**1813**

**Priests serving Mass.[[1]](#footnote-1)**

112:XV in Oblate Writings

*Eugene’s motives for occasionally serving Mass, to the surprise of certain priests. Example set by some saints.*

[1813...][[2]](#footnote-2)

The surprise (coupled with secret disapproval), that certain priests have made known to me over the fact that out of what is no more than a simple feeling of devotion that could not be more natural I have from time to time served Mass, has induced me to gather examples that the Saints have given us on this matter.

I am sure that there is not a single one among them who did not consider himself blessed to fulfil this honourable ministry that the least glimmer of faith shows us to be so far above what we deserve; the more one appreciates the greatness of the mystery the more too one counts oneself blessed to cooperate in its celebration, and given the impossibility of acting always in this great work in the role of principal minister, there is nothing more in conformity with faith, piety and devotion to this admirable sacrifice than to desire to share in it even as a subordinate minister. A priest who is made responsible for proclaiming the Word of God in Christian pulpits, for developing the meaning of the divine Scriptures both for the simple faithful, and for the great and learned of this earth, does not demean himself by teaching catechism to children, although the Church has especially entrusted this duty to various lower ministers such as deacons; in this light how can one be afraid that he may compromise his dignity by serving Mass, that is, by exercising the functions of an order that he did receive and whose character has not been effaced by the priesthood, in performing an act of religion by which the very Angels would deem themselves infinitely honoured, and which is in effect the most honourable after that exercised by the priest in the sacrificial action, since by serving Mass one cooperates in a way that is very proximate to that very sacrifice, that one is by way of being the representative of all the faithful who offer the holy Victim through the hands of the priest, that one is answering the sublime prayers that the priest addresses to the Most High, that one provides the matter for the sacrifice, that one facilitates in some way its execution, etc.

The Saints thoroughly understood all these things, and had a better appreciation of them than do the Pharisees of today. So let us observe St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure, making it a kind of duty to serve Mass every day and sometimes more than once. Even so these great doctors held a rather sound view of the priesthood. St. Philip Neri was so far from believing that this great role was beneath his dignity that he made it a rule for his Congregation and invited every priest to serve Mass after saying his own.

St. Lawrence of Brindisi, who was not only one of the greatest saints but one of the most learned and able men of his age, would spend the whole morning, during an entire Lent that he passed at Loretto, in serving the Masses that were said after his own which he used to celebrate very early in the morning; and one can be sure that this fervour was not born overnight, and what he did on that occasion more frequently and as noted by the historian of his life, following the testimony of the penitentiary of Loretto, is proof that he was already accustomed to do it previously.

Saint Bruno ordered all his religious to serve each others’ Masses, and we are edified to see this practice observed still in this fervent Order.

I return to the words of St. Philip Neri in his Constitutions: “... *In divinae Sacrificio Missae, non solum singuli quotidie clerici laicique deserviunt, sed sacerdotes complures laude quidem digni sunt administri*…” Thence the custom established in the Congregation of the Oratory in every Catholic country (outside France), that each priest serve a Mass in thanksgiving for the one he has just said.

**To M. de Forbin-Janson, c/o His Lordship the Bishop of Chambéry, in Chambéry.[[3]](#footnote-3)**

113:XV in Oblate Writings

*Father de Mazenod, while he expresses his joy over Charles’ apostolic works, strongly urges him to moderate his zeal and put limits on the scope of his activity.*

L.J.C.

Forbin-Janson

Aix.

February 19, 1813.

