

NOVENA FOR OBLATE VOCATIONS 2016



INTRODUCTION

A foundation is the support for the construction of a new house to be lived in by a family. Our house finds its foundation in the community formed by Saint Eugene and his first companions. Just as a family opens itself to the arrival of children so as to continue fostering its original love, so it is up to us today to continue to build our house on the same foundation and to therefore prepare for its future.

The Oblates that God will one day want to send out in the footsteps of the Founder are still in the world; some of them we already now and others are still only in His mind. The Holy Spirit is preparing them in the secret of their hearts. Within them, they have those personal traits that make them like one another and which in some way identify the typical traits and the style of our own family. When we meet each other, something in their hearts will find itself at home with what they see in us.

We therefore have the task and duty to keep alive and clear those aspects that identify us and make us recognizable as we obey the Lord's invitation asking us to pray the Lord of the harvest to send more laborers into his immense harvest.

Thematic outline of the novena:

1. **Choices:** *the memory of my vocation*
2. **Passionate:** *in love with Christ and the human person – Men of heart*
3. **Authentic:** *authenticity; transparency of heart; love for truth; obedience to truth – Men of truth*
4. **Hungry and thirsty for justice:** *a compassionate look at human poverties and at the course of human history – With the gaze of Eugene*
5. **Friends of the poor:** *Ministers of mercy*
6. **Humble:** *a Marian character – Oblates of Mary*
7. **Fraternal:** *open to sharing and to mutual charity – builders of the common life – Community men*
8. **Zealous:** *sensitive to the driving breath of the Spirit – Dedicated to the mission*
9. **Daring:** *the daring of the missionary – Leaving nothing undared*

Each step of the novena is structured in this way:

- Introduction
- Opening prayer
- Listening to the Word of God
- From the writings of St. Eugene
- Brief meditation
- Closing prayer

FIRST DAY

CHOICES

The memory of my vocation



Introduction

This day is dedicated to the story of God in our life. This story begins with the gaze of God the Father which flows from the depth of his heart and rests upon all that we are, on our inner self, on that which we hold inside us: our way of being, whatever in us is good, just and beautiful, and most mercifully, on our weaknesses and our sins. Following the ray of this gaze, we find in ourselves the son who came to the world and is in the world. So we think of our family and of the people we have met and the Oblates who have brought us here. Today, it is we who are the mediators for others, for other sons of his who will come, just as it was for us. We need to go back to that beginning. We need to go back to being that mediator, to being the place where others will pass as the Lord calls them, just as he did for us. We need to pray that this will happen again, that what we have received might be given again.

We need to always remember it, even when we can no longer do anything, even if it seems impossible, when no one seems interested in us and it might seem that we have nothing more to give, we will always have a heart for praying that the harvest will not cease, the harvest will still provide bread, the essential bread (cf. Matt 6:11), His body thirsty for love, for the table of the poor.

Opening prayer

Lord, send upon me and upon us the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of memories, which take me back to days gone by, when I was enlightened by your loving gaze, when my heart was still free of those complications and concepts which have made it hard and deaf; when I had my future before me like a dream to be realized; when everything was possible, easy, important and I chose to follow you always. By a coincidence that I don't know how to explain, I got to know an Oblate, an Oblate community. Help me to understand again that it is You who marked out the path that led me to that encounter. Lord, don't let disappointments and fatigue cover this memory with dust, but revive it with your Spirit; make me return to myself as I am, just as you saw me on that day.

The Word of God

He went up the mountain and called to himself those whom he wanted and they went to him. (Mark 3:13)

From the writings of Saint Eugene

I considered myself a sensitive soul created by God with a tender heart, loving, generous (...). I also thought about the different situations in which the Lord has placed me, among which there are so many which, reminding me of the goodness of God, make me see clearly that his conduct towards me is one of fondness. Among others, that of having me spend three years under the direction and in the regular company of a holy priest, who died in the odor of sanctity, to whom He had given in my regard the heart of a brother, so much did he love me. I focused on these thoughts because I saw these graces as a result of creation, as if God, after having formed me, taking me by the hand, had led me elsewhere, saying: I have created you to love me, to serve me; I am doing even more, weak creature

that you are. I am taking you here and there, so that you might achieve this goal, whether by the help that these situations will offer you, or the inspirations that they might suggest to you.¹

(My soul) must bless Him every moment of the day for having wished to gaze upon it mercifully, with one of his powerful gazes that produce such grand things.²

I consider his choosing me was a choice of mercy and of great fondness.³



For meditation

I remember when I felt that call, that inner voice, the attraction that prompted me to belong to Christ forever, to have only Him. What do I think He might have seen in me at that moment? What bond was there between my being and His, between my desires and His words and actions, between what I believed and what He foresaw for me? I also remember when I met that Oblate or those Oblates who fascinated me, or simply challenged me. What was it about him and in them that made me feel the desire to share my life with them? What do I think we have in common today?

Closing prayer

Father, you know everything about me, you know my heart and you know that I love you. You have led me by the hand where I would never have thought of going; you have consoled my heart when no one had the words to do so and you gave me brothers to love and by whom I have been loved and accepted. I have walked with them; I have experienced joy and sorrow as in any family. It's true that at times I have been disappointed, misunderstood, left alone, but I have always found someone to show me the way back. That's how we have proclaimed Your Kingdom; we have become close to so many people whom you made known to us, just as Saint Eugene taught us. I am here today to look at the future horizon and to pray; we are here together. Call to yourself those whom you want, those whom you know and send them again into your harvest, with us, in our house which You have founded with the first Oblate community. The world needs them; don't leave us alone. Don't allow it to go out, this brilliant lamp which one day you lit and which I have not always replenished because of my failings, my fear, so that I could stay comfortable with my own little things. Lord, keep sending Oblates into the world, into your Church, among your poor.

