emotional side of our being. We need to love and be loved, to affirm and to be affirmed. These are not needs that disappear when we answer the call to discipleship and religious life and ministry. In fact, that very call is one that also invites us to grow and mature in all aspects of our person, and such growth cannot take place without that kind of concern and interaction that will allow us to both express our needs and use our gifts in the trusting climate of community. We need to share both our faith and our doubts, our joys and our sorrows, our loneliness and the fruits of solitude. We need to appreciate the growth patterns and their critical passages in ourselves and in others; to learn that it is good to receive as well as to give. Each of us is an inner world of mystery, to draw the water of life from the well, so we can offer these riches that God has given each of us to those whom we serve. The very efficacy, power and spirit of our ministry will be in proportion to the growth we experience in the context of our caring communities.

Our communities should therefore be living christian cells, a mini-realization of the Kingdom of God. The Gospel values should shine in our communities through a genuine sharing of goods (poverty), through a genuine out-going love (chastity) and through a genuine search for God's will in our regard in collaboration with our superiors (obedience).

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. What do you understand by your “capacity for friendship” and what do you personally contribute this attribute to the growth of your community?
2. What do you think are your “God given talents?” How do you put them at the service of all?
3. Do you really enjoy your life in community? If so, what elements contribute towards this enjoyment? If not, what is at the root cause of your discontent and what can be done about it?

### Exercises:

- I. Reflect upon the manner of conflict-resolution employed in your community, and the extent to which fraternal correction and forgiveness, both of which are based on humility and love, are parts of your experience in community. You may also wish to exercise your dynamic memory and bring to mind occasions in the Gospel and in your personal life-experience in community wherein these elements of brotherly concern have occurred.
- II. Reflect on the past month of your community-experience and list the ways in which your personal spiritual life, intellectual development and apostolic activity have been enriched by the friendship and God-given talents of the men with whom you live in community.
- III. Reflect on the past month of your community-experience and list the ways in which you have enriched the spiritual life, intellectual development and apostolic activity of the men in your community through contributing your personal capacity for friendship and your God-given talents.



## COMMUNITY LIFE AND THE APOSTOLATE

*Were anyone tempted to regard these Rules  
 as too severe for our human nature,  
 we beseech him in the Lord to consider  
 first, that our ministry will be forever fruitless  
 unless we fervently strive  
 for our own spiritual advancement;  
 second, that we shall never attain  
 the high purpose of our vocation  
 without the help of these observances,  
 which have been deemed indispensable  
 by all the fathers of the spiritual life,  
 and especially by the holy founders of religious orders;  
 third, that since missions and retreats  
 necessarily cast us into the world's milieu  
 for three fourths of the year,  
 in order to busy ourselves there  
 mainly and almost exclusively  
 with the conversion of sinners,  
 we run the risk of forgetting our own needs,  
 if we do not,  
 at least in the brief intervals of this perilous ministry,  
 return to the precise observance of the Rule.  
 If then, we have at heart our highest happiness  
 and do not wish to risk being ourselves cast away  
 after we have preached to others,  
 so far from experiencing repugnance  
 at submitting ourselves  
 to such an excellent observance,  
 let us rather sincerely regret  
 that the duties laid on us by charity  
 remove us for such long periods and so frequently  
 from the corps of our communities where it reigns,  
 and deprive us,  
 against our desire and for a great part of our life,  
 of the benefits of its salutary influence.*

## Article 40

## TOGETHER IN PRAYER

Whatever the demands of our ministry, one of the more intense moments in the life of an apostolic community is the time spent praying together. One is spirit with those who are absent we turn to the Lord to praise him, seek his will, beg forgiveness and ask for the strength to serve him better.

## Scripture for Prayer:

- |                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 1. Mark 6: 30-34               | "Come. .and rest a while."   |
| 2. Matthew 7: 1-11             | "Your heavenly Father will give good things to anyone (who asks him)." |
| 3. Luke 11: 1-13               | "Lord, teach us to pray."  |
| 4. Philippians 4: 4-7          | "Present your needs in every form of prayer."                          |
| 5. Colossians 4: 2-4           | "Pray perseveringly: be attentive in prayer."                          |
| 6. Ephesians 1: 17-18          | "May he enlighten your innermost vision."                              |
| 7. 1 Thessalonians<br>5: 16-18 | "Never cease praying: render constant thanks."                         |

## Church Documents:

Perfectae Caritatis 6, 15  
Evangelica Testificatio 43-48

## Reflection:

## OUR PRAYER – FOR LIFE AND MISSION

Christian spirituality is concerned with the mystery of life, the transcendent dimension of human experience. It is concerned especially with ultimate meanings and values, but is incarnated in human encounters and circumstances.

