**1811**

**To his sister Eugenie, in Aix.[[1]](#footnote-1)**

78:XIV in Oblate Writings

*By her good example Eugenie will ensure Nathalie’s purity and virtue. Fidelity to graces received leads to more being offered. Example of the soldier who receives the sacraments frequently and remains faithful to all his Christian obligations. Moral corruption especially at Carnival time; one can keep oneself free of it by following Jesus Christ and his cross. The Lord asks more of Eugenie because she has received more graces. Above all, she must never go to masked balls. How to remain united to God while in the world, importance of the Eucharist.*

L.J.C.

Boisgelin Eugenie

Saint Sulpice,

February 9, 1811.

... Let’s talk especially about what interests you most and, I have to confess, is very close to my heart too, namely Nathalie. I know very well that I love her so much for the simple reason that she is yours, for really a child at that age is not all that attractive in itself, the plain truth is that if she was your neighbour’s child or anybody else’s at all, charming creature though she is, I would not give her another thought, but it is my darling Eugenie’s blood that flows in her veins; that’s all it takes for me to love her with all my heart. So I never write to mama without asking after how she is getting on, etc. May God grant the prayers I say every day that he will keep her soul in that state of purity he restored it to through baptism. Her mother’s good example will be the best and most assured way to obtain this end. What happiness for a mother when she can console herself with the thought that her children can finda surer path to virtue by following what they see her doing than by what she merely says! Courage, dear Eugenie, don’t let yourself be contaminated by your inevitable contact with the world, remember what I have several times told you in my letters; it depended only on you to oblige me to elaborate on these thoughts. If I dared, I would tell you about a young soldier,[[2]](#footnote-2) who lacks nothing that is needed to immerse himself completely in the world and even so keeps his virtue intact in the barracks as if he were in solitude, which persuades me that, notwithstanding my inadequacy and lack of virtue, the Lord even so looks with favour on the very vivid desire I have to see him served in all life’s circumstances and imparts some force to my words. But if this young man can affirmtheir utility, why can’t they be of some use to my sister? My sins are the first reason, but doesn’t she have some responsibility too? Anyway, this young man, despite all manner of persecutions he has to endure at the hands of his comrades, never ever enters a theatre and would rather be reduced to the ranks[[3]](#footnote-3) than dance with persons of the opposite sex. He is completely open about observing the Church’s rules on abstinence and fulfilling all his other duties and the only thing he can reproach himself for - judge for yourself what a fine Christian he is - is that his exemplary conduct earns him the admiration of the tiny number who are able to appreciate it. How can one explain these marvels in the midst of the licence of barrack-room life? Fidelity to grace. It is certain, of faith even, that cooperation with one of God’s graces will attract others from his beneficent hand. It is this fidelity to grace that leads him assiduously to frequent the sacraments. There you have the whole solution to the mystery. It is only by very frequent participation in the sacraments that the early Christians kept themselves at that high point of heroic virtue that has since earned them the admiration of every age. If we want to imitate them, as we ought to strive to do, we will succeed only by using the same means and they will work as infallibly for us as they did for them.

Carnival time is back again, an abomination when Christians give free rein to their hearts’ corruption, and seem to glory in the fact that they are much more like pagans than followers of a Leader like our Saviour Jesus Christ. Just because the miserable slaves of Satan lose their heads, must the tiny number of disciples of the Gospel let themselves be dragged along with the current? By no means, and we have too many helps at hand to keep us from contagion to have any excuse. Let us take a look now and again at our crucifix; we will find in our divine Model’s wounds the answer to all our miserable excuses. It is in this faithful mirror that we will discern what he will tolerate and what he forbids. Let us open our hearts to his, listen to his voice, let’s not stupefy ourselves and then we’ll see if all the petty reasonings of the world’s followers don’t collapse and dissolve before a single one of the rays of light that emanate from Our Lord when we have recourse to him in silence and meditation.

It won’t surprise you that I start my letter with these great truths, for you know I love you too much to flatter you, and so I take good care to refrain from patting you on the back for the good you do, that’s done by many others. As for myself I am continually conscious that while the world, I mean the Christian world, praises us for the good we do, God will condemn us for what we have not done. We mustn’t delude ourselves, we have to fulfil all our duties; don’t forget our duties are relative to the graces God has given us and still is giving us, there where he has placed us, in the light of what he expects of us for his glory. For example: someone else who did the good you do would perhaps be going enough, while God is asking something more of you. Why? Because he has showered his gifts on you since your infancy, shown you his signal favour on a number of occasions and in particular at the most decisive moment of your life, because he wanted you to serve as an example for all the persons in whom he would inspire thereafter the holy desire to work out their salvation in the world. If you weaken and are satisfied to follow the broad way by which it is so difficult to get to heaven, which is yet the one and only end to which we must tend, you are bringing about the failure by your fault of all the merciful plans that God has for yourself and for the good of others too, perhaps, and you put yourself in a state of ingratitude towards God which is indubitably a very dangerous one for your soul. What might I not add if I were able to write all that God in his goodness places in my heart, but I have to stop for lack of time. Even so, if I may once again beseech you not to let yourself be seduced and go and prostitute the sacred character of Christian in the horrid dens, cesspits for all manner of filth, called “masked balls”; it makes no difference that you wear no mask yourself, that you stay away from the ballroom and stay in a box, you have to stay away altogether. I could write a book on this topic, please just don’t set foot there. While one should not put the presentation of a play like “Joseph” on the same plane as all the others, I would give ten years of my life if it meant you had enough spirit of mortification in you to offer the Lord this small privation of something that seen under a certain point of view has a number of unwholesome aspects. And so another prayer please do not yield this year.

Dear God! When will we finally grasp the value of the sacrifices we make for God? At the moment of death, the moment of death! Never let yourself be persuaded to dance, that is important when you are obliged to be present at a ball, or in other rowdy gatherings, bring often to mind God’s presence, a precious practice you cannot be too familiar with; and make use too of the other practices I have given you in the past: death, the moment of the point of death, judgment, hell; according to what time it is, take yourself off in spirit and keep company with saintly people praising and blessing the holy Name of God, the Carmelites between 9 and 11, between 11 and 2 the Religious who in various places still have the happiness of being able to sing the Lord’s praises at the hours prescribed by their rule; from 2 to 4 to La Trappe; at 4, that’s the time at the seminary we begin to offer the stainless Victim who immolates himself for our sins. When one has faith and even a tiny modicum of love of God, it is easy to find ways of not losing sight for too long of one’s well-beloved. In this way one will find we have acquired a treasury of merits right there where unhappily every day others are losing their souls. But the infallible way to conserve ourselves in the world, with no fear of its blows, is going often to the sacraments. There you have the true and specific remedy for all the poisons, the corruption of the world lays down for us; to keep your distance from the sacraments and to claim to serve God in the middle of the world’s dangers is to want the impossible. In the summer heat and when the labour of harvesting is at its heaviest, the farmer needs to take frequent nourishment to renew his strength, so we see the harvesters eating five or six meals a day. Poor souls in the world are engaged in a continual and forced labour to fight and keep themselves in God’s grace. Without question their strength will soon be exhausted if we don’t pay strict attention and have them draw fresh strength by participation in Him who said: My body is a bread of life; he who does not eat of this bread will die. Reflect seriously on all this and pray too for me ...

If you are sending me an answer, make it a long one. You don’t have to write the whole letter the same day, but it would be useful for you to give some details on the dispositions in which you find yourself as to piety; it often happens that, while fulfilling very badly one’s own duties, one gives excellent advice to others; that might be where I am. But if you profit from it, wouldn’t that always be all the more a victory for you?

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

79:XIV in Oblate Writings

*His letter to Eugenie. Eugene has had to accept teaching adult catechism which he proposes to introduce one day in Aix.*

L.J.C.

Mazenod Madame de ,

Saint Sulpice

February 13, 1811.

... My first intention was to send Eugenie’s [letter] with a passer-by but it turned out the person would be three weeks on the road so I decided to find a better way to get it there, especially as it contains some words of wisdom that would be out of date if the letter only arrived after Lent had started ...

February 14.

They have me back at teaching catechism again, and the major catechism at that, if you please, where the pupils are well-educated, very pious adults whom it is difficult to speak to without preparation. I held back as long as I could, but with so much good to be achieved it would not brook a refusal. If God is his goodness grants his Church a period of peace, we might eventually be able to establish something similar in our dear town of Aix, but for that to happen we have to be back in a state of normality and God knows if we will ever see the day. Affectionate greetings, dear mama, please pray for me, and ask for the prayers too of all the people who ask after me.

I am so happy that the Ordo was to your liking, that was really my intention ...

**For mama.[[5]](#footnote-5)**

80:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Eugene will not be ordained priest this year, not for the reasons his mother suggests, but because he wants to prepare himself better for it.*

L.J.C.

Mazenod Madame de

Saint Sulpice,

March 2, 1811

... For once I am getting down to it as if I had nothing else to do. I won’t be satisfied with writing just to you, I’ll write grandmama and Eugenie as well and continue so long as I have space left on my paper, although when I began I was quite decided just to write a few lines; but one can be forgiven for overstepping the mark when it is to do with what one holds dearest. I am not going to repeat to you what I am telling grandmama about what you wrote on her behalf as well as your own. It does not look as if I will be ordained priest this year, you know I have always wanted to give myself a little bit more time to prepare for it, there are no other reasons for my delay; the reasons that make you want me to put it off have absolutely nothing to do with it. You know what St. Paul said about Christians and himself, that they have not received a spirit of fear; on the contrary when we received the diaconate the Spirit was given us *ad robur,* namely, to armour-plate us against every kind of fear and weakness. It is a tonic liqueur that was poured at that time into our souls and, provided we raise no obstacles by our sins, it must produce its effect, for it is not in vain that the Holy Spirit came down upon us. In any case, whether it be for this reason or that, so long as I am still deferring it for a while, that is all you want and you will be satisfied, unless some extraordinary reason that I cannot foresee, but of a completely overriding nature, makes me change my mind: but I repeat that it is more than likely, practically certain even, that I will let Easter and Trinity pass by without offering myself for ordination and I have decided even to say no when the proposal is put to me at the usual time. I am bringing my letter to a hasty conclusion because someone is coming to collect it and it has to be ready when he comes. With my most affectionate greetings. I want you all to take care of your health, and be prudent in Lent and don’t let it make you ill.

**To Madame de Boisgelin, née Mazenod.[[6]](#footnote-6)**

81:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Retreat given in the Church of St. Sulpice during the Carnival. Eugene gives meditation on the Lord’s lovable qualities. The pleasure he feels in serving God and doing penance in reparation for the sins of the world.*

L.J.C.

Boisgelin Eugenie

Saint Sulpice,

March 3, 1811

Although I haven’t yet received any answer to my long epistle, dated I don’t know what, I can’t let a good cleric go off to Aix without writing a few lines for my darling Eugenie. I am impatient, dear child, for your news, and I will be thrilled to get it from your own hand; tell me about your wonderful self, your husband, daughter, health, piety, how you spent the Carnival, what you are going to do in Lent, in a word share all your concerns with me as if they were my own.

If you followed my advice on how to get through Carnival time in a holy way, even though you may have had to attend some noisy gatherings and balls, you may well have earned more merit than myself who have perhaps done badly the excellent things that I was busy with in the final days of that wretched time that is given over to the devil.

However, it is a real consolation to think of 7 or 800 children of all ages, for we thus designate even people 30 years old, and a large number of relatives, spending Carnival Sunday, Monday and Tuesday doing a retreat that took up each day six or seven hours of their time. I was really happy to give them a meditation of three quarters of an hour on O.L.’s lovable qualities to bring them to a sense of how advantageous it is to follow faithfully such a good Master rather than the detestable Satan who flatters us to bring about our perdition. This edifying assembly was so well disposed, their hearts were so moved to love Him who has acquired so many rights to our gratitude and love, that everyone’s tears flowed freely; I was the only one, I say it to my shame, to remain unmoved and my heart remained cold even while my spirit was penetrated with what my mouth was saying.

During the various exercises of this retreat I thought of you from time to time, and when we were praying to the Lord to graciously accept our humble prayers in reparation for all the outrages done to him by his ungrateful children, I asked him to hear the intentions you would bring him for your part and to really fill you with his divine Presence so that none of this world’s vanities and illusions would have an ill effect on you.

What a pleasure it is to serve the good God! I was happier eating my tough piece of beef than all the fancy foods people stuff themselves with in the world. The solitude of the seminary was sweeter to me than the most melodious of concerts; and the time I spent on the retreat was a happiness I cannot put into words, for I felt as if we were performing the office of angels of peace rescuing from the devil’s lairs a host of souls who would perhaps have committed a large number of faults had they to depend on no one but themselves or been pervaded by seductive dissipation in the days leading up to Lent. And that expiatory *Miserere* sung in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament exposed in our chapel, what did it not say to the heart? One offers oneself at that moment as victims in reparation for so many crimes, one unites oneself to all that is holy in heaven, on earth and in purgatory. It feels as if one is crowding around the good, so-offended Jesus to alleviate his pain, which one feels oneself in a very vivid way. It is only on these occasions one feels the whole value of being a Christian. After that one is wholly disposed for the next day’s liturgy, and one enters effortlessly into the Church’s way of seeing things as she covers her head with ashes. Goodbye. Affectionate greetings from the heart. Best wishes to everyone. Write me a long letter. Goodbye,

**For my darling grandmama.[[7]](#footnote-7)**

82:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Advice on the Lenten fast. Gratitude to his grandmother for paying his seminary fees. Eugene will not be ordained priest this year.*

L.J.C.

Joannis Catherine

Saint Sulpice,

March 3, 1811.

A few lines too for our darling mama. Although I’m only going to tell her something she has known for a long time now, namely that I love her with all my heart, it will be enough to satisfy my heart.

We have come once again to the time of year when I become worried about you. Lent always leaves you exhausted, and you would get through it a lot more easily if only you didn’t refuse some relaxation of the rules that you are *entitled to.* I speak as a theologian who knows what he is talking about. You need not hesitate to take a hot drink in the morning, even if it’s only a *chichera,* what you call a *quiquere* of coffee or tea. You know your confessor advised this, and I am telling you his decision was not an unstudied one. Trust me; nobody accuses me of being lax. But I would have to be a complete idiot to give you any other decision than the one I have just said. More is the pity my letter will reach you after Lent has begun and you will already have had time to suffer a lot from the phlegm that the mouthful of coffee you take in the morning brings up, and from the wind that that liquid that suits your stomach so well gets rid of.

I am so used now to your acts of generosity, and my feeling of gratitude is so habitual, that there is no need for me to keep on saying “thank you” on every occasion. However, although you know the extent to which you can count on me, as I have the opportunity of writing, I thank you once again for the money you kindly had sent on. I have just received from M. Gilbert your half-yearly amount; and the only reason I haven’t sent the statement on sooner is to avoid the postage expenses, as I no longer have the facility of writing and using the minister’s bag, since orders from higher-up have absolutely forbidden it.

