**1810**

**To Madame de Mazenod, in Aix.[[1]](#footnote-1)**

66:XIV in Oblate Writings

*New Year’s Greetings to his mother, grandmother and sister. Feelings of joy and spiritual fulfilment after receiving the subdiaconate. Eugene intends to spend his life in poverty. Importance of having holy priests, like the apostles.*

Mazenod Madame de

St. Sulpice,

January 6, 1810

My darling and most excellent of mothers, may you be filled, not just this year, but through your whole life, through all eternity, with all the blessings of our God’s generosity. This wish goes for darling grandma and our Ninette too; it wells up in me every day and more than once in the day; I particularly placed it for safekeeping in the heart of Jesus on that ten thousand times ten thousand times blessed day I had the ineffable happiness of exchanging a wretched liberty, which I had so often abused, for this sweet and precious slavery which makes one master and possessor of all the treasures that go unknown to those who go the way of the world and its vanities. Yes, it is really true that when I was making my prostration lying flat on my face, as the whole Church earnestly entreated God to deign to send his Spirit with all his gifts upon us, I begged him for my part to bless you and convince you totally that in offering your son freely to the sovereign Master of the Universe, you would not be losing him but rather gaining him for all eternity. It would be impossible to try now to convey to you any idea of the joy the Lord poured into my soul that happy day. The kind of happiness one experiences at that moment is ineffable, and you must not think that this is perhaps because afterwards there are only vague and superficial traces left behind, on the contrary. This state in which the grace of ordination places you is stable and permanent, staying habitually in the soul, but as it is wholly divine, it cannot be put into words and all forms of expression fall short. There is a kind of spiritual plenitude, there are swift movements towards God, there are delights that flood the soul. What can I say? I repeat, there is a tremendous happiness that one experiences in a very vivid way, but which one cannot describe to oneself, let alone to others. After such an experience, don’t talk to me about the beauty of sacrifices, etc., etc. God in heaven, where is the sacrifice in giving practically nothing to get everything? So strong was this feeling on the day of my ordination that I asked God, by the intercession of the Blessed Virgin and all the Saints, who at that very moment were being invoked on our behalf, to deign graciously to pour out on me the fullness of his mercies and to let me make over to him my liberty and life, which were already his own on so many different counts. How true were the words that the Bishop addressed to us as he received our vows, that to serve God is to reign! ...

What do I have to do to convince you that I am enjoying excellent health? Nobody in the seminary would dare to contradict me on this. There’s nothing wrong with my nerves, chest, head, or feet. If only I could be sure that my soul were as beautiful as my body is sound; I am working on it, and persevere in the hope of getting there, with God’s grace ...

Please don’t forget to have sent on the Hebrew books I asked you for in one of my letters; I need them more than I need shirts. My underclothes are in fairly good condition. This doesn’t surprise me so much as my soutane, for although I only have the one for winter and the one for summer, they still don’t have any holes in them, although they are a little threadbare. It is true I chose a good, really heavy cloth. Thanks be to God, I don’t think I can be accused of luxury or being over-particular about myself, and I hope no one will ever be able to find fault with me on that account, as I am firmly resolved never to change. An ordinary soutane, woollen cincture, hair uncurled, this is and always will be the way Father de Mazenod will dress. I really don’t know what people think they are achieving when they are forever adorning and pampering this wretched carcass that is destined to be food for the worms and is never less manageable than when it is treated gently. But what is pitiable in the case of people in general is shocking in a minister of the Cross. A sensual priest is in my eyes a deformed monstrosity, to be pointed out in the street, but it is all too true that you would often need more than ten fingers to do it. So let’s pray to the Lord to grant his Church, not so much a larger number of priests, as a small but well chosen number. Twelve Apostles were enough to convert the world ...

**To Madame de Mazenod, in Aix.[[2]](#footnote-2)**

67:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Deaths of M. de Talleyrand and the Mayor of Aix. Eugene’s dealings with Cardinal Mattei.*

Mazenod Madame de

Saint Sulpice,

February 24, 1810

I told you [M. de Talleyrand] is dead; God in his goodness gave him the grace to receive the sacraments. He does not do as much for everybody, for I often hear tales of tragic deaths, of people snatched away before they have made the least effort to return to God; for the Lord sometimes passes terrible judgments on rebels who all their lives have mocked his mercy.

I thank God our poor mayor Fortis did his duty, and, although I don’t like it at all that no one anticipated his desires in such an important matter, it delighted me to see that he persisted with his request for a confessor. Although so far as practising is concerned he was never everything I would have desired for his own good, even so I always felt I saw in him a basis of religious principles. Our Master is so good he takes everything into account; but it is quite possible we are wicked precisely because he is good.

I almost forgot again to tell you that the saintly Cardinal Mattei, whose interpreter and secretary I am, has asked me to pass on his greetings to His Reverence the Parish priest of St. Esprit; I will leave that with you. We have the same Director, as I had the idea of making him a present by getting him a confessor such as mine; he profits by it in an edifying way, for he goes to confession every Friday, following the holy and praiseworthy custom of all the saints, and of those too who want to become saints. You understand I don’t mean that everyone must go to confession precisely on Fridays; I mean confession on a weekly basis, that is to say, every week. I escorted this venerable Cardinal (who nearly became Pope) to every convent of religious sisters in Paris, and he was delighted with this.

**To Madame de Mazenod, in Aix.[[3]](#footnote-3)**

68:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Madame de Mazenod should be grateful for Eugenie’s good behaviour and Eugene’s priestly vocation. Why Eugene must stay more than two years in the seminary; his social standing will not permit of his being a poorly formed priest.*

Mazenod Madame de ,

Saint Sulpice

April 14, 1810.