For us Oblates, it becomes the Christian value structure of our missionary activity and of our community life. Some of the greatest things in life are the things that happen to us - - like birth and death and the many other aspects of life between these two polarities, such as the people we meet and the events that shape our lives, both tragic and happy. There are as many things that happen to us as are done by us. Even the things we choose to do are conditioned by so many other factors.

We look for meaning in all this - - not merely an immediate meaning, but an ultimate meaning as well, What value do we attach to these things, circumstances, persons and events? As Christians we refuse to accept them as mere convergence of accidental forces. Our human lives are governed by the loving hand of Providence. There is a transcendent dimension to our lives (Matt. 6: 25-33; John 6:27). This dimension was revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ, the Word Incarnate. He gave meaning and depth to our existence.

In our day-to-day lives, there are many things that we tend to consider as absolutes. Jesus Christ relativized our false absolutes and taught us to look for the “one thing necessary”. But, in another sense, Jesus also relativized God who is the Absolute. If we know him, it is because Christ revealed him to us (Matt. 11:27). And by the Incarnation God became one with us. Thus, consubstantial with the Father and his divinity, Christ revealed the Father to us; consubstantial with us in his humanity, he became one with those to whom he was sent.

Our apostolic spirituality will be rooted in Christ. Like Christ, we too will be in intense communion with the Father. Like Christ, we too will be in close communion with our fellowmen, in the context of his rejection by the majority and faced with the contradiction that the unlettered and unlearned accepted him while those educated in the Law rejected him (Matt. 11:25). The moving prayer of Jesus in Matthew 14: 35-36 shows him once again grappling with the meaning and significance of his whole life. It is a critical moment in his life, wherein he seeks the Father’s will and continues to trust in him. Thus, the meaning of his life and ministry is incomplete without reference to his Father.

As members of an apostolic community, we will model our lives on Jesus Christ. We will pray both individually and in community, and seek meaning and significance to our mission and our life in the will of the Father.

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. Two essential elements in the life of an apostolic person are formal prayer, wherein the mysteries in the life of Christ are contemplated, and an informal prayerfulness in which the practice of increased awareness of the presence of the Lord in all the events of life is cultivated. What role do these elements of prayer play in your life?
2. The article speaks of the necessity of community prayer and refers to the time spent in praying together as one of the more intense moments in the life of an apostolic community. What does this phrase mean to you? What is the pattern of communal prayer in your community?
3. In your experience, what effect does time spent in praying together have on the life of your apostolic community? What effect does the quality of prayer have on the community and the demands of your ministry as well?
4. Is prayer recognized as a priority “whatever the demands of ministry” in your personal life and in the life of your community?

**Exercises:**

I. Reflect on your life of prayer and write down your responses to the following questions relative to your personal prayer:

- what is my present mode of prayer?
- when do I pray?
- how do I pray?
- where do I pray?
- to whom do I pray?
- how did I arrive at this mode of prayer?

Encourage someone else in your community to answer these questions and then share your responses together.

II. Take time to read through Luke's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. Make special note of all references to prayer as these refer to discipleship and ministry. Prayerfully reflect on these texts.

III. What are the attitudes and values that Jesus brings to his prayer as these are reflected in the Gospel. What are the attitudes and values that you bring to your prayer?

## Article 41

## OBLATE HOSPITALITY

Our communities seek to radiate the warmth of the Gospel, to those around us. Our houses, therefore, while reserving certain sections to the community, are characterized by a special sense of hospitality.