I have no problem in going along with the wishes you outline, although my reason for doing so is not the reason behind your request. I am very much inclined to postpone priestly ordination, not out of any fear of possible difficulties that may arise in a diocese shorn of its pastor, but because I am struck by my unworthiness for so sublime a ministry, and believe I can’t prepare myself too much so as to bring to the priesthood the best dispositions I possibly can. Moreover, in a matter of such high importance, the only course to take is to disclose one’s desires and leave the rest to Providence as manifested in our director, who holds in our regard the place of God. However, I would venture to think that no one is going to press me to get ordained priest this year. So you can rest easy and keep up your prayers for God to grant me all the graces I need both for myself and for others.

As always happens when I sit down to write you a few lines, I end up filling the page. However, finish I must, with my affectionate greetings. There’s no need for you to reply; it tires you and all I ask is for you to take care of your health ...

**To Madame de Mazenod, rue Papassaudy, n.21, near Place St. Honoré, in Aix.[[8]](#footnote-8)**

83:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Eugene is going to wait until he has finished his theology before he is ordained. He is not doing this out of fear of political developments, but so as to prepare himself better with a long retreat. It is unjust of Roze Joannis to accuse him of following blindly the advice of his directors.*

L.J.C.

Mazenod Madame de

St. Sulpice

March 31, 1811

I have already written you several times, dear mother, that it has never been my intention to receive the priesthood this year and since this seems to give you pleasure, I will repeat this assurance yet again. Several reasons incline me to postpone receiving this sublime Order, the first one being my lack of virtue which is nowhere near the standard required for this awesome ministry; 2° there is the desire I have always had to prepare myself for the priesthood with a retreat worthy of the name, I mean spending 30 to 40 days concentrating completely on my interior life to get to know my needs thoroughly, cut off what is harmful to me, acquire what I lack; in a word, with God’s help to establish the work of my sanctification on solid and unshakeable foundations, root out anything that impedes God’s action in my soul, to make myself fitin a word to sanctify others by working at my own salvation. Only in the most absolute of retreats can all these things begin to come together, God rarely speaks amidst the worries of the world or any other activity that absorbs our attention. So even studying, although it is very much a part of God’s plan, is even so an obstacle to that perfect knowledge of oneself that can only come in recollection without any distractions. However, during the course of my theology, it would be impossible for me even to dream of carrying out this plan I have always had in mind because of the need I see for it; and so there is just one way left to me, namely, postpone receiving the priesthood until after my theology studies are entirely over. Then, with my studies behind me, I can spend my time at prayer, etc., and when the time fixed for my elevation to this sublime dignity that I so dread approaches, slipping quietly away, I will go and have a month’s stay in the country in our delightful countryside at Issy and not show my face until the moment of ordination. That is what I have always had in mind. So I have no intention of deceiving you, and you are quite wrong to get alarmed. So I say it again, I will not be ordained priest this year. But I can’t refrain from pointing out that those people who are showing such concern for my welfare do not know me at all if they can imagine that any other reason at all could hold me back for so much as fifteen minutes. I would be really unworthy of the sacramental character I bear if I allowed myself to be influenced for a single moment by any fear other than that of my very great unworthiness. If I had been so cowardly as to listen for a single instant to the least thought coloured by pusillanimity, it is not just for a matter of a few months I would have postponed my going forward to the priesthood; on my life, there would have been no consecration with the holy oil for hands so weak as to rely on human helps, and judging myself absolutely incapable of fulfilling the duties which already weigh in part on a deacon, I would have banished myself to the crowd of the pusillanimous, be they laity or non-laity to forget, amid their politic and scarcely Christian outcries, that I had even so received by the imposition of hands the spirit of strength and spiritual [vigour].

I understand the torments of a maternal heart which, listening a little too much to the feelings nature has engraved so deeply in her, forgets for a moment that they must be subordinate to what God’s service and the salvation of souls requires, souls a single one of which is worth more than all the riches, honours and temporal goods whatsoever. A mother or a grandmother is one thing, but when people reputed to be pious dare to fill them full of vain fears and when among these officious friends one can include perhaps some priests, that is what upsets me! Does anybody believe in good faith that on entering the clerical state I had not foreseen what is now happening?[[9]](#footnote-9)

I resume my letter after an interruption to get it finished and have it delivered, courtesy of a traveller. I add nothing to what I have already said although in all probability I would have had more to say if I had been able to continue, but this is enough, in the first place to set your heart at rest since I assure you that I have never had the intention of receiving the priesthood this year; in the second place so that you may inform those people who have communicated their fears to you what the real reason is for my delay. Far from intimidating me, current events encourage me, and certainly they would have made me change my mind and not postpone any longer the reception of the priesthood which affords me my only opportunity of being able to be of service to the Church if, on the other hand, I were not convinced that I will be more useful still by delaying. They should know what will be all my life my only goal: the glory of God, being of use to my neighbour, service of the Church, here you have the answer to all the arguments that human prudence may put to me. Any other fear than that of failing to do one’s duty is a monstrosity in a Christian, in a deacon I cannot find words to describe it. But that is enough of that and there would be too much to say about it all.[[10]](#footnote-10)

It remains only for me to express my astonishment about a manner of speech you sometimes fall into: you seem to suppose I let myself be led, that I am one to be blindly impressed by others, etc. I have to confess that I would never have thought I would have this thrown at me. And if I had not seen with my own eyes the insolent expressions a certain person used in a letter which, to add insult to injury, he handed me to deliver, I would never have thought it possible someone could accuse me of a weakness of that kind. The very person whose unwitting tool you are could furnish an example to the contrary, since despite all the efforts of his eloquence and all his attempts to bring me over to his heretical views, I have steadfastly persevered in frankly resisting him on every occasion. I am so little inclined to let myself be impressed by others that I tend to the opposite extreme and frequently have to force myself to pause for reflection to maintain a just balance; it is an undeniable fact and if I sin it is much more through a natural tendency to bend others to my will than by being overly-inclined to accommodate myself to their views. Such is the judgment I am constrained to make on myself, such is the judgment of everyone who has known me up to the time the abovementioned person saw fit to write the contrary in the most outrageous way. At the same time, if I hark back to that act, it isn’t that I bear him any rancour, God forbid! I have forgiven him for that black deed and I renew my forgiveness from the bottom of my heart. It is only to let you understand a little the facts so you don’t get worked up on the subject. Just remember what my poor grandfather, your father, said to you when I was an infant: *a queo picho es nest caractero leissali dire, vuoli aco vau mieou qu de ploura a de caratero me fa plaisi.* His judgment was sound, I have always kept a lot of temperament and once more, when I sin it is by excess and not by default ...

**To Madame de Mazenod, isle 56, n.21, in Aix. Dep[artment] des Bouch[es]duRhóne.[[11]](#footnote-11)**

84:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Details of M. Emery’s illness and death. Eugene looks after him. Admiration.*

L.J.C.

Mazenod Madame de

Saint Sulpice,

May 2, 1811

Dear, darling mamma, if you have been reading the papers, you won’t be surprised at my rather lengthy silence. At first I was putting off writing in expectation of a letter from you; and since the one dated April 18 arrived, we have in the house been taken up with some matters of so sad a nature that I have been quite unable to write.

When our venerable superior fell ill it was only natural that I should do what I could for him; and when we suffered the grave misfortune of losing him, and the principal funeral arrangements were confided to me, if I were to acquit myself worthily of this painful task I had no time for anything else.

To give you some idea of who M. Emery was, I would have to speak with the voice of all men, even those with little attachment to religion.

His death is the greatest calamity that could afflict the Church in the current situation. He was the only one able to bond people together in unity, the only man who on account of his outstanding merits could impose it on all parties. The Emperor himself fell silent in his presence, so great was the ascendancy of his enlightenment and virtues.

He was one of those strong souls, so rare in our days. Incapable of betraying his duty, unshakeable in his principles, he yet had the talent of conciliation to a supreme degree. He was in a word the man the Church really needed. But the Lord who likes to show that it is in Him alone that we must place our trust, has just taken from us this last source of strength. May his holy will be accomplished in everything.

Throughout my life I will never forget the examples of strength and truly priestly vigour that he gave us right up to the last moment. He did not yield until the moment that death, which already circulated in his veins, had laid him low. Two days before his demise, he still wanted to get up to say holy Mass, despite the acute illness that oppressed him; with unbelievable pain he got as far as the altar, and he would have died at the altar had not his director arrived just in time to force him to stay in bed. These were the last efforts of an eminently generous soul. Scarcely had he returned to his bed than he fell into that state of weakness that is the precursor of death. He did not move again from his place and he lost the power of speech a few hours later, when he had received the last sacraments. It was Sunday that he breathed up his spirit to the Creator.

I had been one of the first to notice his illness on the Tuesday morning, and perhaps I was the first to become alarmed over his condition. I ran to the doctors, as in an emergency it is not wise to rely on the servants. The good superior, thinking that his illness was nothing but overwork, had in the interval sent for a carriage with the intention of taking a 24 hour break in the country. The doctor I brought just managed to feel his pulse as he crossed the courtyard to get into the carriage. I was in a state of alarm. I conveyed this to my other superior, who begged me to go and spend the night in the country, together with the bursar. As my fears grew, when I arrived at Issy I did not want to go to bed, though the bursar urged me to do so. I spent the night in the library next to the sick man’s room, without his knowledge. I was afraid he would be taken suddenly.

The next day, Wednesday, he wanted to get up, despite his very great weakness. It was impossible to stop him saying his office; and he would not be denied saying holy Mass. He dragged himself to the chapel. It was a heartrending sight to see a venerable old man, almost 80, unable to put one foot in front of the other, supported by two people, making his way to the altar to offer the sacrifice of his life to the Lamb who would immolate himself through failing hands. I had the happiness to serve that last Mass. What feelings did I not experience at the sight of this holy priest, almost at the point of his agony, celebrating the holy mysteries with a redoubled faith and love that have left really deep marks in my heart. He suffered enormously getting through it, only his courage gave him enough strength to make it to the end. His condition deteriorated after the Mass. He was brought back to Paris and the prognosis of the four doctors summoned for consultation was that he was on the point of death ...

**Retreat, as deacon.[[12]](#footnote-12)**

85:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Decrease in fervour and observance, repugnance for bodily mortifications. Resolutions: more mortification and recollection. He invokes the aid of saintly deacons.*

Retreat for diaconate

Saint Sulpice

May [1811].

On my retreat day in May, I noted in myself a marked decrease in fervour, observance, etc. I reflected on this disorder that was leading me backwards rather than forwards; to my surprise I noticed that I had allowed myself to be overcome by an invincible repugnance for bodily mortifications. I could not hide from myself the fact that the only fasting I was doing was on Fridays, a burden that still seemed quite heavy to me in my excessive laxity. No more use of disc[ipline], nor of the ch[ain].

The result of my reflections on my need to renew myself in the spirit of fervour and observance, etc., led to the following resolutions:

1. I will make it a point of duty to fulfilwith the utmost scrupulosity every point in the rule and the special articles of my own program. I will submit myself to this laborious duty, in view of pleasing God by doing his holy will, and as penance for my sins.

2. I will start getting up again before prayers, to have enough time to attend to various things I have for some time neglected. All the worse for me if I am late going to bed.

3. I will set aside anything that has been a source of distraction from study, since the time I have only been getting up at the same time as the community.

4. I will resume the holy usage of the chain three times a week. Have I become more holy, that I am entitled to give it up? The more nature finds it repugnant, the more must I force myself to overcome it.

5. I will take pains to say my office with more attention, so as to savour more the consolations the Lord can put in one’s way there, when one carries out this duty with more piety than I display. Since I have become aware that I have generally been saying all my prayers with little attention and recollection, I will take the greatest care never to begin them without recollecting myself for a moment so as to place myself in the presence of God; I will accompany this interior recollection with a great exterior modesty, not permitting myself to look about me nor listening in on conversations that are not part of the one thing that should hold my attention at that moment. And in my particular examens, I will apply myself especially to examine myself on the greater or lesser degree of fidelity that I observe in the fulfilment of this article.

6. I will do everything possible to keep myself constantly in God’s presence, and I will bring myself back to it with frequent ejaculatory prayers.

7. As far as possible, I will not let a single day go by without reminding myself that with every day I am getting nearer to the priesthood; and, recognizing that I am totally unready to receive this sublime order worthily, I will humble myself profoundly before God, confessing my guilt for not having responded to the advances that his infinite goodness had in all truth desired in my regard, and beseeching him who has always covered me with his shadow, in his great mercy to forget my infidelities, to strengthen and confirm my resolutions, and to pour out anew on me in even more abundance, if it be possible, his grace and benefactions, and not to let me abuse them as in the past.

8. Lastly, I will beg the Blessed Virgin Mary to take me under her protection and to intercede on my behalf.

I will pray also to my dear guardian angel, St. Joseph, St. Charles, St. Eugene, St. Aloysius Gonzaga.

I will not fear either to pray to my venerable friend D. Bartholomew Zinelli, who loved me so much while he was alive.

My last resolution is to choose for each day of the week a holy deacon, to be my special protector in acquitting myself worthily of the functions of my order and so that all together they might obtain for me the virtues necessary for receiving the priesthood with the best possible dispositions. May I imitate their virtues; that is what I will set myself to do.

Sunday: St. Stephen.

Monday: St. Lawrence.

Tuesday: St. Vincent.

Wednesday: St. Francis of Assisi.

Thursday: St. Ephrem.

Friday: St. Arsenius.

Saturday: St. Maur.

**To Madame de Mazenod, rue Papassaudy, ín Aix. Bouches-du-Rhóne.[[13]](#footnote-13)**

86:XIV in Oblate Writings

*When Eugene is back in Aix as**a priest, he will not be getting much involved in family affairs; his time will be divided between ministry, study, and good works. Eugene is very happy with Eugenie’s conduct.*

L.J.C.

Mazenod Madame de

Saint Sulpice,

June 7, 1811

... All the details you give me about the family, and Nathalie especially, are delightful, I take a very vivid joy in all your pleasures, but it does upset me when on occasions like these you start bemoaning my absence. Even when I am back in Aix, I won’t be able to be more actively involved than I am from Paris; you understand quite well that once I enter the ministry, on a permanent basis, the first sacrifice I will be making will be of anything that could be any kind of a distraction from my tasks and studies. A priest who wishes to do his duty, as I plan by God’s grace to do mine, has not a moment’s rest; whatever time is not spent in the tasks of the holy ministry belongs by right to study or other good works.

It is one thing to spend two months holidays at home, quite another to be there on a permanent basis. It’s no use your citing me other examples, none of them could turn me against the plan I wish to follow. Everyone must answer for himself or, to put it in a better way, in a matter of this importance one does not look for advice from people who are not charged to answer for our souls before God’s judgment seat, or if one wants to find a model it is among the saints who have gone before us and were able to win the reward that the models of our own day have yet to reach ...