*Omnipotent and eternal God,
you have deigned to call me, without any merit of my own,
but only in your mercy,
to be part of the Congregation of the Immaculate Virgin Mary.
I humbly ask you,
through the merits and the precious blood of our Savior,
through the intercession of Blessed Mary conceived without sin,
and of my other holy protectors,
grant me the grace
to be faithful to this holy vocation.*

(St. Eugene)

¹ Notes taken during the retreat at Amiens, December 1911. In EO I, 14, n. 95.

² Resolutions taken during the retreat made in the first days upon entering the seminary In EO I, 14, n. 28.

³ To Mme de Mazenod, 11 Oct. 1809. In EO I, 14, n. 61

SECOND DAY

PASSIONATE

Men of Heart



Introduction

This day is dedicated to rediscovering the passionate heart of Eugene. Young people know how to be passionate but so do adults, old persons, who have remained young within themselves. Young people want to find adventure in the pathways of life which they want to build according to their hopes and viewpoints and they know how to be passionate about what they do. They are like trees that push into the sky toward the beauty of the world.

Young Eugene also did everything with passion and it was this which led him to being totally captivated by Christ. He discovered and transferred to Him the affective qualities of his own heart. He saw the generosity with which the Lord dedicated Himself to humanity and with which he struggled, His gentleness and understanding with which He dealt with the poor and with sinners, His concern in the face of human suffering and how, precisely in this way, He revealed the passionate and merciful heart of His Father.

For this, Eugene asked nothing other of Christ than to love Him, not only with his own strengths, but with the very love of God Himself, with the heart of God, and in so doing, he let himself be transformed intimately into an extraordinary father.

When the first youth encountered Eugene, they recognized in him a heart very much like that of Jesus. Still today, we Oblates must remain, like him, “men of heart.” When people meet us, they should continue to see in each one of us “someone passionate for Christ and the Church,” still shining on earth a hint of the fatherhood of heaven.

Opening prayer

Give me, Lord, Your Spirit; pour out on me and on us the Spirit of love. Lord, help me to learn again from You that You are meek and humble of heart; that You call blessed the pure of heart and that You are saddened when you see your that your friends have become lukewarm. Knock again at the door of my heart and come dine with me (cf. Rev. 3:20); sit next to me and let me open up for You every fiber of my being so that You can once again make “living water” spring forth, even through me (cf. John 7:38). Give me a new heart, one that is young and passionate. Write your law upon it once again and make it follow that law without half measures, without compromises, like it did in the first days of my love.

The Word of God

I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! (Rev. 3:15)

From the writings of Saint Eugene

I love passionately all those who I believe love me, but they must love me passionately. (...) Saint Augustine is one of the men (...) whom I love the most because he had a heart just like mine, he knew how to love.⁴

⁴ *Portrait d'Eugene pour M. Duclaux* . In EO I,14, n. 30

It's the kind of hear that He has given me, this outpouring of Love that is mine and which pours forth on each one of them without anyone feeling less loved, just like happens, I would dare say, with the love of God for humanity.⁵

I have often told the good God that He has given me the heart of a mother and children that deserve my live accordingly; He has to (also) let me love then without measure.⁶



For meditation

The passionate way Eugene lived fascinates me. He said of himself: "I live only from my heart."⁷ Sometimes my feelings scare me, but my life is so dry when I don't follow the intimate urges of my heart and I follow designs and procedures, saying to myself: "Anyway, of what use is it?"

I remember when I began my journey with the Oblates and how I felt full of love, of passion. If I think of Jesus, I see that He loved with His whole being. One day, looking at the crowd, he was not embarrassed to be moved to his very core, like a mamma before the weakness of her children. From those days, He has continued to look for and call passionate young persons, like the "sons of thunder," like Peter.

Eugene knew that he was among them and he was not afraid to say that there was no one on earth like him "to whom God had given the gift of loving so tenderly, so strongly, so great a number of people."⁸

Jesus is still looking for these "men of heart" today; without knowing it, they are following the same path as Eugene and are facing the pain and the joy of loving without measure. Today I must ask myself if I am still among them, or if maybe I've set aside the resources of my heart, like the person who hid his one true talent that the Lord had given him to multiply.

Closing prayer

O Lord, who wept at the death of your friend Lazarus, who grew angry at injustices and hypocrisy, who loved your friends in the world until the very end, teach me again to love with my whole being, to not spare myself, to not surrender when confronted by indifference and misunderstandings. Give also to me and to us the heart of a father and mother, passionate and sensitive like that of Eugene

Let us have among us young men who respond like him with generosity to your call and to your love. Arouse again in them that passion for the good, the just, the true, that strong and faithful love were so characteristic of him. Make us men of heart in this world.

*My God, double, triple, multiply by a hundred my forces
So that I can love you, not only according to my possibilities
--which are nothing—
But as much as the saints have loved you,
As much as your most holy Mother loved you and loves you*

(Saint Eugene)

