

March 14th 2026

“Tour de France”* Pilgrim-Style (thanks to Mike Dechant for today’s title) or otherwise known as “HOW many churches did we see?”

Light rain kissed us on our pilgrimage in a Mercedes-Benz bus as we passed vineyards, crossed canals and the Verdon River as we “12 apostles” began our 6th day walking in the footsteps of St. Eugene as missionary. Mists evoked scenes from our Vancouver Island home, and as pasture land appeared with the hills beyond we saw the Fraser Valley of mainland British Columbia, says the ancient masonry with terra-cotta roofing on shuttered houses. With gratitude we were truly in Provence with olive trees, blossoming apple orchards, greening willows, tall spires of cypress, rock, river and mountains, and the sleeping “funnels” of lavender occasionally whispering a bluish mist that spring is here this Lenten season.



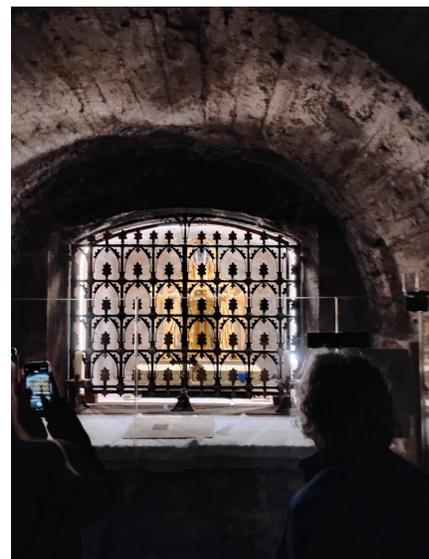
At Saint-Laurent-du-Verdon, cold in body temperature but warmed by the hospitality of two parishioners greeting and joining with us to celebrate Eucharist at the small church, which is being renovated like many churches, we learned and rejoiced in its history for the Oblates. As a 21-year-old newly back from being exiled from France due to the Revolution, St. Eugene was forced to stay without family, without connections, without anything to do, for half a year at the family chateau, the worst period of his life he’d recorded. Yet as an Oblate he returned to the Chateau de Mazenod in 1818, praying and listening to God to write out the Rules necessary for the young Congregation moving out of Provence. This was the first church where the Oblates met in celebration of our Rules. Bonga

encouraged us in today's homily to ask the Lord for the gift of humility. It is God who initiates the desire to come together in community to "work for the salvation of souls... Even if I do not have that desire, I desire to have it." The future of our Congregation lies in God initiating this desire, the gift of community to live for the poor. That is our grace today.

From this church we walked up the gravelled drive to the shuttered and closed Chateau de Mazenod, and then were bussed to Barjol for lunch, laughter and learning. For instance, Mark in our group is a bit of a history buff, and found it amazing to be in the town of the Dragoon Operations of WWII when England, Canada and USA worked with the French Resistance to finally drive out Nazi Germany. We were all amazed as we walked up the town's narrow streets and cars to the Church of Our Lady of the Assumption where in 1818 the six young missionaries under turmoil held its first mission outside Provence. (Eugene was ill and lost his voice to preach for the first weeks of the 6-week mission.) It was a spirit-filled success of people returning to God and including reconciliation between warring parties who'd taken another's land during the Revolution. They rightly proclaimed it was God's work, and were encouraged to know that if they could do this in Barjol, the missions could do great works anywhere. Together we prayed a decade of the rosary for Oblate missions, knowing that these young courageous men with others who joined them held 3,000 mission the decade leading up to 1826 when our Rules and Constitution were approved by Pope Leo XII.

Rolling along in our bus in sunny if cool spring countryside to St-Maximin-la-Baum to the 1,000 year old Church of the Madeleine, we prayed in this basilica at the tomb of Mary Magdalene.

We then rolled into Fuveau for our own "Mount Sinai" of a climb up to its church where in 1818, the six Oblates gave their second retreat following the adoption of the Congregation's Rule. This was the birthplace of Fr. Suzanne, who became the beloved first young novice of the Oblates. Suffering



from poor lungs due to the poor living conditions of this area, he was an outstanding and popular preacher with all, especially Eugene who considered him like a son. He died in 1829, and Eugene mourned him until he died in 1861. This church underwent massive restoration with only the one stone wall still standing in St. Eugene's memory, but many memories for us all. Together we prayed a decade of the rosary for vocations, that more young people answer God's call to know his love personally and to serve the poor in a vocation with the OMI's.

The courage and passion for the Good News these young men and our beloved St. Eugene evidenced in their work has moved us to much joy.

Karen and Dave Sax