... You make me very happy but you certainly don’t surprise me at all when you say [that Eugenie] has a rare quality. I remember trying to calm down your worries at the time of her marriage, when you were afraid the bad examples she would have around her all the time would be the ruination of her. What a consolation that you can enjoy the experience of her good conduct and have the opportunity to see her several times a day. It must be admitted that God in his goodness has really blessed us in everything that concerns that child; whenever I think of it I thank him from the bottom of my heart. You should remember it sometimes too as a mark of your gratitude to this good Master who spoils you more than you realize, for whatever the world’s false prejudice may suggest, it has to be admitted that the grace he gave me of calling me to priestly service is one you can never be sufficiently grateful for, no more than myself. But to make a worthy response to that grace, one must prepare oneself to fulfil with fruit all the commitments it imposes; so it is out of the question that I would be prepared to swell the ranks of the unfortunate priests who are not halfway prepared for the exercise of their ministry and who are going to be judged with severity and no mercy for all the faults they commit or lead others to commit, for failing to acquire the knowledge they should have. Ecclesiastical science covers such a lot of things that you must not imagine it can be acquired with a few words here and there as you go along, so to speak. I don’t disagree that there are quite a lot of things I could learn on my own; however, aside from the fact that I can’t see His Grace the Archbishop being ready to leave me a lot of time to spend on studying, what I have in mind could well be a matter for discussion between us. Don’t you attach any value to the profound experience of those who are directing me here? It is a kind of instruction you don’t find in books, and that very few people are endowed with, even among those who have spent many years in the ministry. A knowledge that would perhaps suffice for most, would not suffice for me. That is obvious, for you know yourself there isn’t anyone who, seeing who I am, my position, the rank I hold in the world, would not have every right to demand and would not in fact demand that I have a degree of preparation above the ordinary. Who is going to put to rest all the doubts, the difficulties that are always cropping up, if not a priest who by reason of his birth enjoys a greater prominence than others and to whom other priests will perhaps one day be going for counsel? This extra period of formation is therefore necessary and indispensable if I am to exercise fruitfully the ministry I am called to. The honour due the ministry is another valid reason for it. A moment’s reflection on this point will clearly show you what it would take me an hour to explain. People are only too ready to scorn our holy religion, without ignorance on my part furnishing them as well with plausible motives for calumniating it. Before long the priesthood will consist entirely of peasants or even of workmen of the lowest classes, and that is already in itself a very great evil. Destined most of them to be pastors in remote country districts, they will be given little care, so that they will get off with a pinch of knowledge that would seem to lift them above their rank, so great are the world’s prejudices. Let them know how to say Mass properly and be able to handle basic administration, that is all people could expect of a country pastor. That is how worldlings express themselves, but is that too how they would speak about me and others like me? It would only take the merest hint that I might be lacking in just one part of the knowledge that the faithful, and clerics too for that matter, have a right to expect from an educated man and one whose position affords him every opportunity to see this education through to the end, to set at nought the little good I dare to hope to achieve. In what esteem do you imagine could people hold a cleric come to exercise his ministry scarcely two years after he left the world? And although when I lived in society I tried to keep away from anything I thought was contrary to God’s law or opposed to evangelical morality, do you think anyone could place much trust in a person one has seen practically the night before in noisy parties, sharing at least passively in the dissipation that is the rule among worldly people? You would have to be completely lacking in experience of men to think one could get away with that. God would not be happy with my being willing to neglect taking every precaution that might assure the success of my ministry. God’s grace has already got enough to contend with in my lack of virtue and multitudinous imperfections without my creating further difficulties of an exterior nature that I could easily erase. I want to disappear, I want people to forget Eugene so that there can be no risk of mistaking him for the priest. I want to enter into the lists only when I am armed at all points and morally sure of not compromising the honour ofthe faith entrusted to me. My first steps will be decisive; everyone’s eyes will be on me to judge me with severity. If it were only a question of myself, I can assure you it would not cost me a thought; my tendency not to be very concerned about what people say about me is clear enough for you to know that I am sincere when I say that. But in the future my person, honour and reputation will be so linked with the faith whose unworthy minister I am that I must proceed with caution. That should be enough, dear mama, to make you understand how important it is for me to follow the plan I have made for myself and you can be sure has received the clear approval of men whose experience and holiness puts them in a position to pass judgment on my reasoning. The question is one of conscience for me and I would have to confront even my Archbishop if his wishes went contrary to what I have resolved. All this won’t stop me coming to see you in the holidays to spend as much time as possible with you, and when I say with you I really mean with you, for I have no intention at all of making any social calls but rather to take steps not to receive any; we can arrange all that when the time comes. It is not far away now and in all truth I think I will not thaw out until the fair sun of Provence warms me up. It is so cold today, April 14, that it is all I can do to hold my pen, there seems to be a block of ice under each of my feet and chilblains are coming up on my hands ...

**To Madame de Mazenod, in Aix.[[4]](#footnote-4)**

69:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Eugenie must not forget to offer her daughter Nathalie to the Lord; she should thank Him and implore his help. Request for prayers for the diaconate.*

Mazenod Madame de

Saint Sulpice,

May 11, 1810, posted on 14th

I don’t have to remind Eugenie to offer her firstborn to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Although the child has not been named after her, she will accept the offering and won’t refuse to take her under her powerful protection. The ceremony for those who have given birth is definitely not in the law of grace, as it was in Judaism, to purify women from a stain which does not in fact exist. Since the time of J.C., the only stain we know is sin, and there is every reason for that. But a Christian lady makes a point of offering to the Lord with her own hands the fruit of her womb, his gracious gift, to thank God for keeping her safe during her confinement with all its dangers, but above all she is unendingly thanking God for his adopting the fruit of her womb as his child in baptism. She implores his help in giving the child a good education, and her concern is, to that end, to do all she can to be in union with the Blessed Virgin in the holy act she accomplished in similar circumstances, to have the same sentiments she had and the divine child, who graciously willed to submit himself so as to set us this example of dependence on God’s sovereign majesty ...