⁵ To Fr. Mouchette, at Montolivet, 2 Dec.1854. In EO I, 11, n. 1256

⁶ To Fr. Mouchette, at Montolivet ,22 March 1857. In EO I, 12, n. 1345

⁷ To Fr. Vincens, at N.D. de l'Osier , 9 Nov.1853. In EO I,11 n. 1187

⁸ To Fr. Dassy, at Bordeaux, 10 Jan. 1852 . In EO I,11 n. 1095

THIRD DAY

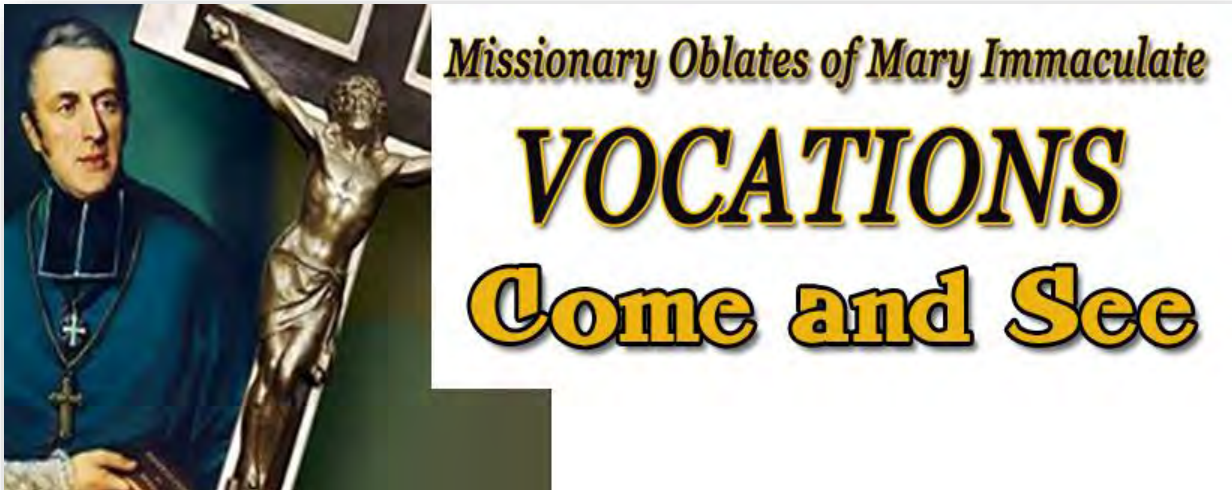
AUTHENTIC *Men of Truth*



Introduction

At times, it can be disturbing to feel like Saint Eugene saw himself. We are used to thinking of him as being so proud of his nobility. It's hard to believe that he could really be that sinner, that traitor, that ingrate as he describes himself before God in his youthful retreats. Yet that's the way it is. We cannot soften his expressions; we must resign ourselves to recognizing that he had become, with time and grace, a really authentic person, to the extreme. He saw himself in all the light of truth that only God's love can shine upon us without burning us.

We all need to understand what we are: we are children who continually go away from the house of the Father, but who always return to his embrace, each time more convinced that we are nothing without Him. We must recognize that we are indeed very rich, but in His mercy, and put into His service every skill, every achievement, and act only for His glory, like Eugene, so that those who meet us and are seeking the truth will find us their traveling companions.



Opening prayer

O Lord, pour out on me, on us, Your Spirit, the Spirit of Truth. Look upon me again with those eyes of Yours that are so full of mercy and understanding to appreciate who I am, to take my poverty, my weakness, together with everything of beauty that You have put in me. Help me every moment to trust in Your grace and to believe more in myself as You see me.

May Your truth make me free again, authentic, newly sprung from Your hands which form and reshape in me the new man, the true one, not the one that I myself have built.

The Word of God

Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Here is a true Israelite. There is no duplicity in him." (John 1:47)

From the writings of Saint Eugene

If someone had a greater need of redemption than I, a poor sinner, a rebellious ungrateful creature for so long, and it could be, then I would let him believe himself to be more grateful than I towards Jesus the Savior for having set him free. In any case, in light of the graces that have been given me and which I have defiled, and in spite of which I have sinned, I see myself as a man for whom redemption was all the more necessary.⁹

For meditation

I must be more sincere, authentic with myself and with others. I must do nothing for the sake of appearances, to make people notice me. It makes no difference if others are more distinguished, appreciated, praised. I must focus only on restoring what the Lord saw in me from the beginning and that I must still develop and allow to be transformed. If I construct another me, whoever I meet who is seeking, even without knowing it, the way that Eugene has traced in the footsteps of the apostles, will not recognize me, will pass by and try elsewhere.

I must only go toward the Lord who calls me as I am. He knows me, he saw me first in that moment of truth with myself (cf. John 1:48) and He loved me precisely for that, not for my abilities. I must not do other than that; I do not need to do anything special, remarkable. I must live only in constant gratitude for having been loved and freed from myself.

Closing prayer

O Mary, today I turn to you who were not afraid to reveal yourself as least in the eyes of God and as loved by him for this and not for something else. You knew that in time, all those who, like you, were authentic, would recognize you as blessed and would want you as their friend and travel companion.

Saint Eugene too, under the façade of his strength, hid a small heart, the heart of a child, a heart with which, when he encountered you, he saw you “smile.” Without even realizing it, he let himself be inspired by you as he founded a community which would continue the plan of mercy of your Son under your protection and guidance.¹⁰

Help me to become authentic, sincerely true, grateful, like the apostles who were sent to give freely what they had freely received and nothing else.

Make yourself known again to so many youth who are seeking the truth, who do not want to be hypocrites and false, who love what is true and essential, like Eugene. Smile on them too, Immaculate Mother; encourage them to join your Oblates, your missionaries in your world, the world occupied by the little ones and the poor.

*True Mother of the Savior,
adoptive Mother of sinners,
hold me on your motherly lap,
with your compassion.*

(Used by Saint Eugene at the beginning of the day.¹¹

⁹ *Notes taken during the retreat at Amiens, December 1911.* In EO I,14, n. 95

¹⁰ *To Fr. Tempier, at N.D. du Laus, 15 Aug. 1822.* In EO I, 6, n. 86

¹¹ J. Pielorz, *The spiritual life of Bishop de Mazenod ...*, pp. 58-59

FOURTH DAY

HUNGRY AND THIRSTY FOR JUSTICE

With the gaze of Eugene



Introduction

The Oblate charism is above all “a look of love and of faith on the world and the Church.”¹² As Jesus was moved by seeing the crowds wandering like sheep without a shepherd, so Eugene was moved by the people of his time and, prophetically, also of our time, so alone, so much prey to the first pusher of illusions and falsehoods, so prone to wandering.