I always receive your letters with a new sense of pleasure, most dear friend. The only thing that upsets me is that you always wait until the last minute to write them, as this cuts short the time we spend together. I bless the Lord for the good he works through your ministry and, apart from the joy that every Christian must feel at the news of the growth in the work of God, I experience, in a personal way, a special consolation for the success of the various outlets of your zeal. I thank the good God for it, as if it were I he had made use of for his glory and the salvation of our brothers; and what you do, I rejoice over as if we had done it together. But, dear friend, will you please listen to me for once in your life? You have to put limits on that zeal of yours, if you want it to be both more productive and more enduring. Keep in mind that it is I who is saying this to you. It is not your brother according to the flesh, nor your mother, nor a worn-out priest, etc., people who have never known, or have lost touch with, what the real interests of the Father of the family demand of each of us and especially of some in particular of his servants. You know me and you know that, although I certainly love you as my very self, I would rejoice at your death. Weigh these words, yes! I would rejoice at your death, if the example of your devotedness might avail more to the glory of God and be more useful to the Church than the prolongation of the exercise of your ministry. I can only tell you more or less what I would say for myself, and these are my feelings about my own position. How is it then in that case that what I tell you makes no more impression on you than what others are telling you? Do you wish to be a judge in your own cause? How can you, in good faith, be satisfied with a decision extorted from people who have scarcely known you for a week and are quite happy with a superficial appearance of well-being; I would almost say with a certain show, without any consideration of the consequences that could be irreparable. I implore you, do not brush aside what I am about to say in an effort to put limits on your holy excesses; your health and your very life weigh as secondary factors only in the advice I give, and should not enter into the calculation except in so much as they can contribute to a very great good. So when now I tell you that when you go to stay at a seminary where, naturally, you must want to give good example, even so you must not do it in such a way as to exhaust yourself as you did in Paris before my very eyes; that you must give sufficient time to sleep and not deprive your stomach, which needs more nourishment than most people’s, of what is needed to keep going a body as active as yours; that oil is needed to lubricate these wheels that turn continually with a frightening rapidity; that you must not stay on your knees for hours on end; that you must not speak without ever pausing; and a thousand other things that I would still have to say. Well, when I speak to you like that, you must not take a jump backwards and thrust my advice a thousand leagues, but on the contrary you ought fully to accept it and act in conformity with it. There will perhaps come a time when I will indeed say to you: “Come, let us die now, we are no longer good for anything else. Let us press on to the death!”

In the meantime, I think that you will be doing a good deed if you recount to me everything that you will do, even the scorn for my remonstrances which issue not in the name of worldly friendship but in the name of the charity that unites us, and the good and the greater good of the family of the common Father.

Good-bye. Let me have a double dose of your prayers. Affectionate greetings and love in Our Lord.

P.S. I do not know if you remember that I have several times offered the holy Sacrifice for you, over and above the daily share you have in all the good that I do. You understand what that means.

**Homily instructions in Provencal, given at the church of the Madeleine in 1813. [Notes for the preliminary instruction, March 3, Ash Wednesday].[[4]](#footnote-4)**

114:XV in Oblate Writings

*The poor like the rich must be in possession of the truth. Dignity of the human person and of the poor*

Homily Instructions

Aix

March 3, 1813

In the course of this holy season there will be an abundance of instructions for the rich, people with an education, etc., but won’t there be any for the poor and unlettered? The Pastor’s love has seen to it that there will be; what a shame not to profit from the occasion.

Get them to admit that they do not understand very much of studied discourses, especially when they are addressed in French.

However the Gospel must be taught to all and it must be taught in such a way as to be understood.

The poor, a precious portion of the Christian family, cannot be abandoned to their ignorance.

Our divine Saviour attached such importance to this that he took on himself the responsibility of instructing them and he cited as proof of the divinity of his mission the fact that the poor were being evangelized, *pauperes evangelizantur*

In effect, the knowledge of the truth that he came to bring to men being necessary to obtain eternal life, to save oneself, it was necessary that it be put within the reach of all, a big difference from the ancient philosophers who taught only a small number of pupils, and repulsed the multitude, and which thus carried within itself the mark of error as the truth must be known to all, all having an equal right to its possession.

We place ourselves therefore at the disposition of the simplest among the ignorant. Like the father of a family, etc., we will gather together our children to uncover for them a treasure, etc., but courage, constancy will be needed to acquire it, etc., the empty discourses of men must be scorned, for people will be found who are as stupid as those of Noah’s time. They laughed at his simplicity when they saw him making the ark which was to save him from the ruin, him and all his family ... what happened?

Those of our own day will laugh perhaps at the pains you are taking to assure your salvation, to save your soul from the ruin that will engulf so many others, but when the day of vengeance arrives, there will be no more time, etc., they will perish, etc.

After all, what is at issue here? Nothing less than salvation or the eternal loss of your souls, that is to say, the one and only thing that merits your attentions. The very thing you have given no serious thought to perhaps until this moment. It is a matter of learning what the Lord asks of you so as to procure for you an eternal happiness, what you must avoid so as not to merit a calamity that will never end.

It was God’s wish that you would bring to the search for this vital knowledge the urgency that you know how to employ for every other affair, for your paltry temporal affairs, but that is far, etc. What zeal, ardour to win some temporal advantage! What negligence, etc., for all that relates to salvation.