... I am finishing my letter at this point so as to be still in time to get it off today. Thanks again for all the news you gave me on Eugenie’s health. I have been with her in her suffering and her joy; and I have truly shared both the one and the other. She will have been able to supernaturalize all her feelings, accepting her suffering in a spirit of penance and submission to the severe but just sentence passed on the first woman and all who were to bear children thereafter; and her joy will have been wholly in the Lord, blessing God for using her in his service to increase the number of his adorers.

My sincere and affectionate greetings to everyone, I ask your prayers to obtain from the Lord, through the intercession of his holy Mother, help in all my spiritual needs that keep on growing as I draw nearer to the priesthood and its awesome challenge. I have already written you that, in all likelihood, I shall be made deacon at Trinity; it will take just a year after that for the priesthood. What stock of virtue have I laid by for that, God knows. The thought makes me tremble. Let us keep up our prayers. I put all my trust in that ...

**To Madame de Mazenod, in Aix.[[5]](#footnote-5)**

70:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Request for prayers for the diaconate. Eugene is going on retreat in preparation for this.*

Mazenod Madame de

Saint Sulpice

June 10, 1810, Pentecost

As I was waiting for Madame de Talleyrand’s answer, I put off writing to you, and now our retreat has begun to prepare for ordination and properly speaking I must give myself entirely to that important task to prepare my heart to receive the Holy Spirit that will be given me by imposition of hands. I planned to write you yesterday, and then I would have had more time to speak more about myself, but I admit that I spent the period after dinner going to beg for a goodly number of prayers in the different convents I know and from various other pious people I have got to know. So, darling mama, this time I must be satisfied with telling you I am well and asking for your prayers and all the family’s, and those of all our good Christian friends. It will be on Saturday morning, the vigil of Trinity, that the spirit of strength will come down into my heart, and I will be raised to the very high dignity of the diaconate. People in the world have no idea what is included in this portion of the sacramental character whose complementary portion is received with the priesthood; but we who, by God’s grace, are guided by the spirit of the faith, we know that it is something beyond all man’s merits and that even limiting one’s consideration to the sublimity of the functions of this order, there is no man, however great and virtuous he may be, who should not consider himself all too happy to exercise them throughout his life following the example of so many great saints who added lustre to the Church’s early history. It is true that our good Mother, with her present needs, cannot yield to the desires that a humility that sits well with its spirit might entertain, but it is nonetheless sure that she does not cease on that account to regard the diaconate as anything but a very important order and one for which one cannot prepare with too much attention and fervour. I am stopping here as I see I am on the point of pouring out the feelings my heart is filled with, which would not exactly conform to the spirit of retreat and interior contemplation which requires in these circumstances that I contemplate carefully every drop it pleases God’s mercy to give me, to savour and mull it over in meditation. In all probability you will get this letter too late to be a reminder that I wanted you and all the family and all good souls who concern themselves with God’s glory, to be one with me on the day of my ordination. I hope even so you will have thought of it; in any case I beg you to do and have others do afterwards whatever you did not do before hand, that the Lord, moved by our gratitude, will let his graces flow in abundance, for, I need nothing short of an overflowing share to prepare me for the most holy and awesome priesthood. I calculate the diaconal ordinations will take place on Saturday between 9:00 and 10:00 a.m.; if my letter gets to you before then, kneel before Jesus at that moment and ask him everything a mother could ask for her dear son; don’t be afraid to be importunate; God is rich and generous enough to satisfy everyone. Goodbye, dear darling mama, I give you a good hug, and our dear darling little nursing mother. Greetings too to uncle and cousin. Goodbye, goodbye, I should have ended long ago ...

**To Madame de Mazenod, in Aix.[[6]](#footnote-6)**

71:XIV in Oblate Writings

*To punish M. Emery who is too loyal to the Pope, Napoleon expels the Sulpicians from the seminary. Emotions on M. Emery’s departure.*

Mazenod Madame de

St. Sulpice,

June 19, 1810.

I have only a moment to take advantage of Madame de Simony’s departure: she leaves at 4:00 a.m. tomorrow, and she is on her way to Aix. I have not had the honour of making this lady’s acquaintance, but I am very close to her brother-in-law who has just been ordained priest at the ordination where I had the happiness of receiving the diaconate. I won’t say a word on that topic now for if I get started on a subject so close to my heart as that I won’t know when to stop; and so, as I have very little time and there is something else I want to tell you about, I will get straight to the point.

It is just possible you have heard in Aix that the Congregation of St. Sulpice has been dismantled, and if you get this news without further explanation it may well cause you a lot of anxiety if I don’t write and say something about it.

It is indeed all too true that this latest blow has been dealt to the faith. The Emperor, after imprisoning the Pope, exiling the Cardinals, dispersing them in pairs in different towns of the Empire, stripping them of their insignia as Cardinals and confiscating all their property, has turned his attention to the Congregation of St. Sulpice, famous in every age for its attachment to the holy, catholic, Roman Church and to sound teaching. This Company was raised from its ashes by the devotion of M. Emery, a very respected figure who, after battling with all the storms of the Revolution without succumbing, after saving the Catholic faith in France single-handed at a time when it was on the point of being totally proscribed anew, gave his life to the work of formation in the hope of raising young shoots in the Lord’s vineyard to fill the frightening number of vacant places death has left in the sanctuary. As he wanted to devote all his energies to this saintly task, he refused on various occasions three different dioceses that were offered him. His great piety, profound knowledge, wealth of experience, constituted this venerated old man the oracle of the Church of France. Proof against all and any private interest, his sole concern was for what was good, and without passion or prejudice he often found ways of achieving it where many other clever men had given up hope.

