

**Week of Prayer for Vocations
21 – 29 May 2019**

FIRST DAY, 21 MAY 2019, SAINT EUGENE

WELCOMING (CONST. 41)

From the Gospel according to Matthew (Mt 10, 40-42)

“Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me. Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever receives a righteous man because he is righteous will receive a righteous man’s reward. And whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink because he is a disciple – amen, I say to you, he will surely not lose his reward.”

Oblate text

Oblate houses and hearts are open to all who seek help and counsel. Priests and religious are always welcome; and other evangelical workers will be received so that they may share the bread of friendship, faith, reflection and prayer. At the same time, the community will also respect its members’ needs and their right to privacy. (CCRR, R. 41a)

Testimony

When I was studying linguistics as a young man one of our teachers told us that for the life of a language it is necessary that it be a relatively open and relatively closed system; otherwise - if it is totally closed off or if it is open to another similar one - it dies. And this, it seems to me, applies to every living organism. Either balance, or death. However, Christianity is anything but balanced. And even less the Oblate charism. Jesus is not balanced, he is not moderate, Jesus accepts man unconditionally and he does so in order to "die"! And Eugene? Welcomed by the crucified Jesus, he spends his life to carry forward the mission of Jesus: to be near the poor and to bring them the good news.

As I try to live the life and the mission together with youth, I understand more and more that our charism can be summed up in one word: closeness. And it is a radical closeness. This closeness that can cost you your life. Living this closeness means opening oneself to the other and in a certain sense, breaking down the walls between you and me just as Jesus himself did first.

Welcoming today’s young people means first of all going out to meet them where they are and not where we would like to meet them; then seeing them as they are and not as we would like to see them and welcome them as such: with their weaknesses, immaturity, gifts and talents. To welcome them means to listen to them without prejudice and allow them to enter our home, our personal and community life, thus risking having to change our ways of doing and thinking, cooking and praying ... in a certain sense, of dying.

Oblate closeness is dangerous: it’s easy to fall; it’s easy to make mistakes, get hurt; you risk death. But it is precisely when I die to myself to welcome the other that a new life is born. This is the law of the gospel. If we remain relatively closed and relatively open, we will perhaps still live for a while, calm and safe, and one day we just die. If instead we risk opening the doors, maybe we will die just the same ... but for life!

Fr. Vlastimil Kadlec, OMI – Czech Republic

Prayer

Prayer

Holy Father,

we come to you because Jesus asked us to pray
that you send workers into your harvest.

Therefore, send us generous young men,
passionate for Jesus,

willing to make of their whole life a total oblation to you,
to become close to the poorest and most abandoned,
and to proclaim the Gospel.

May they burn with the same fire that you enkindled in Saint Eugene;
may they come to be part of his family
and, with all the Oblates, may they continue the work of Redemption.
Mary Immaculate,
Who first gave Jesus to the world, be with us as we pray. Amen

SECOND DAY, 22 MAY 2019

COMMUNITY, (CONS. 3)

From the Gospel according to Matthew (Mt 18, 19-20)

Again, [amen,] I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Oblate text

"My dearest friend and good brother, if my letters give you as much pleasure as that which I experience on receiving your letters, I imagine that you wish to receive them oftener. As for myself, I would wish to have such happiness every day. I am bored when separated from you and pine for my return. Nothing on earth is worth being kept from dwelling pleasantly in our holy house with such good brothers as yourselves. Never have I appreciated so much quam dulce et quam jucundum habitare fratres in unum. This strikes me all the more in that I see with my own eyes that it is not given to all communities to taste this happiness, harder to find than one thinks in this world below. Let us pray God to preserve for us this precious blessing that men cannot snatch from us except by our own fault... May these be ever the foundations of our little Society which, combined with a truly disinterested zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, and the most tender, affectionate and sincere charity amongst ourselves, will make of our house an earthly paradise and will establish it in more solid a manner than all possible orders and laws." (to Fr. Tempier, 12 August 1817)

Testimony

For me, the community is the right place to "live fully and preach the mystery of the cross." The cross, the community and the mission are at the heart of my Oblate vocation.