... I will be writing to Eugenie as soon as I have the time. Her letter, full of common sense and sound reason, gave me the greatest pleasure. There is a very good understanding between us. When I speak to her about things of salvation it reminds me of M. Aranthon, one of the most worthy of the successors of St. Francis de Sales in the See of Annecy, who used to confess his mother and sister-in-law. I tell myself in all truth that I am preaching to someone who is worth much more than I am myself. At the same time, there is nothing wrong with that, as in reminding others of their duties, I feel myself covered with confusion when I see that I am carrying out my own so badly and that challenges me to do better. Besides, God in his goodness always gives some grace to his ministry of charity. So in all humility I will go on as I am doing, in the hope that the Lord will give his blessing more and more to a correspondence that tends to make him loved and served better ...

**Conference on the fear of God.[[14]](#footnote-14)**

87:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Abundance of religious feasts to arouse our fervour. Meaning of the fear of God. Four effects of this gift.*

Conference on the fear of God

Saint Sulpice

June 30, 1811

M. de Mazenod began with the remark that the Church seemed at this season of the year to have multiplied the number of feasts so as to arouse our fervour. In effect, (he said, more or less in these words), we have celebrated one after another and almost at the same time the Ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven, Pentecost, Corpus Christi, the feast of the precursor, that of the apostles Peter and Paul, and in a few days we will be celebrating that other feast so dear to the Association, the feast of the love of Jesus Christ for men, the feast of the Sacred Heart. What abundance, what profusion! What consoling subject matter for meditation is furnished you by this thought, one that must have come to you on the solemnity of the Ascension, that the Saviour has gone before us to the place of glory to arouse our desires and indicate our places in the Kingdom which he has won for us at the cost of every drop of his precious blood.

You were still absorbed in this consoling mystery when the Church herself took you away from it and presented to your piety another object no less edifying and salvific, the memorial of the miraculous descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles assembled with Mary and the other disciples in the cenacle. You must have felt that it was not just a question of celebrating the memory of a glorious moment of the past, for you certainly shared in the very same favours that were poured out on the assembled disciples; the Holy Spirit, ever fecund and infinitely multiplying his benefactions, comes down anew today as then, accompanied by all his gifts, into souls so fortunate as to be busy preparing him a dwelling. Ah! the more faithful you have been, the more you will have drawn from that inexhaustible source. And of a surety was it ever more necessary to be abundantly provided with the graces of the Holy Spirit than at a time when all Christians should be desiring to be afire with love like the Seraphim to enter into the spirit of the Church which celebrates at this time with such touching pomp the excessive charity of Jesus Christ for men in the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist? But your sure grasp of your obligations in this regard, and your profession of total devotion to Jesus Christ poured out on our altars for love of us is for me a very sure guarantee of your feelings with regard to the lovable Saviour of our souls, for me to think it necessary to arouse your gratitude on this day; and anyway, it is only a few days since we acquitted ourselves of this duty towards you, and the feast of the Sacred Heart will soon provide us with the occasion to speak with you about it yet again; and so the short space of time that is available for our dialogue will be employed fixing your attention on another subject, all the more interesting as it will be the more useful for you: we wish to put forward a means that is practically infallible for not backsliding on the journey of perfection that you have embraced, this method will also be useful as a means of forging ahead in these ways where one so often goes astray if one does not take care to illumine one’s journey; for, my children, it is not enough to promise to God, in moments of fervour, to be faithful to him until death. Who would not say as much in the same circumstances? Who would not desire, like St. Peter, to set up his dwelling on Mount Tabor? But that is not enough, one must foresee the times of tribulation: the time when one will have to follow Jesus Christ to the Praetorium, accompany him to Calvary, and wouldn’t we run many risks then of denying our good Master, of fleeing in cowardly fashion and turning our backs on him, if we have not taken wise precautions to remain faithful at all times.

This means that I am proposing to you is the fear of God; not, certainly, that servile fear, the sad burden of criminal souls who raise their eyes to heaven only to see there an avenging God ready to hurl thunderbolts on their guilty heads, but I want to speak to you of that filial fear, precious gift of the Holy Spirit, a gift you received from his liberal hand, and which leaves you with the task of cultivating it carefully in your souls. I speak to you of this habitual disposition that the Holy Spirit has placed in your souls to keep them in a disposition of respect before the majesty of God, and in dependence and submission to his wishes, distancing them from everything that can displease God, from everything that can sadden in however small a manner his spirit.

This gift is the foundation and basis of all the others because the first step on God’s path is flight from evil and this is a property of this gift.

You may judge the excellence of this gift by the effects it produces in the soul. These effects are: 1° to inspire in the soul a continual reserve, a holy trembling, a profound self-emptying before God. The soul enriched with this precious gift no longer acts with that precipitation that is so common and of which one has so often to repent: it examines in advance of committing itself to act if that action holds in itself anything that could displease its God: its only fear is to offend, nay rather to cause grief even to the one it loves; the most seductive things lose their power of attraction once it discovers within them the slightest trace of imperfection: penetrated by a sense of its nothingness, it keeps itself humbly prostrate in the presence of its Creator, listening with attention to his every least inspiration, repulsing without cease every least obstacle that could slow it in its journey and dampen that admirable exchange it never ceases to enjoy with its God ...

The second effect of the fear of God is an extreme horror of every least offence to God, and a constant resolution to avoid their every occasion. How could a soul penetrated with a sense of its nothingness and baseness as much as with the sense of God’s grandeur, a soul accustomed to live in continual reserve and a holy trembling, permit itself voluntarily to offend that Majesty before which it walks without cease? No, it is well nigh impossible for that evil to arise, all the more as the horror it feels for anything that might tend to diminish its sweet communications with its God have it take all kinds of precautions not to be surprised by the enemy’s ambushes; it avoids with an extreme care every least occasion, and while so many others through an ill-judged sense of security fall, alas! shamefully into the snare, it distances itself even from things that are perfectly licit lest they be for it, in its weakness, an occasion to sadden the spirit whose delight it is to rest in its heart, and thus ensures a perseverance that will lead to an immortal crown of glory and felicity.

The third effect of the gift of the fear of God is a humble confession of its fault when one has fallen into some sin. Alas! however determined the most holy of just men may be never to offend the good God, however sincere may be this generous resolution, human weakness is so great that it can contrive that the faithful soul, weighed down under the weight of the mud from which is moulded the gross body which was given it to be inseparably united with it, it could happen, I say, that it forgets for an instant its promises and that it offends momentarily, and as if taken by surprise, the good Master whom she never wanted to afflict. These passing faults are the unfortunate prerogative of our humanity. Children of Adam, we participate each and every one of us today, be we ever so far distanced from that corrupted stock, in the weakness of our first father. Sin once entered into the world must needs work its frightful ravages in all flesh conceived in sin ... But be consoled, faithful souls, this power is limited, and the Holy Spirit, in pouring out on you this precious gift of the fear of God, has placed the remedy alongside the poison. It did more, yes, I dare to say it, it allows you to derive advantage from the very falls into which the fragility of your nature may have been able to lure you, for, as an effect of this gift, recognizing your fault immediately after it was committed, and knowing from your own experience how little you must count on the firmest of your resolutions, you seize the moment to establish yourselves in feelings of the profoundest humility, you redouble your trust in God, the one truly solid support, you make new efforts to unite yourselves more closely to him, you renounce finally more than ever your own intelligence and the esteem that you had perhaps previously conceived of your feeble virtue. And thus it is that it perfects itself by its very falls, so great is the mercy of God with regard to his poor children.

Finally the fourth effect of the gift of fear of God is a careful vigilance to restrain the disordered inclinations of the appetite; frequent self examinations to come to a knowledge of one’s interior state, and there discern whatever may be contrary to fidelity in God’s perfect service.

**To Madame de Mazenod, rue Papassaudy, in Aix, Bouch[es duRhóne.[[15]](#footnote-15)**

88:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Eugene is surprised at not getting any news. He will probably not be going to Aix in the holidays. There are some virtuous young people in Paris.*

L.J.C.

Mazenod Madame de

Saint Sulpice,

July 1, 1811

A whole month has passed, dearest mamma, without any news. This delay seems rather long to me, and if I did not put it down to the harvest, or a trip to St. Laurent, I would be really put out. Even so Eugenie could have made up for your absence ...

July 2

My letter did not go off yesterday, and I resume it today too late to finish it in time to catch the post; perhaps this delay will give time for me to receive something from you or my sister. July 2 has come already, and it seems to me it will be really difficultfor me to come and see you during the holidays; it certainly is not for lack of wanting, but if I cannot leave on the 20th or the 25th of this month, would it be worth the trouble of undertaking such a long trip for so short a time? As well as that, if you were all in the same place, but I see that it will be the same this year as last, the whole family will be scattered. It is quite true that as I have finished my courses I will not be under pressure to return exactly on commencement day; but that would never be more than eight or ten days of a difference. Much as I would have liked to know a little about what your plans are, so as to be in a position to organize myself should it happen that the important matter that keeps me in Paris should take a surprise turn and leave me confident that my absence would not be a risk to my own interests….[[16]](#footnote-16)

July 3

There is no way to finish this letter, and I prefer rather to send it as it is than wait until tomorrow to finish it. I forgot to do something M. de Colonia had charged me to do for you and grandmamma; namely, to tell you of the marriage of his daughter with her cousin Maurice de Giry. This marriage promises to bring happiness to both parties. Maurice is the happiest of men and his wife will be able with him to keep up the high piety she professes in imitation of her father and mother. Giry is by no means the usual kind of husband one meets these days, he has committed himself to prepare to receive the sacrament with all the requisite dispositions, and I was really edified last Tuesday, a working day, when I saw the two young spouses very devoutly hearing holy Mass at the Carmelite church, where by chance I was serving one myself on my way to Issy. No show, it is an understood thing (say that to Eugenie, I could cite her a hundred examples), no human respect, not caring one wit what people will say, etc., etc. And so when our darling Eugenie finds herself the only one in Aix to fulfil with courage and generosity the precepts of the Gospel, let her betake herself to Paris, where, thanks be to the Lord, there are still a fairly large number of faithful observers of the law. But here I am still writing away when I ought to have left already; I finish with my affectionate greetings, to you and all the family, lazy Nathalie included.

One more word of consolation for Eugenie. Among the good Christians of both sexes, I met some time ago a pair who are two angels and turn out to be her relatives. They are Madame and Miss de Gramont, niece and grandniece of Cardinal de Boisgelin. This side of heaven one could not find more virtuous people. Madame de Gramont is the sister of Madame de Chabannes whom you met in Aix, where she spent some time with her uncle.

Goodbye, dear darling, I am away at the double.

**To his grandmother, in St. Julien.[[17]](#footnote-17)**

89:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Eugene is planning to be ordained priest during Lent of 1812. He declined to be ordained at Trinity, 1811. He looks forward to celebrating the Eucharist for his grandmother in the chapel at St. Julien.*

Joannis Catherine

Issy,

July 24, 1811.

According to my calculations, darling and dear mother, at the moment the whole family will be scattered: mother in Saint Laurent, Eugenie in Peyrolles, and you yourself in Saint Julien. So it would take too long to write to mother and have her pass on my news, and besides I am delighted to find an excuse to be in direct touch with my dear *darling little mother* whom I will always love more than myself. If I do not give myself this pleasure more often it is only because I am afraid you will feel obliged to write me back and tire out your eyes and I beg you to do me the kindness of not doing that; for me it is enough to know that you are well, that is all I want, and all I need. Don’t even think of replying; let’s just chat here together for a few moments, in the drawing-room, on the court or in the garden, just as you like. But first let’s take a little stroll to the chapel; simple as it is, your being there gives it a feeling of devotion. We shall be there together one day, and what will be my task? Dear God, I cannot think of it without trembling. I shall offer on that altar the holy Victim; I shall offer Him in your name; I shall present you to our common Saviour, and you will receive from my hand, with thanksgiving, Him whom you were perhaps the first to teach me to bless, to praise in the days of my tenderest childhood. We will turn that tiny chapel into a sanctuary, and make up with the greatness of our hearts for all that is lacking by way of grandeur in that earthly temple; we will invite along from time to time those good country-folk whom the Lord has marked out with his graces, and, all together, we will storm heaven to obtain all we need to arrive more surely in our homeland; for all our desires must tend towards that eternal Kingdom which was acquired for us by our good Master and which he destines for us if we are faithful. So I will be your chaplain, and you will have no need to go to strangers to nourish your piety; you will find within your family, for are you not my mother? a minister who is always at your call to fulfil his sublime functions. But I have been talking as if I were a priest already; in fact I am only a deacon; and when shall I be a priest? I dare not indicate a date; it cannot be too long delayed however; and to prevent it happening last Trinity, what a fight I had to put up! Luckily for me, a reason existed against which no argument could prevail,[[18]](#footnote-18) for as to pleading personal unworthiness, that would not hold up if obedience said one should not hold back. In a word, I am still only a deacon but in all probability I will take the great and formidable step during Lent. You will get news of it in good time, so that you can help me with your prayers; You will not be able to be present at my first Mass, but all Masses have the same value and are equally fruitful if one comes with the right dispositions ...

**To Madame de Boisgelin, née Mazenod, hótel de Boisgelin, in Aix.[[19]](#footnote-19)**

90:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Eugene’s advice to his sister: love of God, detachment from the world. This requires daily meditation on some saving truth; Eugene has come to understand this all too late. He invites her to receive the sacraments more often, especially the Eucharist.*

L.J.C.

