

March 18, 2026

Our final full day of pilgrimage began with beautiful sunshine and clear blue skies. As the Foundation House has such a comforting courtyard in its centre, one can easily be sheltered from the wind and noise of the city. This was a day for prayer, quiet time, a final conference presentation, Eucharist, siesta, a walk and visit to the nearby Oblate Cemetery, followed by dinner and packing. Several of our pilgrims will rise very early tomorrow, morning, to be driven to the Marseilles Airport.

After a light breakfast we gathered in the Guibert Room for our final sharing from Bonga. These gatherings are always so moving, personally inspiring us to internalize this walk with the founder. He spoke of Eugene's life focussing on his personal encounter with the crucified

saviour, relying on the spirit of mercy. Poverty truly is not knowing who Jesus is. When we come to know Jesus we too will become attuned to the needs of others, especially the poor. Jesus became a real friend in his life. Eugene sought community, as it is in community where we should be able to talk and share what is deepest within us, our journeys with God, our doubts and our faith.

Bonga shared how Francois Tempier, OMI, the closest friend of Eugene, was present to him. Eugene said to Tempier: *"I count on you more than myself for the regularity of a house in my mind and my hopes. We must reproduce the perfection of the first disciples."* Tempier, this one true friend to Eugene was a very humble confidante who spoke truth to him. Today, we are encouraged to see the good in the other, seeing what a treasure



true friendship is, always rejoicing in each other's gifts.

As written in Constitution 18: *We find our support in friendship and fraternal life, apostolic commitment, self-denial and prayer. If Jesus is the centre of our ministry, this will appease any tensions that exist. It is Christ who calls us as Oblates/Associates, inviting us to follow Him and to share in His mission.*

After this presentation, we spent personal time in silence throughout the house, reflecting on these questions: *What can I say about my relationship with Christ? Where do I find support? How can I be a "Tempier" to my brothers and sisters in community?*

We then gathered to celebrate our final Eucharist together in the Mission Church. We were struck by the story of how the two front statues were beheaded during the French Revolution. Later the artist came back and restored the statues, this time with the faces of St. Eugene and Fr. Tempier in place of the other saints. We allowed these old walls and floor tiles to speak to us, bringing us back to the days of St. Eugene, preaching in this Mission Chapel.



This mass was very moving for all of us as we broke open the Word of God, especially being moved by the first reading, Isaiah 49:8-15. Our songs and prayers reached beyond the high ceiling as we praised God, who always loves us, who never forgets us. What a blessing it was to receive the precious blood of Jesus from the chalice St. Eugene used himself to celebrate the Eucharist in this chapel church years ago. Fr. Mike led us in a final commissioning ritual, using the symbol of water to flow over our hands,

preparing us to be sent forth from this place to evangelize the poor. Our hearts are full of gratitude for this time together.

After lunch and a siesta (or packing time), a small group of us took a walk to the cemetery of St. Pierre. It was an honour to stand on the holy ground containing the remains of Oblates for over 200 years, including such names as Rene Motte (1924-2009) former Superior General. There are 83 Oblates buried here, right along side the de Mazonod family.



Our final event of the pilgrimage was a wonderful dinner with the entire Aix Community. It was a chance to say THANK YOU! From the hospitality of Fr. Paolo Archiati OMI to the spirit and enthusiasm of Fr. Bonga Thami OMI, and all the other Oblate priests and brothers, our cups are overflowing with gratitude. Fr. Paolo reminded us of St. Eugene's zeal for the poor. He thanked Bonga for his contribution to the success of the Aix Experience, noting that Bonga is always ready to lead other pilgrims, and will be returning to Aix in May to lead a retreat.

We presented the Aix Community a gift that was ALL CANADIAN. It contained gifts from each of the pilgrims across Canada, sharing what we hold special from Canada, the country Eugene sent the missionaries to first.

The Aix Experience is everything you could imagine and more. I found myself moved deeply by the sense of presence in the Foundation House and in every location we visited over the past ten days. The Charism of St. Eugene is alive and ready to be experienced by all who are open to the call to evangelize the poor. We pray for Associates the world over, calling upon God to bless them and the lives they lead that share the charism of St. Eugene. Our hearts are full and we will take this charism with us into everything we do in our homes and communities as we say:

Hail holy Queen, mother mercy
our life, sweetness and our hope. Hail
To you do we cry poor banished children of Eve
To you do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping
in this valley of tears.
Turn then, most gracious advocate
your merciful eyes toward us.
And Jesus, the blessed fruits of your womb,
Show unto us after this our exile
O clement, O loving, O sweet virgin Mary!





Pilgrims and the Aix Community



Pilgrims of Aix Experience 2026 & Fr. Bonga Thami OMI

by Dan and Joanne Friedt