I am a South African Oblate. I was still very young when I felt within myself the desire to become a priest, but like most young people, I wandered away from the Church. I met the Oblates during my university years, in a meeting of young people to which I was invited by a friend. The memory of the profound sense of peace I felt and of the strong feeling of joy is alive in me. And it was there that I decided to give my life to the Lord as Oblate, because I had found what I was looking for, attracted also by the Oblate cross that my parish priest wore.

My community experience is very rich and positive. In it, I have always felt a profound sense of belonging; I found support and encouragement; I have been helped to grow as a man and as an Oblate; I discovered the purpose and meaning of my life and my vocation.

One of the important aspects of community life is being able to speak as brothers; to openly say to the other what I think, even unpleasant things. They are said with love, with gentleness and with humility. To achieve this, concrete prayer is very important: praying for one's brother produces the miracle of fraternal life.

In the community, I feel loved and appreciated, but I also experience feeling hurt and judged; and, for my part, the experience of hurting others. In this sense, the community becomes the place of forgiveness, the place where one concretely experiences God's mercy. Living in community helps me to know my limits, my fragility as a creature; this makes me aware of my need for the other, for my need for God. This awareness frees me and allows me to live with others and tolerate their fragility. Among the many challenges I have to face, one of them is that of being a missionary, of preaching and living the Gospel of mercy and forgiveness first of all within my community.

Nevertheless, it strikes me that there is always within me a deep feeling of joy. And this joy becomes my consolation; it gives me strength and impels me to go out and be a presence that transmits life to my brothers. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit that gives me the certainty of the presence of God in my daily journey. In this consists my choice of life, my conviction, my freedom and the joy with which I embrace my cross and my mission. This is why the cross, the community and the mission are the three things situated at the heart of my Oblate vocation.

One of the things I had to learn in community life, indeed, that I am still learning, is "knowing how to lose". "If the grain of wheat fallen on the ground does not die, it remains alone; if instead it dies, it produces

much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life "says Jesus" (Jn 12:24).

I often hear the call of Pope Francis in me: community life "needs to be discovered, loved, experienced, proclaimed and witnessed". But it is only love given by God that allows us to welcome and live community life fully. I am convinced that, with the grace of God, community life is possible.

This reflection gives rise to a profound feeling of gratitude in my heart. I thank the Lord for the gift of my community; I would like to make my own the words of Psalm 116: "What will I give to the Lord for what He has given me? I will raise the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord".

Fr. Bonga Thami, OMI - France

Prayer

Good Jesus, you see in us
the mysterious growth of the good seed
that you cast into our lives
and the wheat that grows together with the weeds:
let us be fertile land and fruitful shoots
to bear the fruit you hoped for.
You see the silent yeast in us
to knead into the mass of the world
and the simple water that becomes new wine:
let us be alive and effective fermentation
to fill up with you the people of our time
so that they might taste
that good and joyful flavor of communion
and of the mutual gift of self.
You see the hidden treasure within us
for which you have renounced all your possessions
and the pearl of great value you bought
at the price of your blood:
let us desire and seek holiness
as the immeasurable wealth of our life.
Lord Jesus,
heal our gaze so that in the real world,
we can see the Invisible one
who already calls us to be your disciples:
be light to our eyes
so that we all recognize and choose
the beauty of our vocation. Amen.

THIRD DAY, 23 MAY 2019

UNIVERSALITY, (CONS. 5)

From the Gospel according to Matthew (Mt 20, 25-28)

But Jesus summoned them and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Oblate text

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. (CCRR, C. 5)

Testimony

When I am welcomed as a brother and friend, as another, as someone who only seeks to share, love and let himself be loved, when I only seek to serve and not be served, it is then that I believe it is possible to live in the dynamic of the Kingdom of the Merciful Father which Jesus preached. This is the God of Jesus who reveals himself in the meek, starting with the person, and leading us to an experience of loving encounter with him and with others.