But I see I am going on too long about someone who would furnish material for many a page and I don’t have space for it. To cut it short, let me say simply that after the Emperor had named M. Emery to be a member of the Bishops’ Commission convoked to give decisions on a number of questions put to it by His Majesty, M. Emery, who all his life had made conscience his sole guide, had the courage to oppose every unreasonable, not to say heterodox, pretension of the French Government in its unpleasant dealings with the Pope and in regard to other religious questions.

This holy man, the equal of the greatest figures of Christian antiquity, foresaw that he himself, and his Company, which he valued more highly than himself because of all the good it does, might be and indeed would be wiped out, but allowing nothing to stand in the way of the duty that comes before all others, namely, not to betray one’s conscience, he persevered continually in the defence of principles that were clearly being compromised. From that moment his fate was sealed. And last Wednesday the bomb went off, and the Emperor, in a decree, ordered changes in the nature and direction of the seminary of St. Sulpice, gave M. Emery and the other directors 24 hours’ notice to quit the premises, forbade the employment of any Sulpicians in the new structure of the Seminary, etc. etc.[[7]](#footnote-7) The Vicars General, at a loss to replace at such short notice our distinguished Fathers, asked for a few days’ grace. With some difficulty Cardinal Fesch obtained these days of grace. M. Emery has gone already, the rest are ready to go at a moment’s notice. Gloom has descended on the seminary, and every Catholic in Paris is shocked. It is the severest blow that could have been delivered to the faith. The Government’s intentions are no mystery, the only reason the Sulpicians are being destroyed is their heartfelt devotion, one that every Catholic must share, to the Holy See, the holy Roman Church, mother and mistress of all the Churches. Our good Superior said his goodbyes yesterday to the assembled community. The pain felt in parting like this is beyond description. The tears flowing from his eyes revealed his deep inner feelings, for all his calm and outwardly serene appearance. The sound of us all sobbing, his children, there are a hundred of us, meant we could not properly hear what he was saying though there was not one of us who would not have liked to have his words engraved on his heart in letters of fire. No, that scene, the most affecting I have seen in all my life, will never be effaced from our memories. Everybody longed to respond to his farewell words, it was like St. Paul speaking to the Ephesians; but nobody had the courage to speak up. “Dear Father”, I cried out with all the sorrow I was feeling, “dear Father, don’t leave your children without giving them your blessing.” At these words everyone sobbed all the more and we all fell spontaneously to our knees. This went right to the depths of his heart and melting into tears he said: “As you wish,” as if violence had been done to his humility. Then with a prayerful gesture towards the crucifix at the end of the hall and with his eyes fixed firmly on our Saviour, the source of all his strength, he prayed for his blessing on us and then bestowed it in his name. You can understand that this episode took away all thought of supper and that the community’s presence later on in the refectory was a pure formality. Although our splendid superiors are giving us an example by their peaceful and moderate reaction, we cannot but tremble before God’s terrible judgments on France and the whole of Europe. But when we were ordained, we received the Spirit of Strength and with that we can surmount anything. This succession of setbacks will not make me change my plans, I am not going to leave Paris a moment sooner or later.

Goodbye, dear mama, your loving son ...

**To Madame de Mazenod, in Aix.[[8]](#footnote-8)**

72:XIV in Oblate Writings

*His intention to visit his grandmother in St. Julien during the holidays. He will teach catechism to the children.*

Mazenod Madame de ,

Saint Sulpice

July 3, 1810

I had intended to go and see grandmother in St. Julien, and I was thinking of giving a little instruction to these poor people who are so abandoned.[[9]](#footnote-9) I was already quite enjoying the idea of the fruit these instructions might produce. Poor Christians without the least idea of the dignity that is theirs, for want of meeting someone to break the bread of the word. I am however convinced that they are not so far from the kingdom of heaven ...

**To Madame de Mazenod, in Aix.[[10]](#footnote-10)**

73:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Eugene is told to go earlier to bed. He counsels meekness and consideration in the family which he loves very much.*

Mazenod Madame de ,

Saint Sulpice

November 11, 1810,

I have less time than ever, dear mama, as I am under orders to pay back to the hours of sleep what I have been unscrupulously stealing from them. No more saying office after prayer and therefore an hour sooner to bed; three quarters of an hour spent every day saying matins and lauds with the community and therefore nearly an hour I used to use for other things: which amounts to fifteen days and five hours I live less in a year

... You have an extra guest with you at the moment2; please remember you are dealing with someone who, if you give him an inch, will take an ell: there is a sensible middle course to follow and it isn’t difficult to keep if one has a modicum of intelligence and bothers to stop and think: you must be able to look ahead and foresee what opportunities the day is going to bring up to put my suggestions into effect and make plans in the light of that on how to act. Plenty of meekness and consideration (I noticed during my stay that we are weak on this point), no bad-tempered witticisms, good manners to the fore. I have often heard that nothing is better for forming the character than finding oneself living in a house where one must be continually on one’s guard, where the enemy, so to speak, is always around. Now, counsel that comes at the level of human prudence the religious spirit must supernaturalize, and here it is not just a question of avoiding so far as possible every sin but also of actually ridding ourselves of imperfections. One day we strive against hastiness, the next we do battle with bad temper, another day we attack some other imperfection and, little by little, we see we have made great strides. I could say a lot more on this subject which I regard as very important, if I didn’t know it would be a sheer waste of time. No one is a prophet in his own country and least of all in his own family

Anyway, I have said what I felt had to be said for the peace of mind of those I love more than they can know, whatever the detachment I should be showing, because of my state in life, from any affection that is of too human a nature; but it is being said that I am adding again half as many years to my purgatory because of my family.

