

# March 17, 2026

*I arise today  
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,  
Through a belief in the Threeness,  
Through confession of the Oneness  
Of the Creator of creation.*

[Opening stanza of the Lorica of St. Patrick]

March 17, 1826 St. Eugene had been in Rome for four months, successfully having received the papal approbation of the Constitutions and Rules for the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate exactly one month earlier. Nevertheless, he was still running around the pulsating metropolis of Rome trying to complete an article... "I came home for dinner all worn out!"

[Roman Diary, March 17, 1826].

For our charismatic family we are reminded these are times of prayer, renewal and fraternal sharing. The 12 pilgrims from OMI-Lacombe in Canada have been blessed to have been led these past days by Father Bonga on a deeply inspiring journey in the life, times, places and challenges of the Founder in Provence.



On a St. Patrick's Day 200 years since the Founder was navigating Rome, we in Aix-en-Provence have been blessed to spend a warm and sunny day, visiting markets, raising a Gaelic toast of Slàinte Mhath over a glass (or two!) of Guinness at the Irish Pub, sharing a meal with the neighbouring students, and enjoying another intimate and touching Eucharist with our two Spirit-filled Oblates. Father Bonga reflected in his homily, "we do nothing for God; He does everything for us." And Fr Mike reminded us: "Jesus invites us, as he invited the sick man at the pool of Bethzatha: Do you want to be healed?"



For me, this St. Patrick's Day marks ten years since my beloved brother Tony died of pancreatic cancer. A Mass was being offered for him in my home parish, but I would not be present. So, while a certain sadness edged my day, I give thanks to God for having blessed me for much of my

life with a generous and bright older brother. “Our citizenship is in heaven and from there we await our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. “ [Phil 3:20].



The silence of the sacred space called the Foundation Room and the peace that the walls of the Chapel offer are blessings we, as pilgrim brothers and sisters, dare to share. The Carmelites, who preceded the Oblates in this former convent, had blessed the House with their prayer-filled presence, and we the charismatic family can bask in sanctuary.

It is a wondrous thing to feel the pulse of the crowd outside the walls and tread the ancient stones that pave the streets in and around Cours Mirabeau, for this is our prevalent reality in 2026. But, oh! what a comfort to return to the cloisters, for, as Psalm 102 says: “... You will arise and have mercy on Zion: for this is the time to have mercy; yes, the time appointed has come for your servants love her very stones, are moved with pity even for her dust.”



I am given to reflect on the immense hospitality (“this is your home too”) we have been shown in Aix by Fr. Paolo and the local community, and the patient guidance of Fr Bonga, all of whom have carried us on their shoulders during our pilgrimage. Having had the huge privilege of pressing St. Eugene’s heart (the sacred relic) against my own heart, these words of St. Eugene tumble out: “Christ is the God of mercy who came among us only to call sinners. It is to [us] that his most loving words are addressed. He seeks [us] out, he presses [us] against his heart. He carries

[us] upon his shoulders. “[Retreat Resolutions, October 12, 1808].

Arising and taking up our pallet may we walk with the Lord, in goodness and mercy through the rest of the Lenten season.

**Arnie Francis**