I have been working for two years in a small community on the outskirts of the city of Dublin, Bluebell. I could describe this community as a community of simple, kind, hardworking people, with strong human and Christian values, ready to welcome the missionaries, generous with their time and service, willing to build community.

I must say that from the beginning, what captivated my heart was the welcome; I discovered that their love came from the heart; it was authentic. They have welcomed me as a son or a brother.

Leaving your country, leaving your friends and family, having to learn a new language is undoubtedly a big challenge. Many times, I experienced fear and loneliness; I was outside of 'my world', of my comfort zone. Suddenly it is as if you were in 'nothingness' and at the same time you experience 'the whole', a 'whole' that is the Lord and is the community. I believe with firm conviction that the community saves us and leads us to understand the Lord's will in what we do as missionaries; Without the community, my Oblate vocation would not make any sense. It is in community that the Lord has called us and it is to the community that we are sent.

One of the specific aspects that I value in the community that I serve is the family atmosphere. The passage from Mark comes to mind when Jesus is told that his mother and brothers are waiting for him. Jesus answers them: "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who were sitting around him, he added: "These are my mother and my brothers" (Mk 3,31-34).

In this community I found a new dynamic for the priest/laity relationship. Here I am not the pastor, and they let me know it. Here I am the brother, their brother who walks with them, looking together for new ways so that each member of this family feels loved and accepted.

Jesus accepts us as brothers; he is the one who speaks of a common Father, his Father who is mercy. Since all of us in Jesus are brothers, it is possible to live in a constant 'construction' of an identity that goes beyond blood ties. From my experience, wanting to be a 'brother' and 'friend' is the first condition to build a community.

In this time, I have been able to witness the real interest that the members of the community show for the weak and sick brother. 90% of the active members of this community are older adults: the average age is 70. They have wisdom in their hearts, they know how to make your day happy; they know how to give what really matters. Living with them, having tea after having celebrated the Eucharist together fills my soul. They do not know how to leave you 'out of tea time'; they do not forget you; When tea time has arrived, they make sure that you have your cup of tea sweetened with the presence of each one of them. A beautiful experience of God!

Around the tea table we continue to celebrate the Eucharist; nobody is left out, everyone is invited, it does not matter if you are known or unknown, it does not matter if that day you have not dressed well or if you seem confused. They have accepted themselves as they are, they know each other, they take care of one another, they 'wait'. Yes, I have experienced community in my own flesh right here, in the Eucharist of common life, where the Eucharist happens when sharing life.

I am greatly inspired by the way Jesus treated his disciples; he called them 'friends' not subjects or servants. He did not look down on them. Only someone who has little confidence in himself needs to dominate others. Jesus did not need to do that. He lived in the conviction of being the son of a common Father who invited him to establish his reign of justice among men and women. Jesus was sure of himself; that is why his only authority was that of service and he treats his disciples as friends.

If there is to be any fundamental characteristic and principal feature in our Oblate communities, it will be merely the 'universality of service,' with the sole intention of being 'friends', of seeking only the good of my brother, of letting him know that he is longed for, that he is loved, that he is respected and accepted.

As an Oblate who is making his way in community, I feel invited to share with simplicity my experience of encounter with Jesus, which will then be put into practice through service, with all my limitations, wounds and contradictions. Because of my way of relating to others, I feel invited to be a mirror, an image of the new world announced by Jesus.

Fr. Eduardo Núñez-Yepez, OMI - Ireland

Prayer

Good Father,
who love all your creatures
and want to make your home in them,
give us a heart that you listen to,
able to rest in the heart of Christ
and beat to the rhythm of your life.
Lord Jesus, lover of life,
Make our hearts as big as yours;
tell us what you want
and make it happen in our flesh.
Empower us with the strength of your Resurrection
and permeate us with eternal life.
Holy Spirit, awaited guest,
come and show us the beauty
of a life that belongs entirely to Christ.
To you, Mary, ever present Mother,
we entrust the desire for the Fullness
waiting to explode inside the hearts of many young people.
You who welcomed the Ineffable,
Arouse also in us the daring of your Yes. Amen.