**74. [To Madame de Mazenod, in Aix].[[11]](#footnote-11)**

74:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Request for prayers for Charles de Forbin Janson and Joseph Szadurski; Eugene will be needing them too when the time comes for him to be ordained priest.*

Mazenod Madame de

Saint Sulpice

December 1, 1810

... Please have someone return to the Jewish family living opposite you the Hebrew Bible they lent me during my stay in Aix; it is on my desk.

The thing now is to bring to your attention two of my friends who are asking prayers of you and of other good people of your acquaintance; they are Charles de Janson who is to receive the subdiaconate on the 22nd of this month, and Joseph de Szadurski,[[12]](#footnote-12) who is to receive minor orders; with a keen sense of our need for our brothers’ help on an occasion when the Lord is disposed to pour out graces in abundance, they are looking for you to be generous at this time. And so you may well want to join to your prayers and the family’s those of the Carmelites, the Grey Sisters, our simple Madeleine, Father Denis, one of the holiest priests alive, as well as of Father Durand. If you happen to be writing to our aunt in the convent, get her to furnish her share too. In putting you to this trouble, you are doing it for me, as I will get it all back when my turn comes around and one thing is certain, I can never have too many intercessors with God lined up in advance for that awesome though still future moment when my wretched person, despite my unworthiness, my very great unworthiness, will be clothed with the priesthood of Jesus Christ. The closer I get to that moment, the more I am tempted to postpone it, certainly not for want of desire, as it is the goal of my desires, but because the closer the mantle of light comes, the more I see in the brilliance of its rays the disproportion there is and the deformity of the person who is to be clothed in it ...

I take the liberty of asking you to consider, when you are making a visit to the Enclos,[[13]](#footnote-13) having some plane trees planted there. You know it is the hermitage I have decided to live in and you would be upset if I were to be deprived of the shade I so long for in the summer heat. I would rather have one tree that affords me shade from the sun than twenty pear trees as I can always buy pears or even do without them without giving it a moment’s thought, but you cannot buy shade nor endure the summer heat without a great deal of discomfort ...

**To his grandmother Joannis.[[14]](#footnote-14)**

75:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Greetings for her feast day. Importance of frequent communion.*

Joannis Catherine

Saint Sulpice,

December 3, 1810.

Whether or not you are in Aix, my dear and darling mama, I really must write you a few lines. This idea came to me on the beautiful day of your feast, for which I am sending you my most tender and heartfelt greetings, at the feet of Our Lord, whom I have just received for your intention. You can easily guess what my prayer was at that rich moment when our good Master rests in our souls and listens to our prayers and is eager to fulfil them. How blind we are, to have there with us the wellspring of all consolation and to persist in our refusal to approach it and draw water. Come to me, cries out the Bridegroom continually, come to me all you who suffer life’s woes and undergo afflictions, and I will give you rest. My greatest desire is to be with the children of men. My only reason for remaining on earth after my glorious Ascension was simply to be able to give each one of them the means of drowning in my living waters the fiery ardours life’s painful journey brings. Come, come, I am the bread of life, I am the strength of the weak, the stay of all. Woe to him who refuses my tender invitation, for whoever does not eat of my flesh will not have life in him.

I am not giving you a sermon; it’s just the feelings the Saviour hidden beneath the Eucharistic species inspired me to share with you on St. Catherine’s day, when I asked him through his infinite merits to help you, and fill you with strength, courage, resignation, love for his Sacrament. His answer was that every one of these graces is at your disposal, it was up to you to open yourself to their riches, but you had to go and draw them from the well by frequent participation in the body of O.L., the only and abundant fountain, which has this special quality that it flows but drop by drop for those who stand afar off while it abounds and overflows for those who have an insatiable thirst for its waters. What a mistake to believe that to dispose oneself worthily for frequent participation of that kind, one must shut oneself up in inaccessible solitude and leave to others the trouble of looking after one’s worldly affairs. The early Christians, who got their instruction from the very mouth of the Lord and the Apostles, did not think that way, they received communion every day in spite of their occupations and the small failings St. Paul and the Fathers reproached them with, another mistake people today only too frequently fall into, namely, to imagine that one has to be perfect to receive communion often. We will not be perfect until we get to heaven; and the one and only way to come anywhere close to it here below is to receive communion often. That is the doctrine of the holy Council of Trent which teaches that this divine Sacrament is a remedy to heal us of our daily failings. So let us listen to the Church and pay no heed to the importunate clamouring of the sectarians of these latter days who say we must be satisfied with just saying our prayers. Let us go as often as we can to the sacrament where our Lord’s love spent itself on our behalf. Let us recall his command; let us thank him a thousand and a thousand times for giving it to us. May the sight of him beneath the species of bread bring us to the knowledge that it is frequent nourishment that this symbol calls for from us, that our soul to sustain itself needs to return there often, as our body so as not to lose its strength does not satisfy itself with eating just once in a while. Finally, let us make no mistake that in denying ourselves very frequent reception of communion we are of our own free will depriving ourselves of an infinite number of graces which are very necessary for us, and storing up for ourselves last-minute regrets, and a prolonging of the pains of purgatory, and a very considerate diminution of heavenly glory.

