

Closing Mass Homily

My brothers and sisters,

When people look at us, what do they see?

They may see Oblates.

They may see Oblate Associates.

They may see priests and brothers, women and men who have spent many years serving the Church.

They may see different ministries, different personalities, different histories, different cultures, different ways of living the same missionary spirit.

But there is a deeper question.

Can they see Christ?

Can they look at the way we live together, the way we care for one another, the way we make decisions, the way we welcome others, the way we go to the poor — and somehow recognize the presence of Jesus?

Because ultimately, that is why we are here.

Not simply to do good work.

Not simply to maintain ministries.

Not even simply to continue the work of the Oblates.

We are here so that Christ may become visible.

The theologian Edward Schillebeeckx spoke beautifully about this mystery. Christ makes the invisible God visible. In Jesus, people encountered the compassion of God, the mercy of God, the nearness of God.

And after the resurrection, Christ continues to become visible through his Body — through the community of believers.

The Church is called to become a living sign, a sacrament of the presence of Christ in the world.

And that means something very important for us today.

No one of us can be the Body of Christ alone.

I can preach.

I can serve the poor.

I can build a ministry.

But I cannot, by myself, be the Body of Christ.

For that, I need you.

And you need me.

We need one another.

Perhaps that is one of the graces God has been placing before us during these days.

For two hundred years, our Constitutions and Rules have reminded us that Oblate life holds together realities that must never be separated:

Christ.

Community.

Mission.

We belong to Christ.

Christ gathers us into apostolic community.

And from that community he sends us on mission — a mission increasingly shared with our Oblate Associates and with others whom God has placed alongside us.

Christ gathers.

Christ forms.

Christ sends.

And he does not simply send a collection of individuals.

He sends a body.

That is why the words of Jesus in today's Gospel are so important:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.”

Jesus is sent.

Sent to the poor.

Sent to the captive.

Sent to those who cannot see.

Sent to those who are oppressed.

And then he says:

“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Today.

That same Spirit is still at work.

That same Good News still needs to be proclaimed.

That same Christ is still being sent into the world.

But now Christ goes through his Body — through communities of disciples who allow themselves to be gathered, transformed and sent.

And so perhaps the question at the end of this Convocation is not first:

What am I going to do?

Perhaps the question is:

What is Christ asking to do through us?

That is a different question.

And it may lead us somewhere different.

We live in a world that teaches us very well how to say I.

My life.

My choices.

My plans.

And without even noticing it, that language can enter religious life and our shared missionary life:

My ministry.

My parish.

My project.

My way of doing things.

There is nothing wrong with loving the ministry entrusted to us. There is something beautiful about an Oblate, an Associate, or any partner in mission giving themselves generously to the people they serve. Some of the finest pages of our history have been written through that kind of courage, creativity and perseverance.

We should never lose that missionary passion.

But perhaps we need to ask what happens **after the splash**.

There is a thought associated with Schillebeeckx that Ronald Rolheiser develops in a wonderfully simple image: alone, we may be able to make a splash, but not a difference.

One person, with passion, imagination and courage, can create something remarkable.

But the Gospel asks something more of us.

Not simply:

Can I make a splash?

But:

Can we make a difference?

Can we discern a mission together, carry it together and, one day, entrust it to others?

Can something that begins with my gifts become **our mission**?

Because the mission does not belong to me.

The charism does not belong to me.

And the Gospel certainly does not belong to me.

They have been entrusted to **us**.

Perhaps that is the conversion being asked of us now.

A movement from I to we.

Not because the individual does not matter, but because the gifts God has given each of us find their deepest purpose when they become part of something greater than ourselves.

Then a ministry does not have to disappear when one person leaves.

Another person can enter it. A younger person can imagine becoming part of it. An Oblate from another part of the Congregation can discover not someone else's private project, but a community and a mission into which he too can belong.

Our Associates can help discern it, shape it and carry it. Partners can bring gifts that we do not possess ourselves. Different cultures can enrich it.

And what we begin can continue beyond us.

That is how a splash can become a difference.

But there is something deeper still.

Together, we can become a sign.