Boisgelin Eugenie

[St. Suplice,

August 12, 1811].[[20]](#footnote-20)

... When I restarted my letter, it was my intention, dear friend, not to finish until I got to the end of the paper, but now Castellane is here and he is going to leave this evening and, if I do not wish to miss him, I must go straight away to his house; and so I cut short my conversation not without regret, for it was my intention, as usual, to finish with some edifying words that might be of some use to you. I also had to tell you that your last letter was as well written as it was good, only your friendship misled you about me, and I know myself too well to be able to be deceived, but I do not wish to vie with you in humility, I limit myself to asking you with some insistence for your prayers. For my part you can guess for yourself if I can forget you in mine. Let us love the good God with all our heart, let us use this world as if we did not use it, that is without becoming fond of its vanities and lies. I do not know if you ever put into practice a suggestion I think I gave you, namely never to let pass a single day without meditating on some saving truth. One makes a monster out of the least thing before one has tried it, and it is an effect of the demon’s allure, but when once one has experienced the consolations that the Lord pours out on souls of good will who sincerely desire to walk in the way of the commandments, then one groans that one thought too late to procure for oneself this happiness; alas!, what a subject for regret it is for me as I speak to you; I know better than anyone how I have abused the Saviour’s graces, and I know what it costs to have kicked against the goad, and it is to save others some tardy and almost irremediable regrets that I do not cease to cry out: children of men, how long will your hearts be closed? Why do you love vanity and seek out a lie? Yes, my good friend, living in the midst of the world, and obliged by your state to find yourself amidst scandals of every kind which that enemy of J.C. loves to stir up all the time, you must forearm yourself against his attacks. For that you have to enter sometimes within yourself, and at one time think about the end that awaits these reckless breakers of our God’s laws, transport yourself to the last moment of your life, and think what you would then have wished you had done, and at another time meditate on some other truth. In the morning make a preparatory examen, i.e., review in advance the actions of the day, what you must do, the relations you will be having with your neighbour, the occasions of giving offence to the good God in which you may find yourself, and then cool and composed foresee and fix the manner in which you will behave, it is the only way to sin but rarely in life, taking a precaution of this kind. I know a young soldier who never misses this practice a single day, and so it is he is always victorious in all the attacks that the world levels at him with an unbelievable obstinacy. Pending my return when we will be able to fixtogether what the most expedient thing is for you, continue to frequent the sacraments, and do not keep putting off what you ought to have been doing all along. Stop deceiving yourself, in your position it is an illusion of the devil to make the holy practice of a sacramental life impracticable for you to imagine that it would be necessary to disengage yourself entirely from all the difficulties in which the situation in which you find yourself obliges you to remain, what an error that is! Are you not a married lady, a mother, a nursing mother because it is God’s will? So in fulfilling the duties of a woman, a mother, a nursing mother you are doing what is pleasing to God, and how could one maintain that in fulfilling the duties that God has imposed on us, be they what they may, we are not fit to respond to the sweet invitations he makes to all his own to come to him, to draw in his Sacrament strength and life, etc. The first Christians understood it better than we do, when notwithstanding their occupations, and all the bother that the various employments in which they found themselves occasioned for them, they let not a day go by without approaching him who cries from the depths of his tabernacle, throne of love to which he calls all men: come, come all of you who are crushed under the weight of your labours; come and I will give you strength and restore you [Mt. 11, 28]. God! how can Christians be so insensible to such tender invitations, how can they resist such pressing invitations. How is it that they do not feel that all their excuses are only pretexts suggested by their laziness and lukewarmness. I am speaking of those Christians who live as such, for as to those who are Christians only by baptism, they form a class apart, and if I had to speak to them, I would speak differently. I have still so many things to say to you and yet I have to conclude, even so I have not answered the points in your letter. Before finishing, I will answer in two words the question you raise: “I am always the same person, what am I to think of my communions?” What you have to think of them, is that they save you from becoming worse; you will remain always at the point where you are for so long as you do not communicate more often; you will not make progress without changing your system. Stop deceiving yourself if you are waiting to be more perfect so as to communicate more often, it is a foolish enterprise and one that cannot succeed; but by stirring up in your heart lively desires to unite yourself more often to your God, by making yourself more docile to his invitations, and by frequenting the sacraments, it is then that you will become more perfect. This means is infallible. So begin with not ever letting a month pass without approaching the sacraments, place all your trust in God. Act to please him; don’t resist his inspirations, allow grace to do its work in your heart, place there the least of obstacles and you will see ...

**To Madame de Boisgelin, née de Mazenod, hotel de Boisgelin, in Aix. Bouches-du-Rhóne.[[21]](#footnote-21)**

91:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Grief on learning of the death of his grandmother Joannis. Her body should not be left in the cemetery at St. Julien, but be removed to the Enclos. Respect due to the remains of the baptised.*

L.J.C.

Boisgelin Eugenie

Issy,

September 7, 1811, despatched the 11th.

I was intending to write you in a few days time, my darling sister, but the letter I have received from you and especially the postscript added by mother decided me to do so much sooner. I am not going to begin with a description of the effect produced on me by the frightful news of the death of a person who was so dear to me,[[22]](#footnote-22) that would only needlessly increase the grief that you yourself are feeling without doing anything to lessen the profundity of my own. All I ask for from the Lord at this moment is that he be so gracious as to accept in expiation of my sins my afflicted resignation to his divine Will. It would have all the more merit, if I really do comply with this duty, as my being away has rendered my unhappiness all the more cruel. But I said that I did not intend to say anything about the way I am feeling. Let us return to what concerns us all at this present moment. In the extreme misfortune that we have just experienced, after submission to the adorable designs of Providence, I cannot think of any greater consolation than preserving so far as possible the precious remains of a body that was for so long the obedient instrument of the most beautiful soul ever made (making the reservations our faith requires). For as long as I can remember, but even more so since I became a cleric, when I first realized that it was within the bounds of possibility for me to survive persons whom I would have wanted rather to precede into the tomb, I wept and often copiously and resolved that only death would separate me from what I held so dear on earth. The Enclos[[23]](#footnote-23) always seemed to me the most suitable place to perpetuate this companionship that death must sooner or later interrupt, and my desire was to be reunited in that place with my loved ones or wait there until they should come to join me if I were to be the first to die. I have become so accustomed to this idea that I cannot conceive how I have never spoken to you about it. The Enclos, just a short distance from the town where we live, was more suited than any other place to fulfil my plan. Those among us who survived the others would find it easy to go each day for a little chat with those who had gone on before, and seated there where they must themselves come in their turn, they would have enjoyed a salutary meditation on death and eternity. In the light of that, you can imagine what I felt when I learnt that my only hope of not losing, at one and the same time and for ever, both the person loved and her precious and venerable remains, had vanished in an instant through someone’s decision to bury her in the wretched corner where the dead of Vallon St. Julien are piled up on top of one another. I wrote straight away to mother to do something about this state of affairs; she answered that in effect both she and my uncle before her had had the same thought that I had communicated to her, but I do not know why they did not carry it out; I put it down to the numbing effect which such a terrible blow would of necessity have on those who were present at St. Julien. So now I turn to you and ask you to beg my uncle on my behalf to seek a way to give us back our mother. She is to be buried in the Enclos in a casket of walnut wood which will be placed in a small vault or tomb until such time as I have had built a small chapel where one day I will celebrate the divine mysteries for a person with whose memory that place of retreat is so filled. Armand will not refuse to lend his help in these circumstances. If reasons of health, that a little money would soon remove, should be raised about touching the casket at this time, at least some precautions should be taken so that no mistake will be made when the removal does become possible, such as for example constructing immediately around the existing grave a little wall beneath the soil or some other means that one would judge best suited to avoid the kind of misunderstandings that are easy in a cemetery where each year, in horrific acts of profanation, the bones of those who died earlier are disinterred so as to bury in the place from which they are expelled new ones which will in their turn be disturbed in the sad possession of a dwelling which they had never believed could have been taken from them. I have seen with my own eyes this kind of profanation hitherto unknown among civilized nations, and which should never occur among Christians to whom religion commands such a great respect, veneration even, for bodies even though separated from the souls to which they have been so closely joined, and from which they are separated only for a time. However, as I was saying, I have seen in that wretched cemetery not merely limbs unearthed but an entire corpse and all that was done to save it from the rapacity of birds of prey was to cover it with an old door which happened to be lying there. I tremble with horror at the prospect of leaving in St. Julien our darling mother and exposing her precious remains, that our duty as much as our love obliges us to preserve with respect and filial piety, to the same infamous treatment. Besides, whatever even though something may be done to putting a stop to that vandalism, could we endure the idea of being deprived of ever being able to go and weep and pray on the tomb of a tenderly cherished mother whose memory will live on eternally in our hearts, engraved there by such love and generosity as never to be able, I will not say to be effaced, but even to be dimmed. These reflections will be more than enough to convince you of the necessity of lending your support to my just desires. I leave you the responsibility of arranging this matter with our dear uncle and Armand. I am counting on your succeeding more than you can imagine and would in fact be dreadfully upset should I meet with the refusal of a service that it seems to me must concern the whole family. I will pay all the expenses; I have dropped a line to Emile, expressing the feelings that seemed appropriate in the circumstance of our common misfortune, but that must have been in my case more deeply felt, alas, than by anyone, you know too well why, the love of my darling, excellent, perfect grandmother being for me a necessity but I finish with bidding you a most loving farewell, and begging you for a prompt answer on all I have asked for, let me know what my uncle thinks, your own opinion how it is to be done, etc. etc. I still have a thousand things to say and even though I wrote very small I have run out of space; I will never write to you again on such a small piece of notepaper. Goodbye.

**To Madame de Boisgelin, née de Mazenod, hótel de Boisgelin, in Aix, Bouches-du-Rhóne.[[24]](#footnote-24)**

92:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Sadness at the thought of his grandmother’s death, but consolation in his certainly that she is in heaven. Submission to God’s will. Invitation to unite herself more closely to God through frequenting the sacraments.*

L.J.C.

Boisgelin Eugenie

Saint Sulpice

19 September 1811

While I’m waiting for one of your letters, dear Eugenie, I will resume my little chat with you, and as the thought that is uppermost in my mind is the memory of our darling grandmother, I will say a few more words about her, for it gives me some kind of consolation to speak of her, her love for me, and mine for her, her virtues, my regrets, pain, tears; all of this is permissible provided resignation and submission to God’s will crown and perfect our feelings, for this is something that has to be said over and over again so as to really sink in, that we must not weep for our dead as infidels do who do not believe in the resurrection; we await that resurrection, and our hope is for a blessed one, that is the moment when that joy and happiness will begin that will have no end for this body even though the soul abandon it for a while to corruption; as for the soul, it does not even have to wait to be reunited with the body it animated on earth, and with which it must be clothed anew, but from the moment it has ceased to expiate the last remnants of its indebtedness to Divine Justice, it enters into possession of that torrent of delights that the Lord promised and merited for its fidelity. Dear God, what a consoling thought! And when I remember the saintly life of our wonderful mother, I cannot help but rejoice and be full of confidence that this time of expiation is already accomplished for her, all the more as I have done everything I can to obtain for her all the helps that God’s mercy and the Church’s charity enable me to obtain for her both through my own efforts and through those of three or four hundred others who have applied indulgences for the repose of her soul and which, it is my hope, will have procured their full effect. It will always be true to say that we are the unfortunate ones, the ones who have cause to weep, for who could ever replace her tenderness? I would offer all the treasures of the world for a quarter of an hour’s chat with that darling mother who has never had an equal; but once again let us console ourselves with the very true thought that in heaven everything comes to perfection, even friendships, and that she, who has loved us so much during her mortal life, will be able to love us in a really different way, now that she has still more power to do us good. I am waiting impatiently for every least detail about her illness. I am sorry to say I am tormented by the idea that our poor cousin’s illnesses are positively parricidal in their effects; the first illness he suffered cost the life of his mother, and now has the one he has just got over finished off our grandmother? Whether this be so or not, let us adore God’s designs. Do not spare me any of the details of what caused and aggravated that dreadful illness ...[[25]](#footnote-25)

Heavens above, how many thousands of times in the course of the day has one to lift up one’s heart to God so as not to lose that Christian resignation that religion even more than reason requires of us; the latter would be feeble indeed if it did not have the former to lean on; so let us strive never to exceed the limits that the Lord permits our just grief, and let us do everything we can to imitate the great St. Louis who when he was deeply moved by the death of his mother whom he loved in a very special way, and in the middle of the tears and sobs that this loss drew from him, even then acknowledging and wishing to submit himself entirely to the Will of God, not only resigned himself, but even thanked the Lord for taking his mother away from him, whom, he said, had only been lent to him for a time ... I share your feelings about the two people you mention,[[26]](#footnote-26) they are each in their own way incorrigible in the way they live, but what can one do, we have to be patient and offer to God in his goodness the vexations they cause us. Yes, let us come closer and closer to this good God, he is the only one we can rely on to be always equally good, equally the friend, always ready to do us good; so let us be faithful to him, love him, and try to serve him as best we can, not neglecting his graces, making use of the means of salvation he has left us; may nothing in the world be able to stop us going to draw from the abundant wellspring of his sacraments strength, consolation, and a pledge of our predestination. Let us frequent the sacraments, yes, frequent the sacraments, there we have the only way to become saints; you know what I mean, my Eugenie; goodbye, with all my love.

**To Madame de Mazenod, in Aix.[[27]](#footnote-27)**

93:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Eugene would like to be in Aix, not to help his mother in her business affairs, but to console her over the death of his grandmother. He will be staying longer than foreseen in Paris to finish his studies and replace the Sulpicians who have been driven away from the Seminary. On his return to Provence, Eugene intends to live at the Enclos with Brother Maur, an ex-Trappist, as his manservant. Invitation to more frequent communion. Death of Nanon, the de Mazenod maid in Palermo. News from his father, after 4 years’ silence. Why Eugene entered the Seminary. His certainty that his grandmother is in heaven. Her remains must be interred at the Enclos.*

Mazenod Madame de

Saint Sulpice,

October 14, 1811

How nice it would be, I am not going to say to relieve you of all responsibility in business affairs, as it is impossible for me now to get involved in them, but to wipe away your tears and soothe away your sadness with all the consolations a tender heart can offer. But just at the moment God’s glory, which has to be our only rule, seems to insist that I curb this desire and leave off satisfying it until a little later on. If I want to be of some use in the ministry, I still have a lot of studying to do, and it is quite clear that I could not undertake anything in my present state and keep a perfectly clear conscience. I am well aware that there are priests who are less prepared than myself perhaps and who nevertheless press on, but it is a very great evil. And I think it is the highest form of ignorance when one thinks one knows what one is in fact ignorant of or knows only in a sketchy way. As well as that, in my position, as I have said many times before, I am obliged to be better instructed than most others. In the meantime, all these delays provide an occasion for acquiring merit, as every time one sacrifices nature and one’s very natural inclinations for the sake of duty, one accumulates treasures of grace which the just remunerator can be relied on to repay when he sees fit. So let’s keep on offering up our separation for a little while longer to the Lord whose service requires it; and let’s even rejoice that we have something to give him in exchange for all the love he bears us. I do not think you are under any illusion that it is because I like living in the capital that I am staying on in Paris, for I can honestly say that it means nothing to me and in fact it takes quite a lot to make me show my nose outside on the street. As well as that I like solitude, and, leaving aside a lot of other reasons for making me prefer Provence, it is much nicer to keep to one’s room in that beautiful climate than under the sad and cloudy skies of Paris.