FOURTH DAY, 24 MAY 2019

JOY, (CONS. 39)

From the Gospel according to Luke (Lk 10, 17-20)

The seventy[-two] returned rejoicing, and said, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us because of your name." 18 Jesus said, "I have observed Satan fall like lightning from the sky. Behold, I have given you the power 'to tread upon serpents' and scorpions and upon the full force of the enemy and nothing will harm you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven."*

Oblate text

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. (CCRR, C. 39)

Testimony

"Always rejoice in the Lord", says the letter to the Philippians. We know that happiness or joy are the proper attitudes of the Christian; Pope Francis reminded us of that in recent years. For me as an Oblate, being cheerful or joyful is the meaning of our Congregation. It is the measure that shows me if I am living my vocation fully and, therefore, if I am responding to God's call. I will tell of some moments that have been a source of joy for me and have confirmed and nourished my vocation.

The encounter with my brothers, although not always easy, has been a source of joy, because I have found my family there. It's knowing I am being accompanied and supported, even if it is not clearly expressed. The bond and the affection that is lost in leaving one's family of origin is rediscovered in the welcoming community.

This experience of joy has always been supported by the grace of God as manifested through my brothers, who have taught me to love, especially when fatigue and weariness in different circumstances deprived me of this ability. Constitution 39 invites us to find joy and blessing in community life, because the brothers are changed into a source and sustenance for continuing to live the adventure of missionary life.

I have had, without a doubt, moments in which tensions spawned the temptation to break the bond with the community, but in the end, I realized that outside of our home, I would not have encountered support such as that of my brothers.

Encountering the simple folks, from whom I learn a lot to grow as a person and as an Oblate, is the other place where I experience joy. They are the faces of Christ who for my time and strength, and which doubtlessly consume me, but in the end, they leave me full of satisfaction because I realize that it is worth being consumed for each other, investing time and caring, without expecting grand results, simply by giving oneself. It is in those moments that I feel the joy of being an Oblate.

Joy also means the ability to love, something God has given me, and which allows me to give myself little by little and every day, especially when I experience the greatest difficulties and I do not feel the desire to continue. It is there that, with humility and in prayer, I recognize that God makes himself present, even if he seems absent. This fills my heart with hope, repairs it and makes me feel joy.

I always have to thank God for calling me to be an Oblate, ensuring my happiness every day, and so my life makes sense and is filled with the joy of an Oblate.

P. Giovanni Nova, OMI - Venezuela

Prayer

Lord Jesus,
give us a free heart,
powered by the breath of the Spirit,
to announce the beauty of the encounter with you.
Help us to feel your friendly presence,
open our eyes,
make our hearts burn,

to see ourselves as "on fire with the mission".
Let us dream with you
a fully human life,
pleased to be consumed by love,
to get up, to go
and ... not be afraid.
Virgin Mary, sister in faith,
make us quick to say our "Here I am"
and set us on a journey like you,
to be bearers in love with the Gospel. Amen.

FIFTH DAY, 25 MAY 2019

SERVICE TO THE POOREST (CONS. 8)

From the Gospel according to Luke (Lk 4, 16-19)

He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,* because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord."*

Oblate text

I have just returned from confirming a sick person in the rue de l'Echelle. Although I have become accustomed to the welcome I receive everywhere and at all times when I go to administer the sacraments to the poor, this time the expression of gratitude was so touching and universal that I feel I must mention it here once again. People vied with one another to ensure that I did not slip. They came to the doors to receive my blessing. They were astonished and expressed their satisfaction and gratitude aloud on seeing me come to visit this miserable area. In the house of the sick person all the closest neighbours had gathered to welcome me and the sick person was overjoyed to see that the bishop was not deterred from coming to her by the poverty of the place. Little did she know, the good woman, that I was as happy as she was to approach the poorest of my children and to fulfill the duties of my ministry among this unfortunate class of people, who are more interesting in my eyes than the richest and most powerful in the world.

