



Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate United States Province

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Oblate Day

Dear Oblate of Mary Immaculate,

Happy Oblate Day! I hope you can spend some time in reflection and prayer today as you renew and deepen the calling you have received from God as a Religious and as a Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate!

It seems to me that we hear so much about our mission, what we do, and our work that it is easy to forget about who we are, what distinguishes us as Oblates, and our giftedness to the Church in and through the charism we have received from our Founder, St. Eugene de Mazenod.

Rightly so, our first formation focuses primarily on each one of us as persons: our prayer life, our relationships in community, our emotional and psychological maturity, our view of God and the person of Jesus, and how we embody the charism. Yes, how we minister and the qualities we bring to ministry are looked at also, but the primary focus is on us as missionaries rather than on the mission, the “being” much more than the “doing.”

David Munoz, OMI, focused on this idea in a presentation he gave to young-ish Oblates in the Canada-U.S. region.

Fr. Munoz reminded these Oblates:

“It is worth mentioning that the Missionary Oblates have had a long history of doing great missionary work. However, the focus on the “doing” led to a disconnect from the charism of St. Eugene. Missionary Oblate scholars of the mid twentieth century made some significant efforts in studying the charism and helping the missionary Oblates to let their mission be influenced by their “being” Oblate. A missionary Oblate culture can only be fostered when the mission of the Oblates is influenced and is borne of a deep reflection on the charism.

Recognizing, then, the tension between “being” and “doing,” it is important to rediscover the sources of the charism. St. Eugene insisted that fidelity to the charism was determined by fidelity to the Rule of Life. When he sent missionaries to foreign missions, he insisted that they be obedient to the Rule. In fact, the Superiors he chose for the foreign missions were men whom he had formed personally and whom he felt would imbue his very spirit. At the moment of first Oblation, each Missionary Oblate is given a copy of the Constitutions and Rules and told: “Do this and live!”

If the missionary Oblates are to remain faithful to the charism in the missions to which they are dedicated, they must begin by reflecting deeply on the Rule. When the Constitutions and Rules become a book gathering dust on a shelf, some of the missions of the Missionary Oblates take on the shape of

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personal charisms and not necessarily one that is faithful to the charism of St. Eugene. Missionary Oblates may do many good missionary works, but are they Oblate missions?

Therefore, reflecting on the Constitutions and Rules helps the missionary Oblate in maintaining this fidelity to the Rule. While many missionary Oblate scholars have formulated different lists on what constitutes the elements of the charism, they all refer essentially to the first ten Constitutions and Rules: Jesus Christ is the center of our life and our mission (C. 1 & 4), and our lives are modeled on the mystery of the cross. Our mission is to the poor and most abandoned (C. 5 & 7), which goes beyond simply the materially poor but also to all who need to know the love of God as St. Eugene discovered it before a crucifix one Good Friday. Our mission is carried out in apostolic community (C. 3), knowing that the community of the Apostles is its model and learning first at the feet of the Lord to then go out on mission. We are missionaries (C. 8), which calls us to not be administrators of ministries but rather to be creative and daring in our evangelization efforts. Our mission is carried out with love for the Church (C. 6, 9, & 10). St. Eugene taught that to love Christ was to love the Church and vice versa. Thus, our mission is carried out in discernment with the Church's leadership. Mary Immaculate, being the first one who believed, is included in the Church as a model of faith and mission. It is she who inspires our missionary zeal.

Finally, what causes the charism to be in constant movement is the sense of Oblation (C. 2). As Jesus Christ gave himself totally for the salvation of others, so are we called to give totally of ourselves in oblation."

As I visit Oblate communities in the province and in our mission in Zambia, I am most often edified by the mission we have embraced wholeheartedly, with passion and with compassion, in each place.

I am sometimes not as edified by the quality of life we share with one another in community. We don't often spend quality time together, tired after a full day of ministry. We sometimes don't take time to pray together, eat together, celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, get to know each other or inquire about our families of origin.

We can easily say such is typical of American (and Zambian) men. But let's not let ourselves so easily "off the hook."

Our primary ministry should be to one another in community, building each other up, praying for one another, supporting each other, spending quality time together and listening to each other.

It's a challenge I offer myself and each one of you.

Thank you for accepting so generously God's call to you as a Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate! May you always faithfully live that call both in who you are and in what you do!

In Christ and Mary Immaculate,

You

Louis Studer, OMI
Provincial