Before finishing this letter, I want to share an idea with you for which I would like to have your consent, however reasonable it may be in itself. You know I have always wanted to retire to the Enclos for a multitude of reasons that it would take too long to go into here. Our mother, tender as always, often told me that she planned to stay there with me; and perhaps you would have become the third hermit when you came to see all the charms of this happy retreat. As a part of the arrangements for this establishment, it was clearly understood that I should take on a manservant, who was needed to perform a variety of services that could not be done by women. In my own case as a cleric there are special reasons, of permanent validity, not to have women in my service. The canons prescribe a certain age. And the resolution I have taken never to let one enter my bedroom, let alone my bed, means I must resolve to look after myself all my life or take a man into my service. As well as that I shall probably have a chapel where I shall be saying Mass practically on a regular basis; I need a man too for this service. If God in his goodness wants to make use of me to do some good in the direction of souls, I will be hearing men’s confessions at home; again a man will be needed for them to contact for I could never endure having a woman coming and prowling around my apartment while I was engaged in the ministry with men who today like less than ever to have indiscreet confidants as parties to their acts of religion. In short, there is nothing for it but for me to have a manservant. But there are two difficulties. First, you have to pay men more and they are more demanding than women; and they are often lacking in virtue, etc. Secondly, one can foresee having problems when one has servants of different sexes in the house. I accept each of these points, but at the same time it cannot be denied that one can have the kind of manservant who, through the work he carries out in a house, does the work of two women, and who through his acknowledged exemplary behaviour does not give rise to any concern on the score of difficulties coming from his living with servants of the opposite sex under the same roof; and as well as that one can set one’s mind completely to rest on that point by engaging along with him women of a certain age only. Now, if this manservant can do the work of two maids, do things even that no woman could do, is honest, discreet, gentle, of outstanding piety, the difficulties vanish; only the advantages remain. And that is precisely what I have in mind for when I return to Provence. There is at this very moment in the house where I live a man as gentle as a lamb, a man of foresight and meticulous habits, with the piety of an angel, instructed in the arts of linen-keeping, a job he used to have in the community where he was a Brother, for he is a religious, and fervent, able to turn his hand to anything and never wasting a minute; in short, I could not have a better man in my service and one would be hard put to find his equal. The question now is to find out if you would have any objection to my engaging him as from the time I leave. I have already sounded him out; he would not be displeased to come with me. As to his wages, I would undertake to pay any extra you think it would cost you on top of my stipend.

Please turn all these aspects over in your mind, none of them is of a trivial nature, and let me have your answer. I think he is familiar with working in the countryside and could help us to make a go of our country estates. At the same time it is not something that has to be done tomorrow; it is just a question of knowing where I am and having a word with him about entering into my service. But as I do not want to do a thing about this without your consent, I wanted to bring it to your attention and let you see that if I have to have a manservant, you will find it to your advantage too, especially when you come across a man who is of a more gentle nature than any of the maids you ever took into your service.

I began this letter thinking to send it through the post, but there is too much to say to be satisfied with just three pages; so it will be either M. de St-Vincent or Father Charles who will be entrusted with it. For this reason I can speak more openly about something I had not thought it prudent to inform you of through the post. I will not enter into any discussions about it as they do not change anything. Our directors have been definitively driven away from the seminary and obliged to retire to their own house; they will leave laden down with merit before God and deeply regretted by all of us. The testimony that we will make on their behalf through all eternity will be that they never ceased, without a single exception, to be an example for us and a model of every Christian and ecclesiastical virtue. It is their departure that obliges me to stay. I could not leave the seminary without creating most serious problems; my example would be followed by others, and at this present moment the government is closely following what is happening here. I am one of the key people in the house, and in some respects perhaps *the* key person; my departure would create a scandal which could not be ignored. Whereas the good of the house and therefore of the Church requires that I stay. So I will stay, for everything points to that: God’s glory, the good of the Church, edification of neighbour, my own advantage. Natural inclination is the only thing to suffer, for I know full well that this decision will bring you some heartache; for yes, darling mother, this will cost you a little pain for that is the only thing that I find hard to bear. It is your pain alone that affects me in my own sacrifices; God in his goodness gives me the grace to scarcely feel what concerns me personally. But would we want to win heaven at no cost to ourselves? No; so let us place all these contradictions at the foot of the cross of our good Jesus; let us offer him throughout the day all that we are doing to please him, and after that let us be at peace. Dear mother, are you not going a little more often to the source of all consolation? Cannot you hear this Saviour, who calls to you from his tabernacle: Dear soul, why am I humbled here like this? Is it in vain that I keep on re-echoing these selfsame words that I said to my disciples: come to me, all you who labour and are heavy-laden: come and I will give you rest, and restore you; unite with me in this intimate union for which I remained with you, and balm will flow in your veins, and your soul will be filled, strengthened, renewed. In the name of God, must I be always crying like this in the wilderness? Do you believe that there is anyone else in the world to whom your salvation, happiness, holiness are more dear than to me, or do you actually think me so blind or ignorant as to keep on proposing a means that will not be for your good? What am I to say? If I did not think it necessary for the good of your soul to frequent the sacraments more often than you do, do you think I would keep coming back to it so often? Just remember, dear mother, that I am thirty years old, a minister of the Church, I could be a priest and I am your son, and after all that judge whether you should listen to my words. One of two possibilities must be true: either this difficulty you have about going to the sacraments comes from yourself, or it is inspired in you by your confessor. If it comes from you, it is culpable negligence, which must at all costs be overcome. If it comes from your confessor, I do not hesitate to say in God’s presence, who hears what I say and inspires me to write these things, you must forthwith forsake this blundering guide. If everyone thought and acted in this way, O.L. would have decided to stay with us under the species of bread all for nothing! But that is enough on that topic. Just remember that anybody who keeps from the sacraments, either by his advice or in any other way, someone who lives as regular a life as you do, is a dangerous man from a doctrinal point of view, and one whose opinions have been rejected by the Church from apostolic times until our own.

I have received your letter dated October 6. I confess it raised my spirits. I was not precisely languishing, but that good letter came just at the right moment. I was delighted to have the news about our dear Sicilians. But how sad to hear of the death of poor Nanon! I was thinking of her just the other day, and the thought caused me some disquiet; I thought it was harsh and almost unjust that we had compelled, albeit as it were unintentionally, that unfortunate woman to live out an involuntary exile, separated from her relatives, a prey to boredom, etc. I lamented her fate; it seemed to me that I would have wished to find a way to console her. I thought about how old she was, I supposed her to be now well on in years. I was worried about her dying, fearing that it might catch her by surprise without her being sufficiently prepared. And then your letter arrived announcing her sad end. God, when one thinks how precious is a soul, what it has cost our Saviour, the dreadful outcome that awaits it if it remains ungrateful to the end. God, I tremble; poor woman, I was very attached to her. Three hours to prepare herself to appear before God, and even then did she still have her senses? It is not likely. Compare that frightful death, which reminds me of poor Madame de Perier, which was also so disastrous, with the happy death, the gentle and peaceful end of our saintly mother. Do not you feel a kind of secret consolation, which is even stronger than the bitterness her loss causes you? There are some things one can hardly put into words but feels very strongly. Yes, it seems to me that I am certain that our darling, tender and venerated mother is already enjoying eternal happiness. And can that consoling thought keep company in our heart with a pagan sadness? Why go on weeping for one who is enjoying the fullness of happiness? Would we grudge her a destiny that fills her soul with the most ineffable joy? From heaven where that beautiful soul is bathed in supreme happiness, with no desire but to do the will of God, could she give her approval to an excessive grief, which is not conformed to that holy will? We are Christians, we aspire all of us to that heavenly homeland; it is there we shall see one another again in transports of joy. Could we, miserable mortals, for all our tenderness, compensate her here below for what she would lose in happiness, if instead of reigning in heaven, she dwelt again amongst us? No, no. Leave her to enjoy there a happiness that the mercy of our God has merited for her; and far from weeping for her, let us rejoice with her as she contemplates face to face that great God, whom here below we can but glimpse.

Let us, surely, not forget her precious remains. But let us deal with them without grief, without bitterness, as befits the relics of a holy person whose soul is reigning in glory. So let us lift up our hearts to God. Let us betake ourselves for a moment into heaven. See there our mother at the side of our King, with some empty places beside her, which are destined for ourselves. Let us thank God for his gifts; and, refreshed in spirit by this ravishing thought, let us be busy with what remains to us of our mother on earth. In that context we can discuss it, with no fear that we shall be troubled by spasms of importunate and deranged grief.

Starting with the principle that we must conserve with reverence the bodies of the saints, that nothing here below can be more precious to us than the remains of our fathers; listening to the voice of religion, and that of nature which commands it; imitating the example that all the patriarchs and other holy personages in Sacred Scripture have given us; we wish to keep by our side the mortal remains of our mother and rescue them from the profanation that they will inevitably be exposed to in the wretched corner where they are at present buried. It would no doubt have been easier to satisfy this desire, just, religious and in conformity with nature as it is, at the first moments of our loss. How is it that no one thought at least of placing them secretly in the vault of M. d’Agout? The reason is self-evident and lies in the troubled state of mind that such an unhappy event must cause in those who might have thought of it. There were other possibilities too, that no one thought of; and as usually happens, the worst possible solution was the one adopted. But what is done is done; we must now think of a way to remedy the situation.

I presume that you really are convinced of the necessity of moving these relics, and that you think as I do that it would be dreadful, odious, execrable for us to contemplate leaving our mother’s remains: 1° in a place where it will soon not be possible for us to go, as I do not give it more than two years before Emile gets rid of the place; 2° in a place where we know with certainty that vultures and crows will finish by making playthings of these bones that we would, if we have any heart, wish to gild with gold. I will not speak further on this topic; I have said enough in other letters. And besides it is not possible to have two opinions on this subject ...

So that, I think, is just about all there is to be said on that topic; let’s pass to another, as I still have some time and some paper. The news you give me of my father and uncles thrilled me all the more in view of getting none for nearly four years.[[28]](#footnote-28) But how did you manage to get our news through to him? Was it through Alexander? I hope you had the goodness to explain why I have not written, the reason that keeps me in Paris, and what made me embrace the state which is my consolation here below and which, I hope, will bring me glory and happiness in heaven. Pure love of the glory of God, the most ardent desire for the salvation of the neighbour, the needs of the abandoned Church, there you have the one and only reason for my entry into the clerical state. I have always been afraid that my good parents would imagine there was something else, as I did not always show myself as thinking along these lines. That is why I would have really liked you to tell him about all the struggles I had to go through before eventually overcoming the tender but all too human attachment that I feel for you and that dear and incomparable grandmother whom I always loved no less than you do, so as to offer a complete sacrifice of my natural inclinations and separate myself for God over a number of years from those whom I would never have wanted to leave for all the advantages the world might offer ...

**Spiritual conference.[[29]](#footnote-29)**

94:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Commentary on Mt. 24, 15-35. Sadness over the departure of the Sulpician directors. Promise to maintain the spirit of peace, unity and fervour at the seminary.*

Spiritual conference

Saint Sulpice,

November 15, 1811.

Why ply me with your questions on this day of grief and sadness, my heart broken with sorrow and unable to respond but with sighs?[[30]](#footnote-30)

How could I, oppressed in soul, find fruit in meditating upon the terrible truths contained in tomorrow’s Gospel?[[31]](#footnote-31) That salutary fear the Church wishes to inspire in the faithful by placing before their eyes the terrifying prophecy of the last times, how could it touch my soul, wholly preoccupied with love, gratitude and sorrow and torn asunder by each of them in turn? Alas! You, Sir, it is for you to say, who come so generously and with sympathetic charity to succour us in our extreme distress, to wipe away our tears, it is for you to say if ever there were a sorrow like to ours, if ever there were a sorrow more just.

No, our heart is not so boundless as to be able to cope with so many different themes, and if my distraught imagination should dwell momentarily on that frightful catastrophe predicted for the end times; on the tribulations to take place on the great days of vengeance, in whose course must be accomplished all that has been written of anathemas and curses; on the oppression announced to the whole earth; on that fearful seduction which would carry away even the just, should not God, for their sake, cut short that time of troubles; if I conjure up for one instant the terrible burning anger of God against the nations, passing over the earth in its fury, like a lightening flash that comes from the East and lights up the sky in a trice as far as the West, *sicut fulgur exit ab Oriente, et paret usque ad Occidentem*, Ithink, I say, that if I pause on all these terrifying themes it is only in as much as it seems to me that the event I deplore might well be one of their sad precursors.

It is not God’s pleasure, Sir, that I should give voice to complaints about this! That would be no way to imitate the example of the heroic submission we have before our eyes. No, not the least murmur will soil my lips. But even so who could condemn the piercing cry wrought by grief and who ever thought to stifle thesobs brought forth from feeling hearts by the loss of what they hold most dear?

How could we remain unmoved as we beheld the advent of this fatal day our bruised love fondly imagined to be impossible, when our beloved friends, our Masters, our good Fathers, were snatched from our bosom and parted for ever from their cherished children!

We still carry before us that harrowing picture of a grief-stricken family, hastening to the feet of the most virtuous of men to hear for one last time those heavenly words which never failed to produce such sweet effects in our souls and receive the final pledge of his love.[[32]](#footnote-32)

What a sight that was, this unanimous harmony of every heart melted, so to speak, into one to mourn the common loss.

We saw them flow, those tears that laid bare for us to see the depth of the feelings his tender and feeling soul nourished for us in secret.

How eloquent this language of the heart! and what memories it awakes for those of us whom that so touching a scene reminded us of other farewells which were, alas, for ever.

A sad portent. If it needs be that harsh destiny should separate us for ever from our mainstays and guides; dear masters, take with you at least the assurance that the memory of what you have done for us will never be erased from our hearts; if only we could lay them bare for you to see! You would see how deeply the marks of your virtues are engraved there and our desire to follow the examples you have given. There you would read the firm and constant resolution taken by each one of us to follow with fidelity the holy Rules you have handed down to us. Yes, we each and all protest, giving you for guarantee of our word the love and gratitude that we owe you on so many counts, we each and all protest with common accord that henceforth, as in the past, peace, unity and concord will hold sway in this place, that we will use all our strength lest we fall away from the fervour your presence sustained among us; and if human weakness should from time to time threaten to make us slack, we will sustain ourselves mutually with all the memories you leave behind with us; and finally that our behaviour will show to all the world that the Directors of St. Sulpice have never inspired in their students any feelings other than those of the most tender piety, any principles other than those of the most complete submission to the powers that be, any teaching in a word other than that of the Church.

**Notes made] during the retreat made in Amiens, December 1811, in preparation for the priesthood.[[33]](#footnote-33)**

95:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Purpose of this retreat. Prayer asking for love of God. Eugene acknowledges himself to be a sinner, a “monster of ingratitude “ towards the “uniquely lovable” Being. Meditations on God the Creator, man’s end, the use of created things, sin, death, judgment, hell, the prodigal son.*

Retreat in preparation for priesthood

Amiens

December 1-21, 1811

At last the Lord has answered my prayers and opened the way for me to make a retreat as I have always wanted to do it.