Testimony

Desiring to follow Jesus, I entered the diocesan seminary of Viterbo, but the more I went forward with my theological studies, the more I recognized that my path was different: to proclaim the Lord's love to the poor in countries where He was not known. When I discovered the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and their charism 'Announcing the Gospel to the poor', I decided to enter this Congregation and dedicate my whole life to the poor. So in 1990 I landed in Korea.

With the help of a Korean priest, I discovered that there was a city with great marginalization challenges. So I arrived in 1992 in Seong Nam City, a metropolis of one million inhabitants just on the outskirts of the capital Seoul. I began to visit poor families in a slum area of the city. I remember that on one of these visits I entered a basement where there lived a lonely old man; and moreover, he was a paralytic. The stench of that small, semi-dark room was sickening. This poor handicapped man told me his story: as a young man, an accident at work left him without his lower limbs. Having no one, much less great economic possibilities, so began his ordeal. At first the people of the neighborhood did their best to help him. Then, the more the years passed, the neighbors began to forget about him. He ate when someone remembered to bring him something. He spent all the days alone and carried out his physiological needs in that hovel. In that half-dark room, dirty, foul-smelling and full of useless junk, I listened to him for two hours. I tried to put some order to the place and prepared some food. Before leaving, I approached to embrace him; at that moment a strong and acrid smell of urine and dirt provoked a strong urge to vomit. In that deep and endless moment, I heard a voice saying to me: "Do not be afraid, it is I". From that moment, confirmed by that great revelation, I began my adventure alongside the poor and with the least of society ...

In 1993, with the help of the nearby parish, we started a daily food service for poor and lonely elderly people: the 'House of Peace' ...

In 1998 a very serious economic crisis hit the Far East. In Korea, from one day to the next, thousands and thousands of people found themselves on the street without a job and without a salary to support their family. Given this new and more urgent call that pricked our consciences, with the help of some generous and good lay people, we began the 'Anna House'. We began as an evening food service in a small, old, abandoned and shabby warehouse that the nearby parish had kindly made available to us. We only offered 80 meals three times a week.

Now Anna's House offers 550 daily meals and offers a shower, hair-cut and clothes distribution service, thus answering to the primary needs of those who live on the street ... In this long journey together with the poor, I learned a lot from them.

They taught me that life is always a gift, even amidst misery and obstacles. I have seen so many suicides among the rich, but I have never seen suicide among the poor. 'Life is a precious gift,' they always

told me. They also taught me that suffering is not a punishment from God but an opportunity for human and spiritual growth. Once we experience pain, we are no longer the same: either we become better, purified by it, or we get angry and more distressed. Finally, the poor helped me to discover a different face of God, a new and more authentic presence of Him. Yes, in this long life, 28 years are not a few, alongside the poor; I have met God with the poor. God is Love and I testify of this.

Fr. Kim Ha Jong Vincenzo Bordo, OMI - Korea

Prayer

Father of mercy,
who have given your Son for our salvation
and always sustain us with the gifts of your Spirit,
grant us lively, fervent and joyful Christian communities,
that are sources of fraternal life and arouse among the young
the desire to consecrate themselves to you and to evangelization.
Support them in their efforts
to offer an adequate vocational catechesis
and paths of special consecration.
Give them wisdom for their vital vocational discernment,
so that in all things the grandeur
of your merciful love shines forth.
Mary, Mother and teacher of Jesus,
intercede for every Christian community,
so that, made fruitful by the Holy Spirit,
it might be a source of genuine vocations
at the service of the holy people of God. Amen.

SIXTH DAY, 26 MAY 2019

WITNESSING, (CONS. 9)

From the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1, 6-8)

When they had gathered together they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He answered them, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has established by his own authority. But you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Oblate text

We are members of the prophetic Church. While recognizing 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. (CCRR, C. 9).