Question the milling crowd that jostles in the public squares, ask anyone what he is doing, where he is going, what is he engaged in doing, etc. The one will answer that a process on the issue of which depends his entire fortune summons him to the bench to solicit, etc. Another will say that he is going to negotiate an important matter, etc. Another will say that he is going to negotiate his presence on the farm whither he is heading with all speed. Another again will say that he is going over in his mind some plans concerning fortune, interests or ambition that will assure, etc. Perhaps you will discover some who will be compelled to say that they are hastening their steps towards the object of their infamous passions. Not a single one, no, not one will be able to reply that his mind is filled with the eternal verities, that these are the subject of his meditations and researches. *Desolatione desolata est terra*, etc. (Jer. 12:11). O blindness! O folly! However, the days pass, the years roll by, death has its day!

Then illusion vanishes, but there is no longer time to make good the loss of a life entirely devoted in the arduous search for passing vanities that must be left behind. It is too late to amass an incorruptible treasure of glory and happiness for eternity.

So come, whoever you are, come assiduously to some instructions that must undeceive you on the score of many a fatal error, enlighten you on what are your only true interests. Come especially you poor of Jesus Christ and may God grant that I may make my voice heard in the four quarters of the world to reawaken so many foolish people from the fatal torpor that brings them to their doom. We will begin with teaching you what you are, your noble origin, what rights it gives you, and what obligations too it imposes on you, etc.

Man is God’s creature, etc.

Come now and learn from us what you are in the eyes of faith.

Poor of Jesus Christ, afflicted, wretched, suffering, sick, covered with sores, etc., all you whom misery oppresses, my brothers, dear brothers, respected brothers, listen to me.

You are God’s children, the brothers of Jesus Christ, heirs to his eternal kingdom, chosen portion of his inheritance; you are, in the words of St. Peter, a holy nation, you are kings, you are priests, you are in some way gods, *Dii estis et filii excelsi omnes*.

So lift up your spirits, that your defeated souls may breathe, grovel no longer on the ground: *Dii estis et filii excelsi omnes*. (Ps. 81:6).

Lift yourselves towards heaven where your minds should be set*, conversatio vestra in caelo* (Phil. 3:20), let your eyes see for once beneath the rags that cover you, there is within you an immortal soul made in the image of God whom it is destined to possess one day, a soul ransomed at the price of the blood of Jesus Christ, more precious in the eyes of God than all earth’s riches, than all the kingdoms of the earth, a soul of which he is more jealous than of the government of the entire universe.

Christians, know then your dignity, with St. Leo I will call you sharers in the divine nature, etc.

Your Creator did not place you on the earth to amass riches since as St. Bernard says this sort of wealth weighs heavy on those who possess it, wounds those who love it, torments those who lose it: *possessa onerant, amata vulnerant, ammisa cruciant*.

Nor for honours, glory or reputation, as they bring with them a lot of troubles and anxieties which are accorded especially to those who least merit them.

Nor for the pleasure of the senses which give rise to so much bitterness and are made more for the beasts than for rational human beings.

Nor even for knowledge since we see that the devils, despite the superiority of their knowledge, are nonetheless wretchedly damned.

God alone was worthy of your soul. God alone could satisfy your heart. And you, in constant flight from your only good, prostituted this heart, which he gave you for loving him, to avarice, love of pleasures; you ran in pursuit of passing creatures which all in their own way diverted you from your end by promising you the happiness that it is useless to search for outside God. The experience of your cruel errors in this matter taught you nothing and you did not become any the more percipient.

And so it is that after living 20, 30, 40 years and more without seeking God, without having God as the goal of your thoughts, action, you have wasted your whole life, merited nothing and, if you had to appear today before his fearful judgement seat, you would not have one good work to offer him in compensation for your innumerable infidelities.

Let us put our questions to the world. It will reply in line with the prejudices, the foolish code that serves as its rule of life, on which, etc., according to which it pronounces, etc. Workers, who are you in the eyes of the world? A class of people destined to spend their lives in the painful exercise of an obscure toil that places you in dependence on and submits you to the caprices of all those from whom you must wheedle a job.

Servants, who are you in the eyes of the world? A class of people slaves of those who pay your wages, exposed to contempt, injustice and often even ill-treatment at the hands of demanding and sometimes cruel employers who think they have bought the right to treat you with injustice with the paltry wage they pay you.

And you, tillers of the soil, peasants, who are you in the eyes of the world? However valuable your labours, you are valued only for the strength of your arms and if your sweat, distasteful as it is to them, gets any attention at all, it is only because it falls on and enriches the ground.