## Scripture for Prayer:

- |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| 1. Genesis 18: 1-10      | "Please do not go on past your servant." |
| 2. Luke 9: 51-56         | "The Samaritans would not welcome him."  |
| 3. Luke 10: 38-42        | "Martha welcomed him in her home."       |
| 4. Romans 12: 9-21       | "Be generous in offering hospitality."   |
| 5. Revelation 3:20       | "Here I stand knocking at the door."     |
| 6. Deuteronomy 10: 18-19 | "You too must befriend the alien."       |
| 7. Luke 19:1-10          | "I mean to stay at your house today."    |

## Church Documents:

Apostolicam Actuositatem 11  
Gaudium et Spes 17

## Reflection:

## HOSPITALITY: CHARITY AND OPENNESS

One of the qualities that characterized the Israelites in their experience of life in the desert was their hospitality. Living as strangers, these nomads were particularly hospitable towards strangers (Dt. 10: 18–19); Lev. 19:33–34; Genesis 18:1–8; Heb. 13:1–2) Hospitality at table was of special value and even resulted, at times, in the host having to resort to borrowing from his neighbors in order to fulfill this role (Gen. 14:18; Luke 11: 5–8).

Moreover, a hospitality—meal bound the host and the guest in a sacred bond. Such a guest was not to be betrayed. Such betrayal would be infamous and perverse (Psalm 41: 9; 1 Mac. 16:15–17; John 13:18).

Like the requirement of charity, hospitality received a new dimension in the New Testament. At the Last Supper, Jesus chose a rite of hospitality, the washing of the feet, as a sign of unity and charity (John 13: 1–15; 1 Tim. 5:10; Luke 7: 36–46). Similarly, Jesus transformed the hospitality-meal of the Old Testament into an expression of true charity (Luke 4:12–14; 22:27–30). Hospitality thus characterizes every Christian community. It is the imitation of the welcome Christ offers us (Romans 15:5–7). In order to be received by God in his kingdom, we must receive him among us (Luke 19: 1-10; John 14: 23-24; Revelation 3:20). Each time we received our neighbor in need, we receive Christ (Matt. 25: 34-40).

Christ set the pace for all hospitality in the story of the good Samaritan, a germinal event that changed the nature of human relationships. The Samaritan brought the victim of the robbery to an inn. In a sense all travellers are wounded and all who seek the shelter of our roof are pilgrims. In a special way we welcome our own, but never close the door to those who truly need us. The hospitality of the monasteries was one of the basic features of the tradition that when we recognise that all we have is gift, we need to share. We recall the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, sharing their disappointments and

sadness. They welcomed the advent of a stranger and invited him to share their evening meal. And so they met the Risen Lord. In a sense every guest is Christ and every encounter in the name of hospitality is a truly christian sacrament of presence of the Lord.

As Oblates we have a wonderful tradition of hospitality. We have truly experienced that every Oblate house is indeed our home and we have been enriched by this tradition. It is good that this article recognises and affirms that reality.

A community closed in on itself is not a Christian community. An inhospitable community is not a Eucharistic community. The Eucharist celebrates the joy and fellowship of the Christian community across barriers of caste and class (1 Cor. 11: 17-26). Therefore, that which is celebrated in symbol and sacrament is translated into reality by "seeking to radiate the warmth and joy of the Gospel to those around us." Oblate communities will thus fulfill the dying wish of the Founder: charity, charity, charity.

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. The article is short, but very much to the point. Reflect upon it. What do you understand by "the warmth of the Gospel" that is to be "radiated to those around us."
2. Who are "those around us"? As you reflect on your community experience, try to evaluate the degree of welcoming that your community has extended to "those around us" in the practice of its hospitality.
3. Reflect on the extent of your personal attitude of welcoming as you extend this to the men in your community and the people who constitute for you in a wider sense "those around us".
4. What does "Eucharistic Community" mean for you?

### Exercises:

- I. 1. Make a list of the times during the past week or month in which your community has given witness to the demands of hospitality? In what particular ways was this hospitality expressed (for example, in welcoming others to your community Eucharist or prayer times, or to a meal, or to some social gathering, etc.)? Who were the people who were the recipients of your community hospitality (other Oblates, friends and family, people from the ministry-community, those from the wider community, those of differing creeds, denominations, etc.)? What effect did these moments of welcoming have on the life of the community?
- II. 1. Reflect on the values inherent in the theological reflection on this article above and the values associated with hospitality as these are referred to in the scriptural texts suggested as possibilities for prayer. Make a list of these values over a period of time, if necessary.

Now reflect on the nature of the hospitality expressed in your response to the first exercise above. What values are inherent in your experience and expression of hospitality. Make a list of these values and attitudes.