Testimony

You will be witnesses to the ends of the world "is one of the phrases that has accompanied me during these years of missionary life in the most diverse countries and cultural and religious environments. Central therefore is the word "witnesses" and reading forward "to the ends of the world", which for each of us have assumed particular faces and stories. This is the desire, the zeal and the passion of Eugene himself: "the ambition to embrace in his holy desires the immense expanse of the earth" as expressed in the Preface to our first Rules.

Witnesses of what? "What we have heard and seen, contemplated and touched, of this we bear witness"; it is therefore an all-encompassing witness, which reflects "the entire world" of our inner experience of an "initial love" (to be loved by God) and speaks of our concrete encounter with those who have become close our neighbors in our going "to the ends of the world", thus surpassing every frontier and limit.

Here is a small witness of my missionary journey, which starting from "Jerusalem" (all that is familiar and known), passes "through Samaria" (the different, the unknown) to reach the ends of the earth.

I had left home very early in the morning for a bike ride. First stop: I reached the new Roundabout center (a charitable organization) to attend the opening of their new store. There were a lot of people, mostly Chinese, and many people connected with other local charitable organizations. Becky, the president of Roundabout, came to me all smiles, and after kissing me (in the Italian way) told me: "Giovanni, with regard to that donation, I found a way to get you the money without any problems". The British school in Beijing had raised a substantial sum of money for our migrant children's education center, as well as sending us students on Saturday for volunteer service.

Second stop: visit the store of Jenny Wang, where I get the necessary foods when I miss Mediterranean cuisine (olive oil, pasta and wine); this time I met the owner herself. "Jenny, it's been a long time since I've wanted to talk to you. I'm planning a sort of food bank; would you be interested?" After looking at the center's booklet, with a disarming smile, she says to me: "Giovanni, I am more than happy to help you. How about if I send you my son as a volunteer during the summer? Do you need clothes and toys for those children?". Now we are in business ... in "the charity business" that is!

Third stop: on my way to a local shop in the village of Gucheng for a donkey meat soup, a lady shouted at me: "Giovanni stop a moment ...". The wife of Ely, a Palestinian who works for Mercedes Benz, reminded me that they will soon leave China: "We have a lot of clothes and other things; can you tell us what might be useful for your apostolate? We would be happy to help you". Her blue eyes caught my attention; I do not know if they reminded me more of the blue of the sky or rather the depth of the ocean ...

What can I say then? In our missionary journey are we able to recognize the good in other ways, and be witnesses not only of what we give, but of what we receive in a new and surprising ways?

Of course, it is not easy. It's certainly very challenging, and many times even exciting. Meanwhile, I continue my bike rides, waiting to be surprised the next time.

Fr. Giovanni Zevola, OMI - China

Prayer

Lord Jesus,
Good Shepherd,
you offered your life
for the salvation of all;
give us the fullness of your Truth
and make us capable of witnessing it
and communicating it to others.

Lord Jesus,
give your Holy Spirit to all people,
especially to young men and women,
whom you call at your service;
enlighten their choices;
help them in their difficulties;
support them in their fidelity.
Make them ready and brave
in offering their lives,
according to your example,
so that others may meet You,
the Way, the Truth and the Life. Amen.

SEVENTH DAY, 27 MAY 2019

MISSIONARY (CONS. 4)

From the Gospel according to Mark (Mk 16, 15-18)

He said to them, "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons, they will speak new languages. They will pick up serpents [with their hands], and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

Oblate text

«Nota bene: Although, given their current small number and the most pressing needs of the people around them, they must for now limit their zeal to the poor of our countryside, their ambition must embrace, in its holy desires, the immense expanse of the whole earth ". (From the Constitutions and Rules of 1818, first part, chapter 1, paragraph 3)

Testimony

It is not easy to express with words a reality like the missionary dimension. If we think about it, it is not so much the words as life itself that is a testimony of this reality. In my experience as a missionary in Uruguay (I am already 15 years and ten months here), I can say that being a missionary simply means living by answering to the calls of God and the people, calls that ask you to "go out" of yourself to encounter the other. It is an experience that grows more and more, which gives character to your life, to your way of being and relating with others.