As in love, everything begins with a look. Everything begins with a gaze that captures something others do not see, which goes to the center, to the depths. Eugene looked at the world around him and he let himself be challenged by the “need for salvation” that he saw in those whom he met. Like many young persons, he was moved by a hunger and thirst for that justice which God wants and which makes the world and life beautiful and which makes us sons and brothers among ourselves and not usurpers of the rights of others. He could not bear to see how those in government and even men of the Church were looking out for their own interests to the detriment of the most poor. For this, he felt challenged personally when he saw those who were excluded, hidden from the eyes of the world, the poor who were unaware of their own trampled dignity and who were left to themselves by those who should have been their shepherds.

His hunger and thirst for justice were not, however, only for others, but they obliged him to be honest with himself, first of all, and unable to bend before whatever he did not consider correct or to the “political correctness” that often poisons human relations.

Opening prayer

Lord, send down upon me, on us, your Spirit of holiness, the Spirit Paraclete, the Consoler.

Send Him who comes when a heart calls upon Him and asks Him to return.

Send Him when I see around me so many injustices that seem to prevail against the poor, the honest, the undefended.

Send Him when I see someone attack, use and exploit another.

Send Him again; do not let me doze off, satisfied by my quiet life; give me more hunger and thirst for Your merciful justice, and help me also to fight so that brotherhood, respect for the dignity of each person, sharing and unselfishness might be restored in our relationships and among those to whom we are sent.

Send Your Spirit so that I might desire even more that Your kingdom come, that Your Will be done and that I might know how to love even my enemies, rid my hands of vengeance and put aside pride so as to be, I myself, that just person which for a long time I expect of others

The Word of God

Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice. (Matt 6:33)

If your justice is not greater than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 5:20)

¹² Cf. F. Jetté. *Il missionario oblato di Maria Immacolata*. Frascati 1989, p. 32

But according to his promise we await new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you await these things, be eager to be found without spot or blemish before him, at peace. (2 Peter 3:13ff)

From the writings of Saint Eugene

What will become of you, poor and destitute ones, forced to having to beg because of the injustice of men, and the rigors of fate, to continually plead for your miserable existence, to self-consciously beg for the bread you need to sustain you in life? Everyone looks upon you as the dregs of society, unbearable to look upon, so much so that they turn their gaze away from you so as not to be forced to pity your state which they do not want to relieve...¹³

One would think that Providence had picked the wrong century by making me be born in this one, with the dispositions and, if you please, the qualities to do great things two hundred years ago. I cannot come to terms with error, with lies, with ungodliness. I am a man of sacrifice, but the frankness and honesty of my character keep me from dealing as is necessary with persons who do not really want the good but who bend over for the political.¹⁴

For meditation

What Eugene saw was the abandonment of the Church and the decadence of human beings through a look which focused on the value and the good of the person. This look came from his experience of the mercy of God which had transformed him and which fulfilled that innate sense of authentic nobility which made him so sensitive to injustices.

Today, I too must return to that same source and open my eyes, fix them where others are passing by indifferent and to seek again, as did Eugene, the Kingdom of God and His justice in myself and among those who would never think they are capable of receiving it.



¹³ *Instruction familière en provençal, données à la Magdeleine en 1813*. In EO,I,15, n. 114

¹⁴ *To Fr. Tempier at Marseille, 23 August 1835*. In EO I, n. 536

Closing prayer

Today, I go directly to you, St. Eugene, and I ask you to show me again how to look at the world and its people just as you did. Intercede for me so that I might follow your example and also become a man who looks at the world from the point of view of Jesus Crucified (cf. C 4).

That I might know more deeply what those around me are living; that I might understand what they are suffering, and especially what they are called to become, just like Christ sees them Who sacrificed Himself for them at the price of His blood.

That I might be aware of the injustices which exclude the poor and crush the weak; that I might share the burden which they carry who do not have friends among the powerful, who are outside of the power game and social prestige, who do not have a voice on the public square and the commercial centers of the world.

That I too might work to be honest and just; that I might not allow myself to be drawn into the ways of compromise and falsehood. I know that only in that way will I come close to those who, like you, are hungry and thirsty for the justice of the Kingdom of God.

Take me into their streets; let us look each other in the eyes and recognize one another and ask the Lord to send among us other apostles whose gaze is like yours.

*O Jesus, living in Mary,
come and live in your servants, in the spirit of holiness,
in the fullness of your power, in the perfection of your ways, in the truth of your virtues,
in the communion of your mysteries.
Rule over every adverse power, in your Spirit,
for the glory of the Father. Amen.*



FIFTH DAY

FRIENDS OF THE POOR

Ministers of Mercy



Introduction

Even as a child, Eugene was a friend of the poor. He himself tells us that he loved the servants who worked in his house as if they were dear relatives and friends. Even in his last Will, he asked that, on the occasion of his funeral, two poor persons from each parish in the diocese would be part of the funeral cortege.¹⁵ He always wanted them near him. He knew that by vocation, he was “servant and priest of the poor” and he lived as a poor man. He knew that Jesus loved them dearly and he was concerned about the many kinds of poverty that exist in the world among the miseries of human beings.