A sign of Christ.

A sign that communion is possible.

A sign that different vocations can share one missionary spirit.

A sign that the Gospel is larger than any personality, any ministry or any generation.

Perhaps this is one of the prophetic witnesses our Oblate family can offer our world today.

We often imagine the prophet as the courageous individual standing alone. There are moments when that courage is necessary.

But perhaps today there is another kind of prophetic witness desperately needed:

a community that actually lives the Gospel together.

People from different cultures and generations discovering that Christ is stronger than their differences.

Oblates and Associates sharing one missionary spirit, willing to discern together and to surrender some personal preference for the sake of a common mission.

In an increasingly individualistic world, perhaps community itself can be prophetic.

People should be able to look at an Oblate community — and at the wider missionary family gathered around it — and sense:

There is something happening here that cannot be explained simply by friendship, convenience or common work.

And what they are encountering is Christ.

Christ among us, gathering us, reconciling us and sending us.

That is what it means for community to become sacramental.

Not because we are perfect, but because our life together can become a visible sign that Christ is alive and still gathering people into communion for the sake of his mission.

And if that is true, then our communities are not simply places where Oblates live while each one goes off to do his ministry.

Community itself belongs to the mission.

We are called to discern mission together, to receive it together and to be sent together.

And increasingly, our Associates are part of that discernment and missionary witness — not simply helping us with our mission, but sharing with us in a mission entrusted by Christ.

That is a very old Oblate intuition.

And perhaps it is one we need to recover and live in a new way.

Isaiah gives us the beautiful image today:

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news.”

The messenger is moving.

The Gospel cannot remain where it is.

It must travel.

And so must we.

But we are not simply travellers.

We are pilgrims.

And there is a difference.

A traveller can travel alone.

A pilgrim belongs to a people on the way.

We are pilgrims in Christian hope.

Oblates and Associates, different vocations but companions on the same missionary road.

And Christian hope does not mean that we know exactly what the future will look like.

We do not.

Hope means that we know **who walks with us.**

The risen Christ.

And because Christ walks with us, we do not need to fear the road ahead.

We can imagine new ways of living community and mission. We can welcome new people and listen again to those at the edges. We can allow ourselves to be surprised by God.

Not because we have a perfect plan.

But because we have hope.

Paul reminds us today that our faith does not rest on human wisdom but on the power of God.

That is where our hope rests too.

Not ultimately in our plans.

Not in our structures.

Not even in our own abilities.

In God.

The God who called Eugene de Mazenod.

The God who gathered that first missionary community around him.

The God who sent Oblates across oceans, languages and cultures.

The God who has continued to call others to share in that missionary spirit.

The God who has carried this Oblate family through two hundred years of grace.

That God has not stopped calling.

And that God has not stopped sending.

In a few moments we will come to the altar.

And perhaps the Eucharist gives us the most beautiful image of everything we have been trying to discover during these days.

We come as many.

Oblates.

Associates.

Partners and friends.

Different vocations.

Different stories.

Different gifts.

Different hopes.

And Christ gathers us around one table.

One bread.

One cup.

One Body.

And then something extraordinary happens.

The Body of Christ receives the Body of Christ.

We receive Christ so that together we may become what we receive.

And then the Body of Christ is sent.

That is us.

Perhaps that is the deepest meaning of this closing Eucharist.

We are not simply finishing a Convocation.

Christ is gathering his Body around the table so that he can send his Body again.

And so when we hear at the end of this Eucharist:

“Go.”

Let us hear that word deeply.

Not:

Go back to your ministry.

Not:

Go back to your plans.

Not:

Go back and continue exactly as before.

But:

Go as my witnesses.

Go together — Oblates, Associates and partners in mission.

Carry the Gospel to the poor and to those who need hope.

Go where Christ is calling us now.

And perhaps our response can be very simple:

Here we are, Lord.

Not:

Here I am.

But:

Here we are.

Send us.

Two hundred years of grace have brought us to this moment.

And now that same grace sends us forward.

We do not know exactly where the road will lead.

But we know who walks with us.

And so we go with hope —

together.