It is normal that all this is a journey, not something fixed. The missionary dimension grows with the person. If you pay attention to what surrounds you, if you feel accompanied by the presence of Jesus, living the mission is your saying "yes" and diving into life.

Why do I speak about this time of missionary experience? It's not only 15 years and ten months, but 28 years that I have had this in my heart.

It all began with an encounter with the mission when I was 21; then it became a concentrated discernment and eventually it became my life. When a reality reaches the deepest part of your being, it becomes the engine that ignites and moves everything.

In Uruguay I learned to "make myself one" with people, to see reality with new eyes, to ask myself why things are so and not as I would have imagined. It is true that the missionary is called to give; he is sent and invited to help, but he must consciously live so that others can have their own say, that they might have different outlooks; above all he is called to dialogue with others, with their culture, with their world.

To live the missionary dimension for me means first of all being available, being on the sidelines and not in the center, having a fundamental attitude of service and, sometimes, even a few words can help.

For us Oblates, mission is our life, as St. Eugene told us, and it must be lived in two dimensions: the apostolic and the communal. This is the path that I am following and that I invite others to travel; sometimes it is a bit difficult and draining but it fills you with joy. Moreover, it is the same path traveled by Jesus, who continues to be an example and a motive for every missionary.

Fr. Antonio Messeri, OMI - Uruguay

Prayer

God, Father
of every creature,
we received from you
the extraordinary gift of life:
make us generous in responding to your call
to share with our brothers
the "breads" we have received.
Christ Jesus,
our brother,
who have become for us bread of life,

renew the wonder of the multiplication of the loaves
and make our existence a gift and an eternal thanks.

Holy Spirit,

faithful friend on our way,

support us with the strength of your love

to announce and give witness,

along the streets of the world,

to the beauty of life as a vocation.

Holy Trinity,

Eternal and infinite love,

help our communities

to welcome the Gospel of Vocations,

to pray and rejoice in the presence of young people

heading towards ordained ministry and the consecrated life. Amen.

EIGHTH DAY, 28 MAY 2019

PERSEVERANCE (CONS. 29)

From the Gospel according to Mark (Mk 13, 9-13)

Watch out for yourselves. They will hand you over to the courts. You will be beaten in synagogues. You will be arraigned before governors and kings because of me, as a witness before them. But the gospel must first be preached to all nations. When they lead you away and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say. But say whatever will be given to you at that hour. For it will not be you who are speaking but the holy Spirit. Brother will hand over brother to death, and the father his child; children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who perseveres to the end will be saved.

Oblate text

Our vows are as perpetual as the most solemn vows in the world. When we made the vow of perseverance we intended to oblige ourselves to live and die in the Congregation that has accepted our commitment. It is not up to the individual to operate according to his own schemes and whims, much less to foresee a possible case of dispensation. Such a thing would not be permissible before the profession and it is absolutely impossible afterwards. In our Congregation, dispensation is considered so great a disaster that we like to think there will never be any such case, now that we have been approved by the Church and have been placed in the same rank as the Lazarists, Passionists and Redemptorists ... (To Bishop Arbaud of Gap, 13 August 1826)

Testimony

We have all started something new, a sport, learning a language or a weight loss program and never quite complete it. The excitement and romance motivate us to pay the fees, enrol and purchase the accessories but after a short while our interests change and the personal cost of the activity outweighs the benefits, and our commitment falters.

There are other examples of commitments in which we are successful; the initial romance and excitement become enthusiasm and passion and no matter what challenges we face we succeed and preserve. Important lifelong Vocational commitment such as Religious life, Marriage, Priesthood and the single life require perseverance, to see us through the inevitable challenges of life.

While members of most Religious Congregations take three vows Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate take a fourth, Perseverance. For the Oblates the vow of Perseverance has two important effects; it is a conscious decision by the individual that they have moved from romance and excitement to enthusiasm and passion for the Oblate Charism. It also creates a sense of stability for the Congregation which St Eugene described in terms of "the most united family on earth".