His desire was something more than exercising a ministry among the poor. He saw them at the center of God’s mercy and therefore, his life project was the same as that of Christ who proclaimed: “I have been sent to evangelize the poor” (Luke 4:18) and “I want mercy...” (Matt 9:13).¹⁶

He especially looked upon those whom he considered the most abandoned souls of all, who have no one to help them and he considered them the most precious part of the Church. Eugene got close to the poor and to sinners with great respect for their dignity, like a brother, a father, a friend. So the Oblates desire to be next to the poor with their thousands of faces, prefer them and, like the Divine Word, pitch their “tent” among them. (Cf. John 1:14)



Opening prayer

Lord Jesus, who in the synagogue at Nazareth made your own the merciful plan of the Father to bring to the poor the happy news of the Kingdom, help me to understand who the poor are to whom you want to send me; help me to discover them also among those who live near me and to understand that I too am like them and that if I have received something, I have received it as a grace I must share.

Give me the heart of a poor man so as to appreciate everything and every person; give me a merciful heart to move me again over the many human sufferings and urge me to make a gift of myself to help them, take care of them, heal them, pardon them, with the soothing oil of your healing Spirit and the wine of your blood poured out for all of us and mixed with mine.

The Word of God

At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest.” (Matt 9:36-38)

At sunset, all who had people sick with various diseases brought them to him. He laid his hands on each of them and cured them. (Luke 4:40)

¹⁵ Excerpt from Last Will. In EO,I, 15, n. 191

¹⁶ Cf. M. Bélanger, “Regina Congregationis nostrae I et II. Réflexions sur notre vocation et notre esprit marial”. *Études Oblates* (1944), n. 2, pp. 128-129

From the writings of St. Eugene

They will have deep-seated feelings of charity for the misery of the poor, and they will consider themselves happy to help in their needs these suffering members of Jesus Christ¹⁷.

These visits (to families during the missions) are not very pleasant, but they are very important because they bring the missionaries close to the people they come to evangelize. They present themselves with all the warmth of a charity that makes itself everything to everyone.¹⁸

For meditation

In his first conception of the Oblate community, Eugene saw his companions as dedicating part of their time to missionary work, with an uncommon zeal, and part of it preparing themselves to become “worthy ministers of the mercies of God for humanity.”¹⁹

Therefore, my spontaneity and the generosity of my poor human heart are not enough; I must prepare myself to encounter the poor with their many faces whom the Lord wants me to visit. I must work on myself to become a servant, a messenger of the mercy of God for them.

I must take care how I act, make myself more Christlike, take on His feelings, free myself of all seeking of personal honor, of esteem, of being praised. I must be poor in spirit and in the superfluous things that weigh me down in life. The more I look upon the crucifix, the more I discover again that I must put myself aside to be with Him, like His Mother, like the beloved disciple, in prayerful silence, respectfully listening to His broken heart and to the heart of the poor people he loves.

Closing prayer

From whom could the Lord Jesus have learned to be close to the poor if not from you, Mother of mercy? I ask this of you, appealing to His last words: “Woman, behold your son”, to be able to hold you among my most intimate possessions, in the depth of my being. Help me to learn what “I want mercy” means; give shape to my feelings and make them become merciful. Be my mother in all the events of my life.

Accompany me into the homes of the poor, among the abandoned souls, those in danger. Teach me your ways; help me to attract them with tenderness and the strength of your Son, so that I can make them feel truly loved and might free them from the false attractions of the evil one, from old habits of evil and from internal turmoil.

Make me a friend of the poor like you did for your Son and for Eugene and open again the way for those who want to be there too. Bring them to us, to be your friends and ministers of the mercies of God.

*Come, father of the poor,
Come giver of gifts,
Come, light for hearts.*



¹⁷ *Abrégé du règlement de vie des Messieurs les congréganistes de la jeunesse chrétienne*. In EO I, 15, n. 135

¹⁸ Cit. in J. Leflon. *Eugène de Mazenod...* vol. II, Paris 1960, p. 104

¹⁹ Cf. *To F. Nicolas Riccardi, at Marseille*, 17 Feb. 1826. In EO I, 7, n. 225

SIXTH DAY

HUMBLE *Oblates of Mary*



Introduction

Filial dedication to Mary Immaculate gives the Oblates a particular style which distinguishes them in simplicity, humility, love for service and for being modest. It is this which makes them enter on tiptoes into the lives of others, rendering them attentive to their hidden needs as happened in Cana of Galilee. (Cf. John 2:3)

This makes them lovers of reflection and meditation on life's events (Cf. Luke 2:19) so as to be, like her, contemporaries and cooperators in the sacred history of God and his merciful plan. Mary's humility is therefore their lifetime ideal to be "cooperators of the Savior," who always chooses the least ones for his works.

Opening prayer

Lord, You who ask that we learn from You who are meek and humble of heart, help me to live like the poor in spirit whom you declared blessed, those who know that they come from the earth and that without You, they can do nothing. To these, you have promised Your kingdom.

Make me always remember who I am and where I come from; make me always aware that all that I have and am, I have received it; that I am nothing more than anyone else; that I owe everything to You and I must take everything back to You.

Make me be like those servants who are happy for having done what they were supposed to do, without pretense, without expectations. Make me a human being side by side with other human beings, without privileges, like the most simple and unaware.

Only in that way will I be able to break the bread of the Word, like You did among the laborers, among the housewives, in the midst of people of every kind and race, with the weak of every kind, like St. Eugene wanted to do when he preferred to preach in Provençal, not for vain glory but to reach the heart of each person.