None of those I have made up to now has been able to satisfy me, and I would long for the moment which God’s mercy now grants me at this decisive moment of my life when I must prepare myself to receive very soon the sublime and awesome priesthood of J.C. I pray that I may profit from the grace I am privileged to receive, and use it to purify my soul and rid my heart completely of creatures, so that the Holy Spirit, when it no longer encounters obstacles to its divine operations, may come to rest on me in all its fullness, filling everything within me with the love of J.C. my Saviour, in such a way that I live and breathe no longer but in him, consume myself in his love, serving him and spreading the news of how loveable he is and how foolish men are to seek elsewhere their hearts’ resting place when they can never find it but in him alone. Jesus, good master, turn a look of compassion on your poor servant. It seems to me that I love you but I am afraid of deceiving myself; it seems to me that if you were to question me as you once questioned the Prince of the Apostles (it was the ardour of his love for you that motivated my choice of him as patron), it seems to me I would answer as did he: yes, Lord, I love you. But it would not need your putting the question for a third time to make me feel unsure of the sincerity of that love I had avowed for you, for, I repeat, I am afraid of deceiving myself and while I believe I love you, you would see, you who are the uncreated Light, that illuminates the darkest corners of my heart, and reads in its most secret places, and plumbs the depths of hearts and loins, you would see that in fact I do not love you at all. My Saviour, my Father, my love, bring me to love you; this only do I ask, for I know full well that that is everything. Give me your love.

But who am I, miserable sinner, to want to love very purity and sanctity! Ah! I am well aware that in the sins of my past I made a quite different choice; I gave myself over to the devil and his perverse works. See there the master I served, see there the one I loved. My God! Although that hideous period is now far distant, it is still present to my mind. May I never forget it! It will be the salutary counterweight to all the movements that my self-love would stir up in me. But you, O my Saviour, do you forget it, and keep in mind only your mercies.

So I am a sinner, I am aware of it, a great, indeed very great sinner. I am aware of it and I tell it to myself not once but a thousand times a day. I become even more convinced of it during the little retreat I made with my venerable Father M. Duclaux before starting this one or, to be more accurate, in preparation for this one. Even so I see no harm at all in pausing a moment again on this thought, to meditate further along the purgative way. So I will start my prayers with the one the Fathers of the spiritual life call the foundation, the pivot of every good retreat; I will consider man’s end, why God created me, why he placed me on this earth, whether I have responded to the intentions the Creator had when he formed me, what I have achieved so far here below, what I must do in the future.

After that I will meditate on sin, horrible, execrable mortal sin, in which for so long I was happy to dwell, or to be more accurate, under whose empire I groaned for many a year. I will pass in review successively the other great truths of religion, but without lingering overly on them, as, for example, hell raises less fears in me than does lack of love for my adorable Master, my good Jesus.

I will follow, for the rest, the path as it is indicated to me, taking care to bring in each day some considerations relative to the priesthood I am so soon to receive.

I was not able to read yesterday evening, before going to bed, Father Judde’s meditation on man’s end. I was intending to read it this morning, but, after I began my prayer by putting myself in the presence of God, the sight of my sins held my attention for quite a long time. I considered what I am in the sight of God, who sees me as I was; I admired his goodness in so far as he endured having in his presence so wretched a sinner. The patience with which this good Father waited for me seemed hardly conceivable, especially when I compared it with the blows that his justice had administered to right and left around me, while his mercy seemed to be reserved for me alone. The excessive extent of my ingratitude threw me into a state of confusion that is difficult to describe. I could not find any way to explain how a heart that is as feeling and loving as mine could be so barbaric towards what is most lovable, towards the being who is, properly speaking, the uniquely lovable being. I abandoned myself to the affective movements that this thought inevitably led to.

Convinced of being a monster of ingratitude, I saw myself as utterly incapable of prayer, or even of raising my eyes to a Master I have treated so cruelly. Even so I turned to the Holy Spirit with a prayer inspired by him in the name of J.C., sovereign Mediator, whose precious blood, this says it all, had expiated greater and more numerous sins than my own, enormous and numerous though they be.

After that I adored God the Creator. I imagined him forming man in his image, after creating this whole beautiful universe; He wished to give nature a priest, he wanted to create a being who would enter into relations with him, be able to lift up his thoughts to him, perform actions both worthy of and pleasing to him, able to serve him, able to love him. This being, I told myself, this being is me. My soul is an emanation from the divinity, that tends naturally towards it, and will never find rest outside of it; created solely to love God, etc. And my body equally is formed only for his service, to give glory and homage to God. All that exists was made to bring man to God, and the Creator gave man eyes so that, admiring so fine a work, he would give the glory to the sublime Architect. Dumb nature’s interpreter, he received a tongue to sing the Creator’s praises, to bless him in his own name and in the name of all that has no voice. The canticle of the three Hebrews in the furnace teaches us that that is how it should be; and man must render to the Creator the homage that the ant and the worm would not fail to give, if they had but received, like him, what is needed to fulfil this indispensable duty to the Creator. Hands were given to man to raise up altars and temples to the Most High, the feet for etc. But I come back to the soul. As we see, it was created solely to serve and love God. How has my own fulfilled this august destiny? To my shame, God placed in me I would almost say a kind of instinct to love him, my reason was not yet formed when I loved to dwell in his presence, to raise my feeble hands to him, listen to his word in silence as if I understood it. By nature lively and irrepressible, it was enough to bring me before the altar to make me gentle and utterly tranquil, so ravished was I by my God’s perfections as if by instinct, as I said, for at that age I did not understand them. What a happy augury these early beginnings were, had I been faithful to this wonderful way of grace. But to my shame this consoling seed was soon snuffed out by sin, and so it is I sullied your image, so it is I insulted your love, before ever I conceived what sin is and who it is whom I offended. I frustrated by my crimes the development of the plans you formed for me; and this soul that you gave me to praise you, bless you, love you with, defied you, insulted your generosity, turned from you and plunged into the filthy mire, from whence perhaps she would never have emerged, if, to crown all your mercies towards me, you had not worked some miracles in my favour.

And so it is, my Lord and Master, while you created me solely to love you, not only did I not fulfil this indispensable duty, but I gave you offence in an uninterrupted series of wicked actions; and you, infinite Majesty, offended, outraged by this filthy worm, this revolting rottenness, instead of destroying and annihilating it, instead of blasting it and despatching it to the depths of hell’s abyss, you wait patiently for me, carry me in your arms, hold me to your breast, which I tear at it in my frenetic rage. My Father, the thought of it overwhelms me. No, you never ceased to speak to me in my heart, which was hard and insensitive only towards you. The further I distanced myself from you, the closer you pressed at my heels. You were the tender and dear father who does not cease to support and embrace his well-beloved son who grows angry in his frenzy against the benevolent hand which he fails to recognize, as he has lost the use of reason. My God, what devotion, what love can I summon to make amends for so many outrages, and how can I ever make up for such excesses?

And so I am convinced that I have never really loved you. But whom did I love in your place? The devil. Yes, it is the devil who has been my god, it is to him I have prostituted my whole being! See then how I have fulfilled the end for which I was created: I have hated my Creator, or at least I have acted just as if I hated him, and I have delivered myself over to the devil as his slave. And it is a monster like this, O my God, that you wish to claim as your own and have admitted into your sanctuary, whom soon you will invest with your priesthood. My God, what language is there to express what this infinite, incomprehensible goodness means to me? My head is prostrate in the dust, my lips press the earth, my soul is emptied, I can do no more. My God, double, triple, increase my strength a hundredfold that I may love you, not merely as much as I can, that is nothing, but that I love you as much as did the saints, as much as your holy Mother loved and loves you. My God, that is not enough, and why I should I not love you as much as you love yourself? That cannot be, I know, but to desire it is not impossible, for I form it in all sincerity in my heart, with all my soul. Yes, my God, I would like to love you as much as you love yourself; this then is how I may undertake to make reparation for my past ingratitude.

I return to my theme. You gave me intelligence, will, memory a heart, eyes, hands, in a word all my bodily senses, all my soul’s faculties, you gave me all these things for yourself, to use them for your glory, for your unique, your greater glory.

Let us see, face without flinching, enter fully into the details. I can but grow in knowledge of the extent of my odium, and of the extent to which you are good, merciful, etc. etc. etc. etc.

My God, that is all over henceforth and for my whole life. You, you alone will be the sole object to which will tend all my affections and my every action. To please you, act for your glory, will be my daily task, the task of every moment of my life. I wish to live only for you, I wish to love you alone and all else in you and through you. I despise riches, I trample honours under foot; you are my all, replacing all else. My God, my love and my all: *Deus meus et omnia.*

*On man’s end.*

Once again I made a prayer on the theme of man’s end, an inexhaustible wellspring which will not run dry though I pray it all my life; but I will not stop to transcribe the thoughts God gave me, as I perceive that that would take me too long, even though I wrote very fast. I will note only that I thought of God as doing for me much more than he has done for others; gratitude filled me as I admired the wholly merciful plan he has followed in my regard, and my gratitude grew all the more when I considered that my innumerable infidelities have not deflected him at all from these merciful plans for me, in this but little resembling the most outstanding benefactors one could mention, who in the end grow weary of helping ingrates and withdraw their donations from those who obstinately refuse to take any profit from them. My good God, on the contrary, seemed to redouble and did in fact redouble his graces, even as my sins grew and acquired fresh heights of malice. He put up with me, he affected not to see the damnable injuries that I continually inflicted on him; never changing, he opened to me his loving heart. Monster that I was, instead of hastening to consume within it all my crimes, I cruelly wounded it; and still God offered it to me full of love, ready to receive me, urging me to enter, etc. How long did it last, this prodigious scene of love on the one hand, of barbarity, folly on the other? ... I dwelt on this subject in some detail. Thus, I thought how I was created by God with a sensitive soul, a tender heart, loving, generous. All this was for God and my own good; my special talent it was to turn it against God and to my own detriment. He placed me in a Christian family with good example abounding before my very eyes. And so I passed through the various situations the Lord placed me in, among them there are some which, by reminding me of God’s goodness, give me a clear perception that his way of acting in my regard is a way of predilection, among others he had me spend 3 years under the direction and regularly in the company of a holy priest, who died in the odour of sanctity, and whom he endowed with the heart of a brother towards me, so much did he love me. I gave myself up to these thoughts, as I saw these graces as a continuance of creation, as if God, after he had formed me, had taken me by the hand and given me these successive experiences, saying: I created you to love me, serve me, etc.; I do more, feeble creature that you are, I insert you here and there, so that you may achieve that end more easily, whether through the helps that these situations afford, or through the motives that they may be apt to suggest ... It is with bitterness that I arrived at the conviction that all my life I had abused so many favours. Even so, God having kept to his plan, having so to speak pursued me until he recaptured me, me the black sheep, me the disgusting leper, me etc.; I had to conclude that God has some special plans for me, that he has some plan for me for his glory, etc.; his way of acting is sufficient evidence of this. But woe betide me, woe betide me, if by new infidelities I end up making him lose patience! For, after all, I must really grasp that, whatever be his plans for me, he can only be using me as an instrument of his omnipotence, an omnipotence that he wishes to emphasize even more by making use of what is most abject on earth; but at the end of the day, he may no longer have any use for this instrument so wanting, so insignificant in itself, and then what will become of it? It will be thrown on the fire, the eternal fire. And his justice, for all that it comes late, will not be any the less rigorous; on the contrary, it will be all the more severe because it has been delayed. My God, do not let anything like this happen to me. I acknowledge that I am quite unworthy of all your mercies, but could it be possible that after seeking me for so long when I was fleeing from you, you would no longer want me when I came back? I am too happy, Lord, that you would really want to furnish me the means to do something for your glory in reparation for the outrages I have done for so long a time. You created me for yourself, I want only to be yours, to work for you, live and die for you. See already it is several years that I have been harkening to your voice.

Speak again, Lord, and you will be obeyed, you will be obeyed in life and in death, etc.

*On the use of creatures.*

I meditated on the use I had made of creatures, which were given me only that I might come the more easily to God. It was easy to see that I have been making bad use of them all my life, at least up to the time of my conversion. Far from using them for their true purpose, I made of them my last end, they were my only concern, I took pleasure only in them. Instead of resting in God and rejoicing in him, and using creatures only as means, I rested in the creature, I rejoiced in the creature, and I was so to speak happy to make use of God, only making use of him and glancing in his direction as it were in passing.[[34]](#footnote-34)

The resolution I took is henceforth to make no use of “free” creaturely things, i.e., those which there is absolutely no necessity to use, as are things like food, housing, rest, clothing; to use others only with indifference, i.e., to be indifferent towards them and use them only so far as I recognize that they will bring me to God, their sole end as well as mine. I will make every effort to be indifferent as to health and sickness, good or bad reputation, riches or poverty, honour or disgrace, not desiring and willing anything at all except when the glory of God and the salvation of souls might point to one rather than the other of these things.

And since I have perceived for a long time now that one of the biggest obstacles to my spiritual progress is my over-readiness to give my heart to creatures, may all too susceptible enjoyment of friends whom I see to excel in good qualities, that my attachment for them has too large a place in my soul, in a word that I do not sufficiently oppose nature in this tendency to love in my heart what I find to be lovable, I will make efforts to overcome myself in this matter as in all the rest, so that I might reach the state, recommended so strongly by the Fathers of the spiritual life, of perfect liberty of heart.

*On sin.*

The meditation on sin did not move me in any sensible or extraordinary way. I don’t know if I should attribute this to distractions in my place of retreat due to my hosts’ charity and the extreme affability of the excellent bishop who is so eager to impose hands on me[[35]](#footnote-35) and wanted to do me the honour of visiting me in my cell, an example that was imitated shortly afterwards by his vicar general; or whether the thought of my sins and the horror they inspire in me being continually with me, and especially after my having devoted myself to them to the exclusion almost of all else during the days of retreat I had in Paris immediately before coming to Amiens, my soul could not be moved by familiar thoughts which do in all truth bitterly afflict it but without emotion. It does happen though, and not infrequently, that the grief of having offended so good a God, one who in spite of my iniquities has poured out on me so many gifts, penetrates me vividly, even to the point of shedding tears of compunction and especially in holy communion; but this state does not depend on my will, and it was not given me today. The thought that comes most frequently to me is that I am the greatest sinner I know. It isn’t an exaggeration; I have the proof to hand in the memory of my numerous sins and the bad use made of so many graces that others who have perhaps committed more sins than I ever enjoyed. So I acknowledge that I merit all the punishments of divine justice, and I humbly accept them. It is also from this conviction of my unworthiness that is born a feeling profoundly imprinted in my soul and that I savour several times a day and whenever the occasion presents itself, namely that I am to see myself in the house of the Father of the family only as a vile slave, whom the excessive goodness of the Master puts up with, despite his unworthiness, so as to serve his children in the lowest kind of work. So, when I have time to reflect, I joyfully give to the least of men what to speak in human fashion he would have no right to ask of me, but which I acknowledge is due to him, for I look on him as the son of the house, while I am but the slave, made to serve for his amusement, etc., in spite of my repugnance.