Compare the two lists and use this comparison as a moment of prayer.

## Article 42

## CARE AND CONCERN

Our members in distress, those who are sick or the aged among us, contribute greatly to the coming of God's Kingdom. We will be particularly concerned for them and will surround them with all the affection that binds us together as members of the same family.

## Scripture for Prayer:

1. Matt. 25, 31-46 " . . .As often as you did it for one of my least brothers. . ."
2. Luke 10, 29-37 " . . .And who is my neighbour? . . ."
3. Rom. 15, 1-13 " . . .Accept one another. .as Christ accepted you. . ."
4. I Cor. 12, 12-31 " . . .If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. . ."
5. I Cor. 10, 12-13 " . . .He will not let you be tested beyond your strength. . ."
6. II Cor. 12, 12-31 " . . .I will gladly spend myself and be spent for your sakes. . ."
7. Job 5, 14-19 " . . .Thus the unfortunate have hope. . ."

Church Documents: Dives in Misericordia, Chap. 7

## Reflection:

## SUFFERING

Physical and moral affliction, the lot of all men, demand reflection in faith if they are to have meaning in God's plan. Sickness, suffering are ills that we must fight. This is the first lesson that Christ gives in healing and comforting those whom he met on earth. Before we say with Paul, "I rejoice now in the suffering I bear for your sake", (Col. 1, 24), we must fight courageously against the suffering that surrounds us, finding no satisfaction in the trials for their own sake. A long journey in faith is required to discover the meaning of suffering in the plan of God.

In order to grasp this mysterious plan, we must contemplate Christ. It is clear that his trials had meaning for him: they were part of his Father's call to save mankind. Suffering for Jesus was real, within the limits of what was bearable. In spite of everything he accepted the chalice presented by his Father, because his food was to do the will of Him who sent him. When he announced his Passion, he merely said, "It is necessary"; this is the plan chosen by the mysterious wisdom of God. The cross is for him the great act of love, the love that accepts no limits. (John 15, 13). Reflecting on the meaning of Christ's miracles, the first evangelist sees in them the Servant of the Lord who takes upon himself the misery of men. (Matt. 8, 17). Jesus does not stand outside human suffering; he inserts himself into it, becoming the Suffering Servant among those who suffer.

Living in intimacy with Christ, Paul discovered that he was never alone, that all the trials he had to endure in order to be faithful to his mission were his share in the sufferings of Christ. He discovered at the same time the power of the resurrection that made

his suffering fruitful. (2 Cor. 4, 11-14). We are called to live out this same reality; to share in the Passion of Christ so that we can work with him, in the power of the resurrection, for the establishment of the Kingdom. Whoever suffers even a little, if he does so in faith, can make his own the conviction of Paul, "I rejoice now in the sufferings I bear for your sake, and what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ I supply in my flesh, for the benefit of His Body, which is the Church." (Col. 1, 24) Trials progressively lead us to be in harmony with God's plans.

When viewed in this perspective, our love for those who suffer is not a condescending one. Rather it respects the mysterious plan of God who chooses as He wills. The meaning of this call of God to suffer is often difficult to discover or to accept. Our role is not to explain to those who suffer the meaning of their trial, as the three friends of Job tried to do and were blamed by God. (Job 42, 7-9). Our role rather is to share, to listen, to be with the one who suffers, and, through the delicate touch of love help him to understand the call of God and respond to it generously.

Life is a test of love, not only for those who suffer but for each one of us: it is a call to grow in an authentic christian love for others so they can come to discover the truth of God's plans for them. Trials call for love to express itself in the truth. They reveal weaknesses we were not aware of, help us understand our limitations and our frailty. Trials, then, are the school of truth. At the same time, they reveal, to those who have faith, the love of God the Father, "who will not let you be tempted beyond your strength." (1 Cor. 10, 13). They should also reveal (do they always do so?) the authentic love of brothers who are ready to share everything. Accepted in faith, trials can strengthen the bonds that join us together.

#### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. Am I convinced that I am never alone, that I can truly share with Christ his cross and the power of his resurrection?
2. Sensitive to the personal love of God for each of my brothers, am I always faithful to the Lord who calls me to share with them?
3. Is the sharing of trials a source of joy for me and a deepening of love?
4. Do I do everything in my power to contribute to the joy of others?