So there, darling and most dear mama, you have the bouquet God in his goodness has inspired me to offer you for your feast-day in my twofold role as your grandchild and minister of the Church specially commissioned in virtue of my orders to work for the glory of Jesus Christ and the accomplishment of his wonderful designs in the sacrament of the Eucharist, and further commissioned as a deacon most specially for the care of widows, and what widow is dearer to me than my tender and darling mother, for whom I would willingly give my life, and whose heavenly glory and earthly happiness I long to see growing in proportion to the love I bear her. I pray the Lord that my words may be efficacious and bring about such great good, and that on my return I may have the happiness of giving you the precious pledge of Our Saviour’s love at least twice in the month. As we wait for that happy moment, please pray a lot to the good Lord for me. Receive communion for me often. And give me your love as I give you that of the tenderest of sons.

**To Madame de Mazenod, in Aix.[[15]](#footnote-15)**

76:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Madame de Mazenod should not follow the Jansenist principles of Roze Joannis.*

Mazenod Madame de

Saint Sulpice,

December 14, 1810.

I thought it would make you happy if I gave you my usual seasonal gift: I am having the ordo for saying the divine office sent on to you. Don’t let the sight of His Eminence Cardinal Maury’s coat of arms on the frontispiece upset you.[[16]](#footnote-16) His Eminence seems to have thought his dignity called for having his arms printed in that manner; that does not make him Archbishop of Paris, and indeed he only considers himself to be vicar general to the Chapter; which is just as well if he does not want to cease being a Catholic. Even so in my opinion it would have been more canonical to have left on the Chapter’s arms, however it is hardly for us to be scrupulous about formalities when one does not think they are essential ...

I am praying hard for God to open my uncle’s eyes[[17]](#footnote-17) and show him the dreadful precipice at the edge of which he is standing, or to be more accurate into what an abyss he had already tumbled; but God gives his grace only to the humble, say the words of Scripture, and nobody can be said to be that who substitutes his private judgment for that of the Church. As to your own position, don’t ever forget that it is certainly not from him you are to receive the Church’s true doctrine; make an act of faith and submission in and for everything to the decision of holy Mother Church, and, not being capable of judging what it is none of your business to judge, be on your guard against proud men who lack all docility and, although they have not been missioned and are brazen as only heretics can be, set themselves up as teachers and dare to dogmatise, striving, by a deceptive show of external regularity, that can be so easily exposed if one takes the trouble to look closely, to swell the numbers of a wretched sect with its back to the wall, and has barely survived a whole heap of Church anathemas. We are not talking here about matters of simple opinion, eternal salvation is at stake; so put far away from you every principle that would tend to distance you from the faith; one can love heretics and at the same time detest their errors.

So that is what you must do; I use such language in the name of the Church whose minister I am, but with all concern and tenderness too as your very affectionate son. Let us love Jesus, and his Church, let us believe all she teaches and condemn all she anathematises, as she alone is infallible in her decisions. Let us pray sincerely for those led astray by pride, but let us not allow our fondness for their persons to go so far as to include their errors, which we must detest with all our strength if we wish to dwell in the barque of Peter, which is the only one that has Jesus Christ as pilot and so is the only one that can lead us to the harbour of salvation.

With heartfelt and affectionate greetings.

Eugene

**Spiritual Conference.[[18]](#footnote-18)**

77:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Meditation on the mystery of the Incarnation. God’s mercy towards Eugene. Gratitude to God for keeping the Sulpician presence at the seminary.*

Spiritual Conference

[Saint Sulpice,

December 31, 1810].[[19]](#footnote-19)

Lay aside, O Israel, your mourning, cried out one of the Prophets as, rapt in divine inspiration, he saw the future present before his very eyes. Burst asunder and cast aside, O Jerusalem, the chains that still bear witness to your shameful slavery. Rise up, O Sion, and look to the East. Almighty God would have you clothed anew with his justice, he wants to ring your brow with an immortal crown ... The splendour of his glory is to issue from your bosom, and his rays, shining out to the darkest corners of the least known parts of the inhabited world, will draw on you forever the attentive gaze of astounded nations jealous of your glory.

*Exue to Jerusalem, etc. Deus enim ostendet splendorem suum in to omni qui sub coelo est* [Bar. 5, 1.3].

For the divine Word has been seen on earth and has spoken with men: *in terris visus est, et cum hominibus conversatus est* [Bar, 3, 38]. This prodigy, foretold long ago by the inspired son of Nerias to the children of Israel as they sat by the waters of Babylon and despaired of ever being freed, this prodigy we have seen, it has come to pass among us.

Yes, the Word of Life, which was there from the beginning, we have heard it, we have seen it with our own eyes, we have felt it with our hands, for life itself was made visible, we have seen it and bear testimony ... *vidimus et testamur* ... *vita quae erat apud Patrem apparuit nobis* ... [I John 1, 2-3].

But who could recognize him beneath these rags with which poverty has clothed his delicate limbs? Is it credible, is it even conceivable that wisdom, goodness, justice, infinite grandeur could mean to glorify itself once and for all in such a child?

There speaks human wisdom, but St. Paul replies that what is weak in God is stronger than all men put together, that what does not seem worthy of divine wisdom is wiser than all human wisdom combined.

A Liberator was promised, we were to await one worthy of God and suited to our needs. Behold this Liberator, he has appeared as was foretold, and as he was to be. His humble and obscure origins reveal him rather than conceal him. Destined to be King of a new order, his greatness had to be of a new kind. He who by his death was to destroy cupidity’s reign, had from the first moment of his existence to despise pomp and false show.