The Word of God

Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your selves. (Matt 11:28ff)

When you have done all you have been commanded, say, "We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do." (Luke 17:10)

From the writings of St. Eugene

Have always in your heart and on your lips these beautiful words of Scripture: "We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do." (...) Let us obscure ourselves in our own eyes and be careful not to ask anything from the people; we don't want their praise, their admiration, nor even their money.²⁰

²⁰ To Mons. Dassy, at N.D. de l'Osier, 27 July.1841. In EO I, 9, n. 733

All my trust is in God; all the more reason to use His gifts. Therefore, each one should be inward-looking and not take credit himself for anything that he has received. Every glory must return to its source; only to God be the honor and the glory.²¹

For meditation

I must have no fear of carefully considering my humanity and my personal story because it is exactly therein that my identity and my mission are found. I must recognize my limits because it is there that my vocation is hidden.

It is in this direction that Jesus is inviting me to go when he says: “Go, your faith has saved you.” The humble person is the one who recognizes the splendor of God’s truth in himself and in his life. The gift of myself that I can give will therefore be by “sincere”²² in the measure that it will be a spontaneous acknowledgement, an “obedience” and then a “bowing down” and a “genuflection” before such a truth. I must dwell in this truth of God in order to encounter myself and others, not on the level of false hypocrisies and conveniences, but on that of mercy which welcomes, includes and overcomes all.

Closing prayer

O Mary, who declared yourself to be the handmaiden of the Lord and who expected nothing from Him other than to understand a bit better what He was doing,

Who accepted to give to the world a Son come from God, not caring about shame and human judgments,

Who accepted Joseph as your husband, trusting in his justice,

Who accepted giving birth after a journey in hardship and difficulty, without any relatives to welcome you into their home, and then to flee from Nazareth for an unknown land,

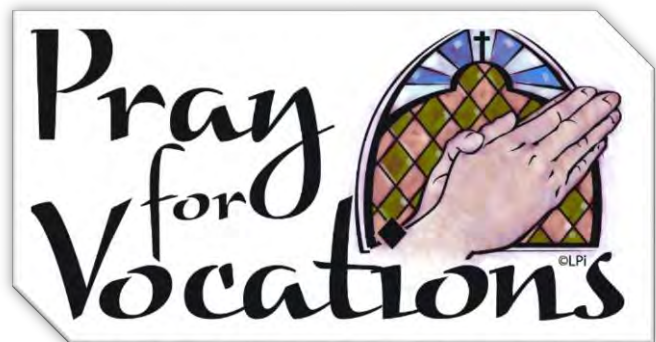
Who followed your Son, becoming his disciple, you who had taught him everything,

Who must have felt put off and sent away like others,

Who could do nothing to save Him from the hands of others and who refused him nothing, not even when he made you our mother,

Help me to accept you into my life and to learn from you that you are meek and humble of heart like Him. Give me the humility that made you mother of all, sister of all, without honors, without titles, without ranks, only with the gift of myself, so as to simply do what I have been asked to do. Give us other brothers like that, who come again to live in our house, as if it were your house in Nazareth, to learn there the practice and the secret joy of prayer, of silence, of service and sharing.

*O most blessed light,
Come into the innermost
Heart of your faithful.
Without your strength,
We are nothing,
Other than guilt.*



²¹ To Fr. Baret at N.D. de Clery, 22 June 1854. In EO I, 11, n. 1213

²² Cf. Conc. Vat. II, *Gaudium et Spes* n. 24

SEVENTH DAY

FRATERNAL *Community men*



Introduction

Asking God to send more workers into the harvest and into our Congregation is not the only thing we need to do. It's not enough to build a house; you have to live in it and live in it well so that others will be happy to live there. Praying for vocations therefore means also taking care that whoever has already entered our family does not have to go away disappointed.

If we pray, we also have to work to build up what we have prayed for; we also have to collaborate and not lag behind to prepare a house for whoever will come. It's a question of working not only as a builder but also as a farmer, a vine grower, to take care of the Lord's vineyard, of the vines with their shoots, so that they be joined to one single branch. It means cooperating to realize a world of good relationships, where we can grow together in brotherhood. Only in that way will we be able to invite others to our feast of pardon and friendship and drink together the new wine of mutual charity.

Opening prayer

O Lord who commanded your disciples to love one another as You have loved them and to forgive one another as many as seventy times seven, teach me the ways of love and of mercy; open my heart; let me find the time to be with my brother, especially when I notice that he is tired, discouraged, tempted, when he closes himself in his pride, in his shame, when he does not know how to ask for help and hides in whatever takes him far away.

Teach me to pardon him if he has been honored more than I or if he prefers others to me. Teach me to love him, to see all that is beautiful and good that you have put into his heart; teach me to appreciate him and support him and protect him from the criticisms of others. Help me to be a friend, a brother, an understanding mother and an encouraging father.

In that way, make of us the "most united family on earth," as Eugene saw us, a family of missionaries and servants of mercy, of your Word of love and of truth.

The Word of God

For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice. But the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace. (James 3:16-18)

Then Peter approaching asked him, "Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus answered, "I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times. (Matt 18:21ff)

Taking a child he placed it in their midst, and putting his arms around it he said to them, "Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the one who sent me." (Mark 9:35-37)

From the writings of St. Eugene

Have but one spirit, supporting each other. Even if something does not go according to your liking, keep from complaining. Communicate to one another kindly, without being argumentative and bitter, the remarks you think are useful. If they are not accepted, stay calm and do not stray from obedience.