#### Exercises:

1. Prayerfully look at each member of my community; how do I see their need to be helped? what do I do to support them, aware both of their needs and of the mystery of God's action in their lives?
2. Reflect on some trial that we have experienced. How was it shared? What more might have been done to share it?
3. From the letters of our Founder, choose a few texts in which he manifests his solicitude for Oblates who have suffered, his concern for their health and well-being.
4. We should always be conscious that we are missionaries. Let us reflect on our concern, both for those who are around us and those who are far away.
5. The Psalms embody many examples of the poor crying out to God. How can we apply these today, not only for our own sake but for all who experience the same need?



**Article 43****REMEMBERING OUR DECEASED**

We will keep alive the memory of our deceased and not fail to pray for them, faithfully offering the suffrages prescribed on their behalf (cf. Appendix).

**Scripture for Prayer:**

1. Genesis 3 "For you are dirt and to dirt you shall return."
2. John 19, 23-27 "And from my flesh I shall see God."
3. Sirach 41, 1-4 "Fear not death's decree for you. . ."
4. Maccabees 12, 38-46 ". .it was a holy and pious thought."
5. Luke 16, 19-31 "they will not be convinced even if one should rise from the dead."
6. John 5, 24-29 "the man who hears my word, .possesses eternal life. . ."
7. John 11, 1-44 "I am the resurrection and the life. . ."

Church Documents: Gaudium et Spes 18, 22

**Reflection:****DEATH**

This article of the Constitutions, which speaks of our charity towards the deceased, gives us an opportunity to reflect on death. A Christian text about this subject cannot neglect to consider the anguish that people have in face of death, anguish of the one who departs at whatever age and the sorrow of those he leaves behind. Death causes suffering because it is a separation - a breakdown. Jesus himself trembled in face of his death (John 12, 27; 13, 21). Gethsemani is the strongest manifestation of that. Jesus was disturbed by the death of his friend Lazarus (John 11, 33-35). He did not want to be stoic nor do we. We wish to live this important hour of our existence with him.

Jesus died in order to be totally faithful to the will of his Father, as an act of love towards Him (Mark 10, 32-34, 45). His death saves us for it is impossible to disassociate his love of the Father from his love for us. Jesus is the grain fallen into the earth that produces fruit (John 12, 24-32). His resurrection was a sure sign that his death was not in vain, and that he was really received by the Father as the sacrifice that saved all persons. Death is not the last word, "death is swallowed up. . .thanks be to God who has given us the victory through our Lord, Jesus Christ. . ." (1 Cor. 15, 54-57). Our faith gives us the certainty that it is life that conquers.

The christian united to Christ in baptism, lives all the realities of existence with him, until the supreme breakdown, He dies with Christ and can, on his part, unite the gift of his life to the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. "Happy are the dead who died in the Lord." (Rev. 14, 13). The christian is assured that God wills that those he has chosen may live forever. He is the God of the living, Abraham and the others, with whom He has made an alliance.

This certainty does not prevent a certain anxiety, because no one can presume to live perfectly this alliance with the living God. It is very serious thing to be in the presence of God, under the brilliance of His light. No one can have a full idea of the purification that a person needs to come into the light of God in definitive way.

That is why we pray for the dead. Prayer is the concrete continuation of our charity. The charity that unites us on earth continues being real after death. If the suffrages include the celebration of the Eucharist it is because, in our anguish, we have a certainty: Jesus loves his Father through us, and we can present to the Father, the sacrifice of his beloved Son. Praying for the dead we remember that they lived. It is not a question of judging nor of determining their degree of sanctity. It is simply an interpretation in love of a past lived together because His existence in common is a gift from God. The gift has not ended yet. Praying for the deceased we can try to discover a message, a particular aspect of the Gospel, that each Oblate lived in a personal way. Each brother is for us a bearer of God's word.

#### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. Am I praying myself, in prayer, for the definitive encounter with God?
2. Do I participate in the Eucharist in the perspective of the return of the Lord (1 Cor. 11, 26)?
3. For me, is prayer for deceased Oblates a sign of a charity that continues among brothers?
4. Can I give witness that I believed that death is a meeting with the Lord?