He must needs be at once both God and man, reunite in his person both God who was offended and human nature that had given offence, that man made strong in Jesus Christ would have the wherewithal to fully satisfy divine justice, and that God would there find an act of reparation superior to the offence and reconciliation would be complete.

Only then could mercy and truth meet, justice and peace reunited and reconciled embrace. *Misericordia et Veritas obviaverunt sibi, justitia et pax osculatae sunt* [Ps. 84, 11]. Such is the secret and mystery of the deep humiliation of J.C. in his birth.

But it is not enough for the emptied heart of this innocent victim. Eight days have scarce gone by since the lamb immolated from the beginning opened his eyes to the light of day: the tears of Jesus for which man’s ingratitude much more than the rigour of the hoarfrost are responsible flow once again, as this child, Saviour from the first moment of his conception, thirsts for suffering, and as a prelude to the lengthy martyrdom and bloody sacrifice he had decided to offer his Father, resolves to prove to the rebels he has come to ransom the measure of his love for them.

In fact we see Jesus, author and only end of the Law, submitting himself to one of its most humiliating practices, freely identifying with sinners, although he is the Saint of Saints, and take upon himself by circumcision the degrading mark and pain of sin. He assumes all the heavy obligations imposed by this ceremony, he submits his tender and innocent flesh to the sharp knife which surely softened its edge when it touched so pure a flesh. He feels its vivid pains and offers to his Father the blood that flows as a first-fruit of all he will one day pour out for our salvation.

Who could have thought it on seeing the King of Heaven consubstantial with God his Father, the Holy One, the Just, the Omnipotent, direct his steps towards the Temple, who could have guessed his intention?[[20]](#footnote-20) It would have been more natural to believe that resolved at last to substitute the reality for the figure, God was about to take his seat visibly in his Temple, that he was about to set up his throne at the very centre of the Sanctuary, use as his footstool that ark (an anachronism one may believe permissible) so revered until then, and deem scarcely worthy of serving as ornaments of his throne those privileged cherubim, sole witnesses for more than[[21]](#footnote-21) years of the mysterious supplications of the High Priests. We would have expected to see him crown his brow brighter than the halo (with a diadem) of glory and majesty; surround himself with countless legions of heavenly spirits ever ready to execute his orders; summon to his feet all earth’s peoples and inaugurate at last the Kingdom so desired by the carnal Jewish nation.

But no, it is not towards the sanctuary that Jesus directs his steps. See him go towards that obscure court situated in the remotest part of the Temple and set aside for sinners come to receive the imprint of their guilty origin. What, my Saviour! What then was your crime! Let all our wonder cease, he takes upon himself all the iniquities of men (of his people) ... Can one reflect on this prodigy of our God’s goodness and not be ravished with admiration and cry out with St. Paul in transports of just gratitude: Here in all truth is the great mystery of the excessive love of the Son of God: *Magnum est pietatis Sacramentum* [I Tim. 3, 16].

But, my God, are your priceless gifts sufficiently acknowledged by simply giving expression to feelings of sterile admiration? Is that the only fruit I am to derive from meditating on the mystery of your self-abasement? No, my Saviour, you call me too to spur myself to imitate the virtues of which you came on earth to give a heroic example. Alas, I have barely begun to follow in your footsteps, footsteps stained with your precious Blood that you poured out for love of me. But that is over: *dixi*; from now on with the aid of your powerful arm I wish to conform my behaviour in all respects to yours. Support my tottering steps as I make this journey that all things conspire to urge me to pursue with courage. The great examples of your humility, penitence, infinite love would be more than enough to hasten me on my journey. When on top of this I think of all you have done for me personally, my heart feels moved to make reparation for my past infidelities. What generosity on one side, what ingratitude on the other! It really seems that while I am by nature sensitive to the point of excess and grateful to anyone who shows me the least sign of love, to you alone I show myself ungrateful and take your gifts for granted, precisely because you like to shower them on me without limit!

If it is true that up to now I have been lacking in fulfilling the sacred duty of gratitude that I owe to you for so many reasons, may it no longer be so in the future. No, I protest my gratitude and speak out among my brothers who as witnesses of some part of what my God has given me are still awaiting perhaps the example that these gifts (graces) require of me. Yes, I will speak out before the last moments of a year so rich in grace run out and go their way to be lost and buried in the vast abyss of passed centuries. My God’s mercies are infinite, let us praise, publish these gifts, for if it is good to hide the secrets of the King, in the words of Scripture, it is honourable, no rather it is a duty to reveal and publish the works of God: *Opera Dei revelare et confiteri honorificum est.*

But how can I with so little space of time at my disposal narrate so many marvels? Frustrated, I see myself constrained to hold in containment what it seems my heart cannot refrain from pouring out. O God, you read the most secret recesses of this heart, you see at a glance with what feelings it is moved when it recalls that happy moment when you deigned to grant that it make you for ever the irrevocable offering of its faith. You did not hesitate, generous Master, to give it entrance to the Holy of Holies, what am I saying! You lifted for it the impenetrable veil that hides from profane eyes the most sacred mysteries, and from that moment, initiated by the effusion of your sanctifying Spirit into the levitical degree, to that high and eminent dignity that sees nothing higher than itself, if it be not the divine priesthood of the priests of the Most High, the power was granted me to touch without temerity with my suppliant hand the depository ark of the precious pledge of the love of God for men.

Tell it abroad, you Levites, who have like me experienced it, with what swiftness the fire which consumes on this altar the stainless victim communicates itself to your heart, warms it and revives it when, deputed to exercise your sublime ministry, you approach with faith and humility to uncover the sacred fire whose flames the priest stands ready to spread. O prodigy, O love!

