

Day 3 Wednesday, March 11, 2026

Bonjour, Salut. Happy Birthday to my brother Dwight who lives in Burnaby, British Columbia.

My first trip to Europe has been fantastic. The trip itself — *“The Aix Experience”* — is a firsthand journey with St. Eugene de Mazenod and the Oblates in Aix-en-Provence.

I am loving the hands on history experience, the walking, talking, (Parler un peu de francais) and living in the very places where Oblates of Mary Immaculate continue ministering. I also get to brush up on my French with our hosts as we enjoy the Oblate hospitality. They are patient.

Our day began with morning prayer at 8:30am in the Foundation Room. Here is where we literally held the heart of the founder in our hands in preparation for today’s pilgrimage.



The Heart of St. Eugene



Today’s journey was a walking tour of de Mazenod and Oblate-related sites in Aix.

Eugene’s boyhood home where he was born, lived for a time and eventually returned to die.

The Church of the Madeleine

(closed for renovations)





The prison where St. Eugene ministered now the local court house. As a priest he heard confessions of the prisoners and walked with the them to their execution by guillotine.

(Interestingly, the area bustled with excitement today with about 100 police, many with automatic rifles and helicopters in the air. Apparently a high profile person was on trial today and to be moved.)

Where young Eugene lived after returning from exile in Italy

As we walked the area I pictured young Eugene running and playing in these very streets and later as an adult and priest in shadow of the French Revolution. He had a difficult family life and had a hard time when he returned to France after being in exile.

Even before becoming a priest Eugene recognized the dignity of the poor in his community. With prisoners he advocated for simple things like fresh bread. As noted in Oblate history he dedicated his ministry to those not touched by the structures of the Church: the poor who spoke Provençal, youth, prisoners, neglected inhabitants of small villages, all children of God worthy of dignity. This was a “revolutionary” way of preaching. This going out among common people caused him a lot of grief and heartache from the nobles and church leaders, a world he once was part of.



As we walked about, I encountered the Oblate Charism in a real way. I saw the face of Jesus in the people on the street asking for change.

One lady sitting on the ground smiled as I walked by and did not put out her cup, but continued to smile and as I waved she waved back. Happy to be recognized and noticed as a person with a simple gesture.

Cathedrale Saint- Sauveur

This building was started in the 4th century by the Romans, with additions in the 12th and 15th Centuries.

As Father Bonga noted many times during the past few days, **“this is our home, our family and community. Our roots are here.”**

St Eugene, Pray for us.

Au revoir

Mark Lich