#### Exercises:

- I. Remember the deceased Oblates we knew and who helped us to grow or progress in our own life. Write specifically the message they transmitted to us.
- II. Remember a recent death. What was my attitude?

**44. SEPARATION.** If an Oblate wants to leave the Congregation or if, for a serious reason, the Congregation is obliged to dissociate itself from certain members, it will do so only after all means of correction and conciliation have been exhausted. In such instances it will act in great charity and in accordance with the canonical norms, respecting all the demands of equity.

**Rule 23.** Apostolic works and the demands of authentic religious life will be the determining factors in the design and furnishing of our houses, as well as in the community's lifestyle and means of support.

**Rule 24.** Any new forms of community living developed in response to special missionary needs will begin in dialogue and be periodically reviewed at the local and provincial levels.

## Rule 25

## RECREATION, REST AND RELAXATION

The community will provide its members with opportunities for recreation, rest and relaxation. Important events in the Oblate family and in the life of the community members will be celebrated in a simple and cordial way. Communities will welcome any Oblates who come to visit. They will be especially hospitable to missionaries returning temporarily or permanently to their Province of origin.

## Scripture for Prayer:

- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| 1. Psalm 90        | "...teach us to number our days aright. . ."                                |
| 2 Eph. 5, 15-17    | "...Make the most of the present opportunity, for these are evil days. . ." |
| 3. Eccles. 3, 1-8  | "...There is an appointed time for everything. . ."                         |
| 4. Eccles. 3, 9-15 | "...He has made everything appropriate to its time. . ."                    |
| 5 Jer. 29, 11-14   | "...For I know well the plans I have in mind for you. . ."                  |
| 6. Mark 6, 30-32   | "...Come. .to an out-of-the-way place and rest awhile. ."                   |
| 7 Luke 10, 38-42   | "...one thing only is required. . ."  |

Church Documents: Gaudium et Spes, Chap. III, 35.

## Reflection:

## ASCETICISM OF TIME

The Book of Ecclesiastes tells us, "There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under heaven" (eccl. 3, 1) For many of us there just does not seem to be enough time for anything. We are busy with activities from the first moment of the day until the last moment at night. We have to serve the people, we have to get the job done. The result is that we just do not have time. There is no time for the recreation, rest and relaxation, the celebration and the hospitality to which this Rule calls us. There is no time for a program of life and prayer and regular meetings of which Const. Article 38 speaks. There is no time for a personal rhythm of life and inner recollection which Rule 22 tells us are indispensable. There is no place for "useless time" in our life.

The question of time should be an important concern for any Oblate who is faced with constant demands from community, from mission and from one's own interior life. Dr James Whitehead, a consultant in education and ministry and a member of the Center for Pastoral and Social Ministry at the University of Notre Dame, treats this subject of time in an article in "Review for Religious". In it he gives guidelines for "An Asceticism of Time." This reflection is a resume of Dr. Whitehead's ideas.

A pattern often appears in the life of those involved in ministry. A mission begun with excitement, industry and selfless service gradually becomes overly busy. The effectiveness of the person's service is lowered. As work and outside demands overwhelm his schedule the community receives less and less attention. The person "just doesn't have time" to spend with brothers in community living, meetings, or prayer. Ironically, a common result of overwork among priests and brothers is the disappearance of prayer from their lives. It is set aside because of the demands of their ministry.

This pattern is produced by compulsions which force us to obsessively focus a great deal of energy in an unbalanced behavior, unfreely directed to one aspect of our life to the neglect of other important dimensions. Dr. Whithead points out two evident compulsions among many possible others that can distort our use of time. The first compulsion is labelled "The Messianic Complex". not in the sense that the person is an egomaniac, but only that he, probably unconsciously, assumes as his own responsibility the salvation of the world. This assumption is complemented by a practical loss of trust in God's guiding Presence in the world. The person has forgotten that his efforts at helping and service belong to a larger process of salvation. He succumbs to the need to respond to every hurt and problem in the community. He has idealized "the being all things to all men", and the ambition to spend oneself in the service of others beyond an awareness of one's specific gifts and limitations. We have to remember that there is only one Messiah.