*On death.*

I recognized, as I meditated on death, that I would not die cheerfully at this moment. I looked for the reason for this repugnance, I carefully examined whether I had something on my conscience, something that could disturb it, etc. After a rigorous examination, it seemed to me that if I were certain I would die during that day, I could make no more preparations than those I was already engaged in; that after the rigorous examination I had made of all my sins, and the pains I had taken to elicit, with the help of grace, a perfect contrition, it remained only for me to abandon myself to God’s mercy and rest myself on the bosom of his paternal goodness. However, as this repugnance persevered, I went deeper, I searched in the depths of my heart, etc. The result of these researches is that I cannot hide from myself that there is in me too much attachment to life, that the natural horror of death has too strong a hold on me and is not, by any means, as subjugated as it should be, etc. I also found another reason, namely, that, recognizing that I am so frighteningly vulnerable before divine justice, and not seeing so to speak yet any work of mine to offer to his justice to counterbalance my numerous sins, I would be sad to die before I had been able to put together some little thing to offer to the sovereign Judge, when he requires of each one a rigorous account of his works. What persuades me that this factor really accounts quite largely for this repugnance I have for dying, is that it seems to me I have no fear of it when I envisage it as happening through martyrdom or in a hospital in service to the victims of the plague.

I also dwelt on another thought, which should cure me of the desire I had to be loved by all those I love. Suppose, I said to myself, that after enormous efforts, etc., I managed at last to be universally loved by all those whose friendship might be pleasing to my self-love, will their love stand the test of this separation? Will I find many with a heart of the same temper as mine, and who will go on loving even after death? I would be a fool to think it. Once dead, they will fly from me with horror, and the world will go its way, while I rot in the tomb and those, whose friendship was most important to me, will be perhaps the first to say: what is the use of regrets, he is well off where he is, our tears won’t bring him back to life, etc. How full of meaning are these words of the Imitation: *Ab omnibus oportet to allquando separari, etc*. *... illum dilige et amicum tibi retine, qui omnibus recedentibus to non relinquet nec patietur in fine perire. (*I.11. c.7, v.l).

*On judgment.*

What struck me most in the meditation on judgment is the soul’s solitude on its exit from the body, encompassed by its Judge, enfolded on all sides by God’s immensity no one may answer on its behalf, no intercessor be admitted; one-to-one with God, its works will speak and nothing else. Where are my works, I ask myself. To my horror perhaps none of those on which I am counting are admissible. And then what will become of me? Merciful God, give me a little more time, *patientiam habe* in me, and with the help of your grace *omnia renda tibi* (Mt. 18, 26). Grant that after I have worked hard, if not long, for your glory, I may give my life for your name; there lies all my hope.

In the meditation on the last judgment, I saw myself abashed at the sight of an infinite number of men who have done infinitely less evil than I, although receiving infinitely less graces. I was more than ever convinced of the necessity of acting in all my actions only for God, without getting back anything for myself or thought for men’s opinions. I have passed judgment on my actions, and notwithstanding my prejudice in my own favour, I found them wanting. Good God, what does that count compared with the judgment of Him who sounds the deepest depths of conscience? and what shame in the presence of the whole universe! Those whose plaudits I have gone after will be the first to mock my folly; and God, as he effaces them from the book of life, will say to me: fool, what did you think you were doing? Those same works which are this day your shame and confusion, had they been done with no admixture, no alloy, solely to please me, etc., would have had the value of treasures of eternal glory. But vanity, etc. has rusted their substances, etc. You had your plaudits on earth, etc. you have had your reward: *Vana vanis.* To avoid a catastrophe of the sort, I will apply myself with an extreme care and in my rule of life I will take efficacious measures to ensure absolutely that in all my actions, even the most neutral, I act solely to please God. I will try to act in such a way that the little good I have the happiness to accomplish escapes the sight of men, to whose praises and criticisms alike I will try to be indifferent. I will take myself often in spirit before God’s judgment seat, during the course of my activities, so that this salutary thought may purify my intention, etc.

*On hell.*

On hell. No, I do not seem to be able to relish and find profit in the great truths that ought to throw a soul that has committed so many sins into confusion. As I have remarked elsewhere, death, judgment, hell are not a nourishment that is suited to my present state. I hope I am in a state of grace, and definitely I must believe it, as I draw near to the moment and give my consent to have hands imposed on me, on my spiritual father’s advice. The soul, vast as it may be, cannot absorb so many different objects, or at least they cannot all at the same time make an equal impression on it. Preoccupied at this time with the great marvels that God in his omnipotence is ready to work in it, moved almost exclusively by sentiments of love, it is only with extreme reluctance that it tears itself away from that sweet occupation to surrender itself to fear, terror, etc. So it was in vain that I sought to put it in the depths of hell, in the shadowy dungeon that divine justice had prepared for it; in vain did I bury it beneath pitch, sulphur, devouring fire, the gnawing worm, devils of all description, etc.; I was soon obliged to come and bring it back to the feet of the altars, beside the innocent Victim which in a few days time it will immolate for the remission of its sins, etc. Here is this horrible place, I said to it, where reprobate souls hate God and never cease to curse him, etc.; it is not made for me, it replied, as I love him, this good God, this merciful God, more than myself, as I would rather die a thousand times than offend him, as I consecrate to him my life and all that I am, that I wish to use and consume only in his service. Why spend in the company of devils the little time left to me to converse with my Master who is soon to place himself within my power; it is his voice I want to listen to, it is his orders, inspirations that I want to hear, it is his love that I want to nourish me. The language of terror no longer speaks to me; love alone has power over me. I must prepare a dwelling for my well-beloved; it is love, love alone that must bear the entire cost.

In any case, I have never needed the idea of hell to bring me to God; I have never been able to bring myself to dwell on it in my acts of contrition. When I ignored God, fear of hell did not hold me; now that I have come back to him [by a quite different road than fear of hell], even were there no hell I would want to love my God and serve him all my life.

But I am nonetheless grateful to the Lord for this, that he snatched me from that place of punishment, and in my impotence to do anything for him, I will direct against his enemy, in favour of his children, all that depends on me. I will spend my life in rescuing as many of the devil’s victims as I can, I will devote myself without let to save souls: *Docebo iniquos vias tuas* (Ps.50, 15).

*On the prodigal son.*

Meditation on the prodigal son. To my shame, this parable never applied to anyone better than it does me. I left the house of my father, after having, even while I still lived there, heaped up every sort of bitterness on my father. I wasted my patrimony, if not with the daughters of Babylon, as the Lord, with inconceivable goodness, has always preserved me from that kind of stain, at least it was in the tents of sinners that I made my dwelling on my exit from the house of my father. I wandered eventually through arid deserts; and, reduced to beggary, I ate and fed myself on the food destined for the pigs, whose company I had freely chosen. Did the thought even occur to me of going back to my father, this good father whose excessive tenderness I had so often put to the test? No, he had to come to me himself, thus crowning his gifts, to lift me up, and rescue me all heedless as I was, or rather he had to come and get me out of the mire in which I was immersed and from which I could not extract myself unaided. I hardly ever even conceived the wish to leave aside my rags and put on again my nuptial robe. O blindness! Forever blessed, O my God, be the sweet violence that in the end you did to me! Without this masterstroke, I would still be wallowing in my sewer or perhaps have perished there; and in that case, what would have become of my soul? O my God, don’t I have every reason to devote myself entirely to your service, to offer you my life and all that I am, so that all that is in me may be employed and spent for your glory? For by how many titles do I belong to you? Not only are you my Creator and Redeemer, as you are all men’s, but you are my special benefactor and applied your merits in an altogether special way to me; my generous friend, you forgot all my acts of ingratitude to help me as powerfully as if I had been always faithful to you; my tender father, who carried this rebel on your shoulders, warmed him against your heart, washed his wounds, etc. Good God, merciful Saviour, a thousand lives employed in your service, sacrificed to your glory, would be the least compensation your justice would be entitled to demand of me. May the desire to make up for my impotence to render you what I acknowledge I owe you, etc.

This meditation leads naturally to a consideration of what one could do to make satisfaction to a divine justice so cruelly offended. It is true that the father of the family places no conditions at all on the pardon he gives his prodigal son; but over and beyond that we may presume that he would have demanded a rigorous penance of this son, if after so generous a pardon he had dared to fall again into his first disorder, Scripture clearly lays down for us that we have to, that it is indispensable to lead a mortified, penitential, crucified life so as to make reparation for our past sins, to produce in a word worthy fruits of penance: *Facite fructos dignos paenitentiae* [Luke 3, 8]. Adam, David and other penitents had after being forgiven to do penance. And all the saints understood it in that sense: there is not one of them who was not a model in this sense. Have I less sins than they to expiate, or do I really claim to have a better understanding of the Saviour’s teaching? Penance must be a setoff for the pains of hell: *paenitentia compendium ignium aeternorum,* says Tertullian. May I never lose sight of the fact that the debtor who deserves a cancellation of debts is the one who does all he can to satisfy his creditor. In my state of impotence to satisfy the immense debts I have unhappily contracted, I must make a firm resolution to do at least all that depends on myself, in so far as when all life’s actions are informed by this spirit of mortification we have an excellent means of uprooting entirely all the bad habits and disorderly inclinations of corrupt nature. Thus, to obviate faults against humility, not only must I repress on all occasions the sallies of pride, study to have no longer my own will in anything, depend in all things on the will of my superiors, but as well live in dependence on my equals and inferiors, and do everything they ask of me, provided that what they ask be permitted and that it costs me but the pain and humiliation of rendering them service, looking upon myself, as I noted elsewhere, as their slave, etc.

I will follow the same line of reasoning for the other virtues. I will fight to the death against fastidiousness, sensuality and to that end, as well as denying the senses what they seek with so much insistence, I will chastise my body, both by depriving it of the things that it likes best, and by inflicting on it various punishments of which it stands most in horror, such as the ch[ain] at least three days a week, and the discipline at least once, Friday, if possible. I will take care to continue to have the latter imposed as penance, so as to give short shrift to all the feeble excuses that the extreme repugnance I have for this salutary exercise may insinuate, as I have already experienced to my shame; besides this adds a very real merit and a very great value in the eyes of God, namely obedience, apart from the fact that a work of sacramental penance makes satisfaction in a quite different way from a work of mortification that is simply voluntary, etc. I will also keep up the Friday fast and the other ones. But for all that, I will take as my guide what is contained in or I may add to my rule.

After these meditations on the purgative way and the holy resolutions that grace inspired me with, I applied myself to consider O.L.J.C. the lovable model to whom I must, as is my desire with his grace, conform myself. I meditated on him as my redeemer, head, king, master, model and judge.

If anyone has a greater need of redemption than I, this poor sinner and ungrateful creature who was for so long in a state of revolt, I may perhaps allow him to believe himself more obligated than I to Jesus the Saviour for having rescued him. But seeing the graces which have been given me and which I have profaned, and in spite of which I have sinned, I acknowledged myself as the man who stood in most need of redemption and [here the text ends].

**To Madame de Mazenod, in Aix. Bouches-du-Rhóne.[[36]](#footnote-36)**

96:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Eugene begins his retreat. He will be ordained December 21. He asks for prayers and to be forgiven any hasty words that may have hurt his mother.*

L.J.C.

Mazenod Madame de

Amiens,

December 8, 1811.

Dear, darling mother,

I am only going to write you a few lines as I am on the most important retreat of my life, in which I must dialogue alone with God on matters of eternal import; by rights I should not be writing to you at all, but I really had to let you know that your Eugene, this poor miserable sinner the sum of whose iniquities are known to God alone, will of a surety in a few days time be vested with the most eminent dignity on the face of the earth or even in heaven. I will not dwell on it further, dear mother, but sum it all up in a word: pray for your son, and have others pray for him too, every saintly person you know. God knows with what love and expressions of tenderness and gratitude I shall offer for you yourself, your sanctification, and even your earthly happiness, that holy Victim who is always heard on account of his infinite dignity. Dear mother, be one with me on Christmas Eve, join in the holy mysteries in Aix while in Amiens, in the most fervent of communities,[[37]](#footnote-37) I celebrate them for you; let each of us for our own part speak our minds to our good Master who assuredly will be quite unable to say no on such a wonderful day; be sure, he will pay off all our debts, yes, I will ask him this with confidence when in his infinite, incomprehensible mercy, he places himself in a way in my power, I shall speak to him too of our mother and many others too, but do not let us yield just yet to the feelings such thoughts awaken in our soul, the time has not yet come to pour out what the Lord is working within me. So, dear mother, I am going back now on retreat, but before finishing off this letter, I throw myself at your feet and ask your pardon for any hasty words through which, while they never had any place in my heart, I may at some moments in my life have brought sadness to that dear mother whom I love and always have loved more than myself; you know my heart too well to be deceived, but it is nonetheless true that I have sometimes forgotten myself, and that is what upsets meand brings me to reiterate the excuses I have made to you a thousandtimes in the secret of my soul.

I bid you now an affectionate farewell, dear mother, and hold you tenderly to my heart which is all yours after God. You know the ordination takes place on the 21st, the feast of St. Thomas the Apostle. Hands will be laid on probably between 8:00 and 10:00 a.m. A double dose of prayers that day.

Your reply can reach me only in Paris, where I shall be returning on the first day of the year.

**To Madame de Mazenod, in Aix. Dept. des Bouches-du-Rhóne.[[38]](#footnote-38)**

97:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Eugene is “a priest of Jesus Christ”. Emotion and tears. Feelings of gratitude. Blessings.*

L.J.C.

Mazenod Madame de

Amiens,

[December 21, 1811].

Dear, darling mother, the miracle has been wrought: your Eugene is a priest of Jesus Christ. That one word says everything; it contains everything. It really is with a sense of deepest lowliness, prostrate in the dust, that I announce such a huge miracle worked in such a great sinner as myself. Dear mother, I have not the strength to say more. Every moment is precious in the state in which the grace of such a tremendous sacrament has placed me; I have to stay in a state of total recollection to savour what it pleases God in his goodness to have me taste in the way of happiness, consolations, etc. What shall I say? The tears are flowing, or rather streaming down; they ought to flow for ever, as they take their source in the tenderest of loves and are simply the expression of a most just gratitude, a feeling I will bring with me into blessed eternity.

I leave you now, dear, darling mother. I have three days still to get used to the idea that I am a priest and prepare to celebrate the divine mysteries on the delightful night our lovable Saviour is born in a stable. I was on retreat from the first day of Advent; it was none too long to prepare the ways, to open my heart to the best of my ability for his coming in me. I pray I have not placed any obstacle to the fullness of his spirit which he was disposed to pour out in me by the grace of ordination!

But I am finishing, with an affectionate farewell and with congratulations on what I am. If I am but faithful, I will be your glory for all eternity! But that is a thought that would lead me too far afield. Goodbye everyone; I hold you all tight to my heart. And yes, I am going to continue, kneeling on my two knees before my crucifix, and give you all my blessing, begging the Lord whose unworthy minister I am, to bring your virtues to flower and perfection and pour out continually in your souls the abundant fruits of his grace, which he merited for us by shedding his blood on Calvary. May his peace, his holy peace, be always with you.