Oblates are not an association of individuals but "come together in apostolic communities of Priests and Brothers, united to God by the vows of religion." (C&R 1) As the Oblates were formed by a group of Diocesan Priests, the rule or obligation of Perseverance preceded the other vows.

The initial rule of 1816, under which the first five Oblates lived, included "The missionaries ought to resolve, when they enter the Society, to persevere in it for their entire lives". Later it became a vow in the Rule of 1818; then all four vows were included in the rule approving the Congregation on February 17, 1826. While Perseverance may be implied in the other vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience the vow of Perseverance is an explicit and public statement that each Oblate is committed to creating "the most united family."

Fr. Cristian Fini, OMI - Australia

Prayer

Holy Father,
constant source of being and of love,
who shows in living men and women the splendor of your glory,
and put the seed of your call into their hearts,
let no one, by our negligence, ignore this gift or lose it,
but let all walk with complete generosity

towards the realization of your love.

Lord Jesus,

who in your pilgrimage through the streets of Palestine,
chose and called the apostles and entrusted them with the task
of preaching the Gospel, of feeding the faithful, of celebrating divine worship,
grant that even today your Church might not want for
numerous and holy Priests, who bear to everyone
the fruits of your death and resurrection.

Virgin Mary,

young daughter of Israel, support with your motherly love
those young people, to whom the Father makes his Word heard;
support those who are already consecrated.

Let us repeat with you the "yes" of a joyful and irrevocable gift.

Amen.

NINTH DAY, 29 MAY 2019, BLESSED JOSEPH GERARD

LOVE FOR MARY (CONS. 10)

From the Gospel according to Luke (Lk 1, 45-48)

And Mary said: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed. The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

Oblate text

Let us renew ourselves especially in devotion to the most holy Virgin and render ourselves worthy to be Oblates of the Immaculate Mary. But this is a passport to heaven! How have we not thought of it sooner? Avow that it will be as glorious as it will be consoling for us to be consecrated to her in a special manner and to bear her name. The Oblates of Mary! This name satisfies the heart and the ear. (To Fr. Tempier, 22-24 December 1825)

Testimony

When I entered the Congregation, an old and wise priest gave me three councils, one of which was: "Consecrate your vocation to Mary". The years passed, and we were making the retreat in preparation for perpetual oblation. During Oraison, I noticed a small image of the Madonna in the room and like in a movie, I saw the whole story of my life, as if I had suddenly been given the grace to go back to the past. I saw myself as a child: the prayers of my family and of my people, Our Lady of Sorrows.

In that moment of time I recalled the words of the Gospel of John: "Jesus, seeing his mother and next to her the disciple whom he loved, said to his mother: "Woman, behold your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that time the disciple took her into his home". These words echoed in my heart, giving me comfort and joy.

I left that retreat with a synthesis of my life: Our Lady has always been present among my people, accompanied their struggles, dreams and hopes, celebrating with them as in Cana of Galilee.

In our community, the good Mother is present. She it was who smiled at our Father Founder when he needed a confirmation to continue his mission, to raise up a new charism in the Church. She is the same one who today keeps her eyes upon us, and watches over the whole large Oblate family.

From that unforgettable experience was born an insight for my ordination: like Mary, who is close to all the "crucifixes" of history. Since then, in the joys and tribulations, since I now live in the second poorest and most violent suburbs of my city, I consecrate the missionary work to the Good Mother, because she is the guardian of our Oblate vocation. In union of prayers.

Fr. Edicarlos Alves, OMI - Brazil

Prayer

Virgin
forever offered to God,
we offer you our heart:
teach us Love.
Virgin humble and attentive
guardian of the Word,
open our minds,
so we can know how to welcome Truth.
Praying Virgin,
with you we pray:
make us witnesses to the beauty of his call.
Pilgrim Virgin,
who walk in the steps of Jesus,
our sure guide,
show us the way of the Gospel.

Virgin, docile servant of the Lord,
help us to say our "yes",
plant it in the good earth of our heart so that,
touched by its beauty,
we bear fruit of new life. Amen.