The second compulsion is the compulsion of "busyness". This arises from the profound temptation towards self justification. The religious not only needs to be needed (a healthy trait, sometimes exaggerated), but is often inclined to believe that the multiplicity of the good he does makes him more worthy in the sight of God. It is a type of bargaining with God, proving our worth and earning our way. Time for prayer, rest, recreation, friendship, and even sickness time, when I am not *DOING* anything, helping anyone, is seen as "useless time". Do we not often enjoy being overly busy and especially telling each other how busy we are? Are we really taking care of 60,000 people, or travelling 32,000 square miles, or doing the work of five priests?

There is a need for all of us to develop an asceticism of time. The ability to manage time is not only related to adult maturity but is also is a necessary element in a christian spirituality. It is a question of taking responsibility for the decisions that shape the use of our time, its distribution for love, work and reflection. This christian time management, as an asceticism, is a response to grace, a response to the invitation to become less scattered and less self-centered, and more aware of a Presence already there. Once again it calls for discernment in our life to keep the balance between being strong, responsible agents of our own lives and, at the same time, remaining attentive respondents to the Presence of the Lord in us, in others and in daily events. Such an asceticism calls for an examination of the forces that now influence my use of time. Are there any compulsions that make us unfree and unbalanced in our use of time? Are there sacrifices required to reportion this use of time according to a priority of values? Asceticism begins in taking the time to listen and reflect on how we structure our days and weeks. It leads to an equitable distribution of our time according to the needs of the diverse dimensions

which integrate our life. It will also consider the meaning of time in the christian tradition and the experience of time in contemporary christian life. It is not an excuse for organising time for our own purposes in an egoistic way. It is not merely intended to give us more leisure or just to enhance our individual well-being. Asceticism of time is ultimately related to our mission, our service to others, our diakonia and its effectiveness. Time must be so arranged that the aptness and ability of the person can be cultivated in order to more effectively fulfil the mission.

This asceticism will help us to exorcise our compulsion and diminish the dissipation of time when we do not know what we should be doing with our life. It will help us to experience a more concentrated use of time in which we feel especially present and focused on our work, in our relationships and even simply in our being. This will let us feel present to people, have a sense of direction in our work and find ourselves working hard but not compulsively. It will give us permission for leisure, reflection, growth. This kind of time is a gift and a grace.

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. Do you plan your activities, work, prayer, community rest according to any kind of program?
2. What can you do to be more present to the use of your time?
3. Do you think rest, relaxation and leisure are necessary for your spirituality?

### Exercises:

1. Consider a recent day, more or less typical of your active life. Divide that day according to different kinds of time- time for work, time alone and time together. Work time refers to those periods of the day when we are performing activities most directly relevant to our apostolate or mission (whether with others or not). Time alone refers to periods of quiet when we are neither working nor with others. This will include prayer, listening to music, reading or other quiet forms of reflection. Time-together describes periods of being with others in non-work situations- conversation, meals, games, so forth.

Charting the percentages of a recent day spent in each of these times provides some of the information necessary for decisions about how to better use your time. Once you have the percentage of any given day given to each of these "times", ask how satisfied you are with the balance of time you perceive. Make any changes necessary in programming your time.

2. Prioritize your daily work involvements. Keep a log of your work activities and the time spent in them during a week-long period. Divide these activities and their respective times into three categories:

“A” - Activities most central to who you are and what you seem called to do. These are the activities most definitive of your vocation.

“B” - Activities which are important but which do not enjoy the same central significance in your life.

“C” - Support activities and chores that seem necessary as “things that have to get done”, but are least definitive of your career or vocation.

Once the distribution of your activities for one week is made according to “A”, “B”, and “C”, make a judgement about your satisfaction with the load of your work activities and its distribution.

If you are not satisfied, examine your “B” and “C” activities. Which ones are important but not necessarily to be done by me? What “B” activities can be omitted? How can I more efficiently accomplish the “C” tasks?

**Rule 26.** Oblate houses and hearts are open to all who seek help and counsel. Priests are always welcome; and other evangelical workers will be received so that they may share the bread of friendship, faith, reflection and prayer. The community will also respect its members' needs and their right to privacy.

**Rule 27.** In various places lay people feel called to participate directly in the Oblate mission, ministry and community. The terms of their association can be drawn up at the provincial level, in agreement with the General Administration.

**Rule 28.** Communities are invited to cooperate with the provincial director of the Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate in organizing and animating lay groups which seek to share in Oblate spirituality and apostolate.

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