But will I overlook on a day consecrated to gratitude what thanksgiving we owe the Lord, all of us who form in this haven the happy family of the Venerable Olier. This peaceful retreat was threatened with the greatest of evils; our hearts were bruised; they cried out to God, and the Lord who is always close to the one who calls upon him heard the prayer of the desolate children who asked for the return of their tender Mothers.

It was granted us that we might once more place ourselves under their protecting wings, warm ourselves again on their bosom, and suck long draughts of the milk of knowledge and piety which flow there in such abundance. You who consecrate to our instruction your talents and virtues, the knowledge of which you reveal in the shadows of humility for those who could reward it here below; receive then on this day the tribute of our hearts; yes, allow our grateful hearts to pour themselves for an instant into yours. Cherished and tenderly loved Fathers, live on in happiness, may your long and serene days pour out benign influences on a host of these levitical generations that succeed one another beneath your eyes. And as a way of expressing our good wishes that might give you deep satisfaction in the goodness of your souls, may we imitate your virtues, may we profit from your example. And may the sovereign Rewarder of all good, seeing what you pour out on us, repay abundantly the debt that we glory in having incurred, but which we can never discharge ourselves.

1. Orig.: St. Martin-des-Pallières, château de Boisgelin. In the paragraphs omitted, Eugene speaks of Armand de Boisgelin, the land at St. Laurent, Emile Dedons’ plan to visit Paris, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Orig.: St. Martin-des-Pallières, château de Boisgelin. In the first pages of this letter, that was begun on February 23, Eugene speaks about the cold weather, a walk to Gentilly and a visit to Madame de Brantes. He reports the arrival of the provisions sent by his mother but is still awaiting the Hebrew books sent by the scatterbrain Castellane. He is getting letters about his father’s debts and is waiting impatiently for news about Eugenie’s confinement, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Orig.: St. Martin-des-Pallières, château de Boisgelin. In the omitted paragraphs, Eugene speaks of letters received and sent, the wait for Eugenie’s child to be born, the absence of several Cardinals from the Emperor’s wedding. He gives an introduction to a Polish priest who will be passing through Aix. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Orig.: St. Martin-des-Pallières, château de Boisgelin. In the omitted paragraphs, Eugene apologizes for not writing very often on account of extra courses and examinations; he congratulates Eugenie on the birth of Nathalie on April 24, and thanks Armand de Boisgelin for the courtesies extended to a Pole to whom he had given letters of introduction. Commissions for Emile and Madame de Talleyrand; holidays in Provence passing by Bordeaux with two Poles. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives, FB I7. At the end of this letter Eugene speaks of errands for Miss de Gravier and Madame de Talleyrand. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives, FB I-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. M. Emery was in fact the only one who left, the other directors were left undisturbed in 1810. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Orig.: St. Martin-des-Pallières, château de Boisgelin. At the beginning of this letter Eugene speaks of his holiday plans, of passing through Bordeaux, of errands for Emile Dedons and Miss de Gravier. He gives various items of news. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Madame de Mazenod had told him no doubt that his grandmother would not be going to St. Julien. She did go as it turned out and Eugene spent some time with her at the end of August. He began, it seems, to teach catechism and made Emile Dedons and a certain Seren responsible for continuing the lessons. His grandmother wrote him on September 29: “They still retain their zeal for teaching the catechism. The children are assiduous in their attendance. Our little Vincent doesn’t forget what he has learnt ...” [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Copy: Rey, I, 114-115; Rambert I, 80; Yenveux V, 130, VI, 37. The extracts from Yenveux and Rambert differ in some words from Rey. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Madame de Mazenod knew Charles de Janson, a native of Aix, and Joseph Szadurski who during the summer had travelled with Eugene to Aix from Paris: cf. Pierlorz, in *Etudes Oblates* 28 (1969) 248-253. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. A property belonging to Madame de Mazenod and then situated some kilometres outside the town. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives, FB 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Copy, Rambert I, 83-84, Rey I, 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Cardinal Maury had been named as Archbishop of Paris by Napoleon. The Pope did not recognize this appointment. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Roze-Joannis for his part continued to warn Madame de Mazenod about Eugene’s principles. On February 7, 1810, he had written: “How nice to see Eugene bursting with joy. I am really happy for him. But there are great dangers in the state of life he has chosen and God would want him to know and avoid them ... Poor Eugene, he is no fool, far from it, but he goes around blindfolded whenever there is something directly or indirectly involving the Jesuits ...”

On August 3 he added: “Dear cousin, I wish you every happiness on your son’s arrival. He will get a warm welcome from me, for I both love and esteem him highly, and he deserves to be regarded in this way. We argue a little perhaps but I hope without going outside the bounds of Christian charity. A legitimate suspicion hangs over his views in so far as he has consistently refused to read the authors on whom I base mine while I for my part have had the patience to read the arguments against. Is it pardonable, this wilful closing of one’s eyes to the light?” Madame de Mazenod must have had Eugene’s letter of December 14, 1810, read to her cousin as Roze-Joannis delivers an even harsher verdict on January 13, 1811. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives, DM VI. We possess two versions of this conference. The first and longer one appears to be a draft of the final text published here and which cuts short some passages, fills out others and adds a new section concerning circumcision. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. This text bears no date. The context points to December 31, 1810. December 31: “Eight days have gone by since Christmas”; “last moments of a year so fruitful.” 1810: allusion to the Directors who have recently avoided the suppression of the Sulpicians and their own dismissal from the seminary. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Eugene writes in the margin: “The reasoning here rests on the supposition that Our Saviour was circumcised in the Temple, something that does not seem in fact to be very likely.” [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. The text omits a word here. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)