No favoritism nor irritability, but openness, frankness, simplicity, kindness and especially charity. "Let all that you do take place in charity."²³

That more than paternal love of the leader for the members of the family and that cordial conformity on the part of the members toward the leader which establishes ties that come from the heart and form among us real family bonds like a father for his son and a son for his father, this I have not found elsewhere (...) And I say that a feeling, that I recognize as coming from the one who is the source of love, has stirred up in the hearts of my children this reciprocity of love which is the characteristic feature of our beloved family.²⁴

For meditation

Before being fathers, we are brothers. Brotherhood is a strange bond. One can be sons of the same father and the same mother, but be so different from each other. Sometimes, confrontation, jealousy, the dominance of one over the other seem inevitable. Jesus began a different kind of brotherhood: sons of the same Father with no other bond than that of having been brought forth, not by the will of man but of God. (Cf. John 1:12ff)

Coming together in community is as if we were called to take up again the experiences we lived in our natural families and let them be healed, completed, affected by new fraternal bonds. And that is how we become spiritual fathers: we need to first of all heal our brotherhood by becoming sons of God and thus, grow, becoming merciful as the Father, as Jesus lived and as he indicates to us in the many teachings he gave his apostles.

I have to reread them; I have to understand that it is necessary to be vigilant and to work so as to not make of my community only a place where I can rest and eat and pass through indifferently, where I dwell periodically while my real life is elsewhere. I need to make of my community a home, a family of brothers, like Eugene wanted.

Closing prayer

Teach us Lord to be brothers among ourselves as you taught your apostles and St. Eugene wanted us to be. Help me first of all to be in my community and to live there fully. Help me so that my attention is not focused so much on seeing who is the greatest, the best, on my own prestige, but rather on that little child placed in the midst of the apostles. Help me to welcome the other, embracing his humanity, his weaknesses, without pretense. Heal me of my need to put myself at the center. Help me to be of service to the brotherhood to make it grow, mature, become more profound.

Send among us, Lord, men who can be first of all brothers, sincere and faithful friends, our companions in following You who did not come to be served but to serve and give Your life.



*God, You are Love.
Give to us your sons, gathered in Your name
and nourished with Your bread,
to love one another as you have loved us
so that the living presence of Christ in our midst
might bring peace and joy to our hearts,
and in all people, the fruits of redemption.*

(from "The Oblate Prayer")

²³ To Fr. Honorat, at Paris, 9 Oct.1841. In EO I, 9, n. 9

²⁴ To Fr. Mouchette, at Montolivet, 2 Dec..1854. In EO I, 11, n. 1256

EIGHTH DAY

ZEALOUS

Dedicated to the Mission



Introduction

When Jesus asked us to pray that the Father send workers into his harvest, he insisted that these men must be inspired by Him and “driven out of themselves.”²⁵ To go out, to be sent out to the mission therefore comes from a strong inspiration to go out of oneself so as to go elsewhere. This inspiration is missionary zeal which comes from an impassioned heart, inhabited by the Holy Spirit and which leads the missionaries to leave their own families, their own countries, their habits and cultures to go to other places where the proclamation of the Kingdom is desired.

Zeal expresses itself in being dedicated, concerned, loyally engaged, without seeking personal interests, in faithful service to those for whom one is sent. It implies concern for these people and the desire, typical of us Oblates, to go to them especially when they are alone, excluded, abandoned to themselves, without anyone to care for them. For us, such zeal is rooted in the oblation of ourselves, in the sincere gift of ourselves and is embodied especially in fraternal charity (Cf. CC 22 and 37), faithful to the Last Testament of St. Eugene.

Our community is the first place where we are forced out of ourselves in order to go toward another and our mission comes from the hidden heart of such a community, as a result of the work of the Spirit in each person and in their fraternal relationships.

Opening prayer

Lord Jesus, You call me to join Your mission; give me the strength of the Spirit who sends me out, beyond myself, in a movement that becomes a condition of constant gift of myself. Support me when I am tired; keep me always on the move, even when I need to stop. Instead, help me transform every period of rest into an occasion to return to my community, as if to a little Nazareth, where I can become more like you in prayer, in study, in silence, together with my brethren and united to them in charity.

Give me a heart that listens to the gentle and mysterious breeze of Your Spirit (Cf. 1 Kings 19:12ff) which shows me the way to keep going; help me to see there the call that comes from that part of the Church which, like an abandoned spouse, still today says to us Oblates: “Come!” (Cf. Rev. 22:17)

The Word of God

For the love of Christ impels us, once we have come to the conviction that one died for all; therefore, all have died. He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. Consequently, from now on we regard no one according to the flesh; even if we once knew Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him so no longer. So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come. And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. (2 Cor 5:14-19)

²⁵ The word used in Matt 9:38 to indicate being sent is the same used a little before to describe driving out demons (Cf. 9:33)

From the writings of St. Eugene

Whoever would be one of us must burn with the desire of his own perfection, be inflamed with love of Our Lord Jesus Christ and for His Church, and with a burning zeal for the salvation of souls.²⁶

For Meditation

Zeal is a response of our entire person that comes from the spirit of oblation and which becomes all of a sudden a creative and active response to the interior inspiration which moves one toward the mission. When the Lord for the first time sent the apostles on a mission, he sent them to the lost sheep of Israel; then, with the gift of the Holy Spirit, he sent them to every creature in the whole world. That's how it happened with St. Eugene who in the first Rule wrote that, if for the moment it was necessary to limit the scope of our zeal to the poor in the countryside, the desire of the missionaries should be "to embrace, with holy desire, the immense breadth of the earth."

I must go back to prayer in order to listen to the spirit that encourages and engages me, to let myself take off from there and on His wings, to reach far-off worlds, outside of myself, beyond my daily horizons. I must ask myself how I am nurturing my desires, whether I am fostering them with that which comes from the Spirit. I must remember that my zeal needs spiritual passion and fraternal charity; it needs an every deeper and authentic oblation of myself.