**Feelings after priestly ordination. Letter to M. Duclaux.[[39]](#footnote-39)**

98:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Feelings of joy, fear, confidence, sadness, love and thanksgiving. Eugene receives enough graces to “make a great saint”.*

Duclaux

Amiens

[December 21, 1811]

My good friend d’Argenteuil[[40]](#footnote-40) urged me, at the time of his own ordination, not to forget to write down what my feelings were when my own turn came. As I think I have captured them in the letter I have just written to M. Duclaux, my spiritual father, I shall now make a copy of it.

Very dear and beloved Father, I am writing this on my knees, prostrate, overwhelmed, stunned, to share with you what the Lord, in his immense, incomprehensible mercy, has just accomplished in me. I am a priest of Jesus Christ; I have already for the first time offered the awesome sacrifice with the Bishop. Yes, it is I, it really is I, the wretched sinner whose turpitudes you are familiar with, who has immolated the immaculate Lamb, or at least he has immolated himself through my ministry. Dear Father, I fancy I am dreaming when I bring to mind what I am. Joy, fear, confidence, sadness, love enter one after the other into my heart. The thought uppermost in my mind and that I get quite lost in is this: so this is how my God in his goodness avenges himself for all my acts of ingratitude, by doing so much for me that, God though he may be, he can do no more. After this, could I ever again be tempted to offend him? Truly this is the moment to reply: it were better to die a thousand deaths.

My letter could not go off yesterday. O my dear Father, there is only love in my heart. I am writing at a time when my heart overflows, to coin an expression of the Apostle’s in a moment like the one I am experiencing. If the underlying sorrow for my sins, which is always with me, still persists, it is also true that love has changed its nature. Is it possible, my beloved, that I could have offended you? How can it be that I offended you, you who at this moment seem to me so wonderful? Can it really be that a heart that loves you as much as mine could bring the smallest frown to your face! And two streams of tears flow with peace and sweetness, and the soul in a state of ravishment it cannot put into words, any more than the other things I am experiencing. I do not know what it is, I do not know how it is. But one thing I see with clarity is that I shall be deserving of hell if ever I deliberately offend against God in his goodness, even in the most venial way.

I am a priest! You have to be one to understand what it means. Just to think of it sends me into transports of love and gratitude, and if the thought of my sinfulness recurs, love abounds all the more. *Jam non dico vos servos,* [Jn 15,15] etc. *Dirupisti vincula mea. Tibi sacrificabo hostiam laudis* [Ps. 115, 16-17] etc. *Quid retribaum Domino*, [Ps*.* 115, 12] etc., like so many arrows that pierce this heart that has been so cold until this day.

If meeting God in Holy Communion has such an effect on me, how will I be able to say holy Mass on Christmas Eve? It will be evident to everybody what the Lord is doing within my soul. This is the only thing that bothers me; it has brought me to the pitch of wanting, I dare not say asking, that I will not be affected so perceptibly and for so long a time.

Starting with the days preceding ordination and especially after ordination, I think I know O.L.J.C. better. What would it be like to know him as he is! Dear Father, please pray that I do not make myself unworthy of so many graces. I am receiving more than enough to make a great saint, pray that I shall become one; please say a Mass for that intention. The week shall not go by without my repaying this new debt, etc. But happily our Master’s generosity has enabled me to pay, etc., etc.

**Note to Father de Sambucy, master of ceremonies at Eugene’s First Masses.[[41]](#footnote-41)**

99:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Suggestions for the Mass and ceremony of first blessing.*

Sambucy de

[Amiens,

December 24, 1811][[42]](#footnote-42)

Father de Mazenod requests M. de Sambucy to be so kind as to have the *Veni creator* sung in an unhurried manner.

During the moving ceremony of imparting of first blessing, please have the psalm *Credidi propter quod,* etc., sung as in the seminary, preceded by the antiphon, *Quid retribuam Domino pro omnibus quae retribuit mihi,* that is repeated at every verse and has a quite ravishing effect on the newly-ordained priest because of all the feelings it gives rise to in his heart.

**My Mass Intentions.[[43]](#footnote-43)**

100:XIV in Oblate Writings

[For December 25-27, 1811]

First Mass, Christmas Eve: for myself.[[44]](#footnote-44) To obtain forgiveness of my sins, love of God above all things, and perfect love of neighbour. Utmost sorrow for having offended such a good and lovable God. The grace of making reparation for my faults by a life wholly and solely employed in his service and for the salvation of souls. The Spirit of J.C. Final perseverance, and even martyrdom or at least death while tending victims of the plague, or any other kind of death for God’s glory or the salvation of souls. A holy freedom of spirit in God’s service, great purity of heart and intention in all my actions, complete detachment from creatures. Deliverance from every thought against the holy virtue of purity, and from the anxiety such thoughts leave in their wake. Likewise deliverance from thoughts against charity, rash judgments. Love of the cross of J.C., suffering and humiliation. Gentleness, patience. Lights for fruitful studies and due fulfilment of all my ministerial obligations, especially concerning confession and preaching. The grace of showing me his holy will: 1) as to the kind of ministry I am to take up, 2) in my every daily action, however trivial seeming, and a constant attention to his interior voice that I might do nothing that is not in accordance with his good pleasure.

Second Christmas Mass: for the repose of the soul of my dearest grandmother.

Third Christmas Mass: for my father, mother, sister, two uncles, niece, brother-in-law, cousin, and all my other relatives *in globo.* For all their spiritual and temporal needs, but especially their conversion or final perseverance.

December 26, St. Stephen’s Day: for my good friend Charles de Janson and all the deacons of God’s holy Church. For their final perseverance and total devotion to the service of God and the Church.

27th, Feast of St. John.

**General resolution. [Notes on predestination].[[45]](#footnote-45)**

101:XIV in Oblate Writings

*Resolution to be wholly for God and neighbour, and seek the cross of Jesus Christ. Predestination.*

[End of December, 1811][[46]](#footnote-46).

General resolution to be wholly God’s and for all, to flee the world and all it may offer as sops, etc., to seek only the cross of J.C. and the penance due to my sins, to seize every opportunity that arises to mortify myself, trample nature underfoot and deny it without letting up. As St. Peter says, I will not set my heart on any earthly thing: *Obsecro vos tanquam advenas et peregrinos abstinere vos a carnalibus desideriis* [IPeter 2, 11].

We cannot tell if we shall be judged worthy of love or hatred, that is true, but we do know that we can make sure of our election by our works; while St. Paul said that those whom God wished to save, whom he has predestined for his glory *quos praescivit et praedestinavit,* he has decided, ordained would resemble his son J.C., *conformes fieri imaginis Filii sui* [Rom 8, 29], or as another interpretation has it: those whom he has foreseen as destined to resemble his son J.C., he has predestined for his glory. Whichever way you put it, it is still conformity with J.C. that is the definitive sign of predestination as it is always infallibly either its effect or its cause.

Do we resemble J.C.? Do we imitate Jesus Christ with all our strength; do we live the life of J.C.? Then we shall infallibly be saved.

Every other mark of predestination is highly equivocal, or can be reduced to the above.

1. Orig.: St. Martin-des-Pallières, château de Boisgelin. In the part omitted, at the beginning and ending of this letter, Eugene complains that his sister does not write often enough, although he understands she is busy with her daughter Nathalie. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. He is referring no doubt to his friend Emmanuel Gaultier de Claubry, cf. letters dated November 1805 and December 23, 1807. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Eugene’s writing is bad here. The Editor conjectures the meaning given in the text. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives, FB I-7. A few paragraphs are omitted in which Eugene speaks about his health and says he is finding it difficult to get his letters delivered. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Orig.: Postulation Archives, FB I-7. We omit the first two pages of this letter in which Eugene thanks his mother for the provisions sent to the seminary bursar. He also speaks of plans to improve the value of the land at St. Laurent. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Orig.: St. Martin-des-Pallières, château de Boisgelin. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives, FB I-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Orig.: St. Martin-des-Pallières, château de Boisgelin. We omit the end of the letter in which Eugene says the Bursar has received the foodstuffs from Aix and he himself is attending to some commissions for Eugenie. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. We do not have the letter Eugene is replying to, but we know what Madame de Mazenod wanted. She would speak her mind again on August 13, as follows: grandma, seriously ill, “urged me yesterday to write and tell you not to receive the priesthood yet. The reason she gave me was the fear she had that those intending to enter the ministry were required to sign something and it would perhaps be awkward for them if they refused. This advice is very similar to that I gave you on behalf of people who had quite different views from those of the hermit [Roze-Joannis] which you mention in your letter ...” [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. An allusion to the next national council and the difficulties experienced by the Pope and Bishops with Napoleon, cf. J. Leflon, *op.* cit., Vol. I, p. 380-385. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives, FB I-7. In the two last pages that are omitted, Eugene describes the funeral ceremony in the seminary chapel and the procession to the chapel of Loretto in the country house at Issy where the body lies. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives, DM IV-I [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Orig.: St. Martin-des-Pallières, château de Boisgelin. In the paragraphs omitted from this letter, Eugene speaks of errands, Nathalie, his excellent health, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives, DM VI. Eugene himself writes up the account of the conference he delivered in the meeting of the Association of the Blessed Sacrament, annexed to Major Catechism for Young Ladies. June 30 was the feast day of the Association. This text is published here as a specimen of his talks in the Major Catechism programme. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Orig.: St. Martin-des-Pallières, château de Boisgelin. In the paragraphs omitted, Eugene speaks of his health and the visit of the abbot de Villeneuve. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Eugene was busy with the national council, inaugurated on June 17 and terminating on July 10 (cf. J. Leflon, *op. cit.,* Vol. I, p. 381). In this letter dated July 1, he writes: “I am, I assure you, far more distracted than I would want to be, by a large number of foreigners who, knowing no French, are forever asking me for this, that or the other ...” [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Copy in Rambert I, 81-82 and Rey I, 119-121. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Eugene did not want to be ordained by Cardinal Maury, named by Napoleon as archbishop of Paris without the authorization of, and conferral of jurisdiction by, Pope Pius VII: cf. Leflon, *op. cit.,* I*,* p. 385, 389-390. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Orig.: St. Martin-des-Pallières, château de Boisgelin. In the omitted paragraphs, Eugene expresses his pain at not being able to go on holiday in Aix, he speaks of Nathalie and especially about Joseph de Boisgelin, the brother of Eugenie’s husband; he invites Eugenie to show a lot of patience towards him: “Like me you must be wary of the vivacity that is natural to us; this would be an excellent gift if we used it properly, but we must moderate it a little.” [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. In the place for the date, Eugene writes: despatched August 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Orig.: St. Martin-des-Pallières, château de Boisgelin. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Madame Joannis, Eugene’s grandmother, died on August 15 after being ill for a few days. It was Rose-Joannis who informed Eugene on August 21, 1811. Madame de Mazenod and Eugenie wrote in their turn about this on August 25 and 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. A property of Madame de Mazenod, situated at that time a short distance outside Aix. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Orig.: St. Martin-des-Pallières, château de Boisgelin. In the omitted paragraphs, Eugene asks for details of his grandmother’s illness and says he is seeking distraction by teaching Italian to a dozen of his confreres. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. On October 27 Eugenie gave a detailed account of the illness and death of Madame Joannis. She confirmed Eugene’s intuition: Madame Joannis fell ill at the same time as her grandson Emile Dedons and she quickly died of it partly because of her worrying and nursing. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. In a letter dated September 12, Eugenie said that her uncle Roze-Joannis had gone away on holiday, leaving Madame de Mazenod alone to attend to St. Laurent; she also spoke of her cousin Emile Dedons’ awkwardness and egoism. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives, FB I-7. In the paragraphs that have been omitted [pp. 9, 10 and 12], Eugene explains, in the minutest detail, how to go about the transfer of his grandmother’s remains from St. Julien to the Enclos. He suggests his mother sell the lands at St. Laurent. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Madame de Mazenod’s letter of October 6 begins: “I had to write a long letter to Alexander and Victor [Amyot]. I took advantage of the occasion to write also to your father of whom I had some news through Alexander who had received some letters dated April 28. The three brothers, he tells me, are well, but big old Nanon is dead.” [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives, DM VI. We do not indicate the various erasures in Eugene’s text. When he says “Sir”, he is no doubt addressing himself to the Superior. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Throughout the text Eugene is speaking about the removal of the Sulpicians from the Seminary. Cf. Letter to his mother, October 14, 1811. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. The eschatological Gospel passage (Mt. 24, 15-35) for the Saturday preceding the 24th Sunday after Pentecost. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Eugene is referring here to M. Duclaux; further on he alludes to the death of M. Emery on April 28, 1811. Cf. Eugene to his mother**,** May 2, 1811. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives, MD VI. Eugene followed the *Thirty Day Retreat* of Father Judde**.** [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Marginal note: “This thought comes from Father Judde.” [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Archbishop J.F. de Demandolx. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives, FB I-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. He will be celebrating his first three Masses of Christmas in the chapel of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, cf. Leflon, *op. cit.,* I, p. 393. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives, FB I-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Orig.: Postulation Archives, DM VI I. Rey (I, 130-13 I) gives a copy of this letter but changing some of the words; e.g., at the beginning he writes: “woes” in place of “turpitudes”. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. A seminarian Eugene names in the list of seminarians for whom he offers his third Mass, cf *infra,* doc. 100, n.65. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives, L.M. Sambucy. Father Louis de Sambucy-Saint-Estère was master of ceremonies at the 1811 national council, cf J. Lefion, *op. cit.,* I*,* p. 381. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. The ceremony of the first blessing was held after the 10:00 a.m. Mass. In the *Annales* of the house of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart of Amiens it is stated: “December 25, 1811, at midnight M. de Mazenod and M. Desportes, who had been ordained at the priesthood some days before, said their Mass in the chapel of the Holy Virgin, and afterwards at 10:00 a.m., after High Mass, they carried out the ceremony of the imparting of first blessing.” [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives, DM IV I: 1811: Sentiments, pp. 47. We have another sheet where the intention for the first Mass is practically the same as here, while that for the third Mass is considerably more detailed: after his family, Eugene lists Fathers Duclaux his director, Magy, Isnardon, Beylot, priests from Aix and Marseilles, everyone of his confessors, missionaries, several seminarians, the Zinellis, various friends from Aix and Sicily, including the Canizzaro’s, religious women, Cardinals Dugnani and Mattei and lastly all his future penitents. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. At the top of this page Eugene added: “At the ordination Mass, the same intention as for Christmas Eve.” [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives, DM IV I: 1811: Sentiments ... p.9. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. The text is undated but belongs to the end of 1811 as it is written on the last page of the notebook in which Eugene lists his intentions for the first Masses. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)