Closing prayer

Lord, I entrust to you my brethren who are in the mission, the loneliest, the most tired, those who feel that they are left to themselves before an immense sea of needs and difficulties. I entrust to you those who are risking their lives, getting sick but nevertheless continually dedicating themselves to those to whom they have been sent, with fidelity, with care, with love, as if they were their own relatives, their children. I entrust them to you because they have left their homeland, their family, for countries that are often unwelcoming, without resources.

I also entrust to you my community; make it more missionary, more afire with the desire to go to those who are waiting, without knowing it, for Your coming. You sent your apostles out for the first time two by two; remind us not to leave any of our own alone. Do not let us fool ourselves into carrying on our own battles, our own mission without the others. Remind us that we need each other and that the world does not need us, but You, who chose to stay in Nazareth with your family and who, when it came time to leave, did not remain alone, but you called from the very beginning your apostles so as to build with them the boat for going together into the world: Your Church.



*Lord, help me.
You alone can give strength to my soul;
You alone can renew in my very depths
the sacred fire of Your love
which must, first of all
inflame my heart and spread,
through my ministry,
to the souls you have entrusted to me.
(St. Eugene)*

²⁶ *Constitutions and Rules of 1853*

NINTH DAY

DARING

Leave nothing undared



Introduction

The Oblates spare no effort to awaken or to reawaken the faith and reveal who Christ is (Cf. C 7). In the Rule of 1825, Saint Eugene had emphasized this personal commitment with the phrase: “Nihil linquendum inausum” – leave nothing undared. It’s a matter of thinking of everything, of trying and retrying, of inventing and reinventing ways, methods, that are adapted to those persons, to these places, to that culture or subculture to whom one is sent. It’s also a matter of not surrendering to the first difficulties and to face courageously the dangers and the difficulties one encounters.

For all this, it’s necessary to firmly believe that one has been sent by Jesus, to be certain that it is His will to do just what is being done and therefore, human desires have little to do with it. Only a great love, a great internal certainty can give life to such resolve. It cannot be simply a taste for adventure or the stubbornness to succeed in one’s own project. It is only upon this certainty, on the Word of the Lord, that missionary daring is founded.

Opening prayer

O apostles of the Lord, Saint Eugene, so many saints loved by Him, you who have opened up the most diverse ways for announcing the Kingdom in your own times, intercede for me, for us, so that we might follow in your footsteps and today, with the necessary daring, open up new ways to reach the people of our time, wherever the Lord wishes to send us.

Help me by your example to trust in His Word, to always have before me the plan of what I must do: the good of those to whom I have been sent; being daring, courageous, leaving nothing undared, believing that He himself will by His providence make me find those who will help me, guide me, in preparing a place for encountering Him, even today, with the poor of the world, those hungry for His bread of Love.

The Word of God

Jesus sent out Peter and John, instructing them, “Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover.” They asked him, “Where do you want us to make the preparations?” And he answered them, “When you go into the city, a man will meet you carrying a jar of water. Follow him into the house that he enters and say to the master of the house, ‘The teacher says to you, “Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’” (Luke 22:8-11)

On frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own race, dangers from Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, dangers among false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many sleepless nights, through hunger and thirst, through frequent fastings, through cold and exposure. And apart from these things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches. (2 Cor 11:26-28)

From the writings of St. Eugene

I have told you (...) that you must prepare the way when you want to succeed, basing myself on the saying of St. Ignatius that in all things, you must put your trust in God as if nothing could be done by human beings, then act prudently, using all human means, as if God does not want to get involved.²⁷

²⁷ To Fr.. Tempier, at Rome, 18 June 1832. In EO I, 9, n. 425

You must never step back from your work, never be intimidated. The good God is with us to inspire us and our good Mother to help us. Detest gossip and back-biting: that destroys everything and you can do anything (...). When you can say that you are where obedience has placed you, doing all that is required, then you are strong and you must be very calm and very secure.²⁸

For meditation

I think of how often I surrender before the indifference of the world. I tell myself that people have little time; young people have other interests; they have lost the value of the sacred; society's problems are too difficult for anyone to think of faith. So I stop and go home, beaten and cynical. But with the Lord, everything becomes possible again. He still speaks to the people of today; He is no less present than before.

We have to bring to Him these new situations and the conditions in which we live and look at them with the eye of the Spirit, with the look of Eugene, and have the courage to make new choices. We must come together more to pray, to believe, to hope, to plan. The Lord can still make water spring from a rock, suggest the right words, open the way, find someone whom He has chosen for this. So why be afraid?

I need to study the life of Saint Eugene and the Oblates who followed him, as he himself suggested, and of so many saints who can still show me how to act, how to be an apostle for today.

Closing prayer

O Mary, at the end of this novena, we all turn to you to ask, with your help, for the coming of new apostles into our family. In your own way, you were brave and daring: as soon as you learned from the angel about your cousin, you left quickly, in spite of the dangers and the inconveniences.

You trusted in the Word that you had heard and believed and in your newly conceived Son, present in your womb, ready to make heard His voice through yours (Luke 1:44), ready to bring joy to the world, joy to the poor who, in you and in Him, see the beginning of the long awaited time of their redemption and find strength and confidence in meditating on how the mercy of God endures from generation to generation.



Give me and give to every one of us this courage, this daring; make us your missionaries, your Oblates, and pray for us that others might soon join us to proclaim with you the greatness of God who does great things for those who love Him and serve Him with a sincere heart.

*O my Lady and Mother, Mary,
I entrust my soul and my heart,
to your protection and mercy,
now and until my death.
I entrust my every hope and consolation,
every suffering and tribulation,
and my whole life until my last breath,
so that through your intercession and merits,
all my actions might be directed and carried out
according to your will and that of your Son.*

²⁸ To Fr. Arnoux, in England, 24 Jan.1852. In EO I, 3, n. 53