And what about you poor beggars, obliged by man’s injustice or the harshness of fate to go cap in hand for your pitiful sustenance, to beg brazenly the bread you need for staying alive. The world sees you as the refuse of society, to be kept out of its sight and avoided so as not to be pained by your plight that they have no wish to relieve.

That is what the world thinks. That is what you are in its eyes! But all the same that is the master you have chosen, the one you have so far grovelled to. What reward can you expect? Insult and contempt, that is the reward it sets aside for you; you will never have any other from that source.

Seeing this, etc., I asked myself if men knew who they are, etc., and came to the conclusion that there were really very few who were not in this matter in the most deplorable state of ignorance.... On the one hand, there are those who, dazzled by the show of their brilliant fortune, accustomed to the homage of flattery, etc., are looked upon as the earth’s idols to whom there was owed, etc. I pitied them for their pride, and leaving death the charge of teaching them how fragile is the throne their foolish vanity has raised up, I turned away, etc. Fixing then my gaze on another class of mortals who look for all their well-being to their hard work, I saw them use all their best efforts, etc. All their faculties, absorbed so to speak in this sole pursuit, they live as if they had no other wealth to obtain than what they search for with great difficulty in the depths of the earth which will one day swallow them up.

**Colloquial instruction on confession, preached in Provencal, on the fourth Sunday of Lent, [March 28] in the year 1813.[[5]](#footnote-5)**

115:XV in Oblate Writings

*Joy on seeing the faithful flocking to hear the word of God. Creation and man’s fall. Redemption. Sacrament of penance: institution, necessity. Why one should make one’s confession as soon as possible. Advantages of a good confession. The compassion of confessors.*

Colloquial instruction on confession

Aix

March 28, 1813

When we ascended this pulpit, dedicated as it is to truth, for the first time, we frankly confessed our fears that our lack of familiarity with the Provencal language would constitute an obstacle to the fruitfulness of our instructions. Encouraged however by a desire to serve you, we placed all our trust in the Lord and our hope has not been in vain, as the outcome has been that the holy Word transmitted to you has received an eager welcome. Praise the Lord for that, my brothers, and so overjoyed am I on that account that I am unable to contain it. Is this for my self-glorification? God forbid, perish the thought, one that is as hurtful to God, sole author of all Good, as it is damaging and pernicious to any fool so complacent as to entertain it. The only claim I have is on your prayers, and all I deserve is to be pointed out as a wretched sinner. But called by my vocation to be the servant and priest of the poor to whose service I would like to be able to devote my whole life, I cannot help being touched when I see the eagerness of the poor to hear my voice; but what fills my cup of joy to overflowing is that this abundant concourse is clear proof that there are still in our town a considerable number of true Israelites who have not bent the knee to Baal, Christians who still love their religion, love to receive instruction, want to practise it, for it is quite evident that only love of your holy Law brings you to our presence, since in imitation of the Apostle we have not come to announce the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the elevated discourses of a human eloquence and wisdom, no, we have not used human wisdom as we talked, but the simple word of God stripped of every ornament, placed so far as in us lay within the grasp of the simplest.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Continue, my brothers, to listen to it with faith and attention. I begin.

After God had created this beautiful universe and all the wonders it contains, reflecting that this mute nature was incapable of glorifying his holy name, he wished to form a creature more perfect still who would serve as the interpreter of all his other works, inanimate or lacking in reason, and repay in a freely given act of homage the glory and honour due to his sovereign Majesty.

He formed man; he empowered him with a rational soul which he made in his image; his beneficent and generous hand loaded him with every kind of gift; he made him king of the earth which he submitted to his laws, he destined him in a word to spend his days in happiness, one day succeeding another endlessly in peace and happiness.

But so that in this place of sovereign independence, and while delighting in this general domination, he would not forget that he still had over him a master more powerful than he to whom he owed homage, God submitted him to the most trifling of privations, if indeed one can call it that, the prohibition he gave him not to eat of the fruit of just one tree out of the vast abundance of an infinite number of others.[[7]](#footnote-7)

However, who would believe it! Ungrateful and perfidious man violated that sole commandment that was so easy a one to keep, and thus voluntarily exposed himself to the just punishment of which he had been warned and which in fact he and all his race now undergo.

As a result of this disobedience, all men were subjected to death, and if the Son of God, by an effect of his immense charity for men, had not become incarnate, we would like the rebel angels have all been eternally damned.

This is not the place to bring you to see the justice of that harsh condemnation. A whole instruction would scarcely suffice to explain this dogma of our faith to you. Let it suffice for now for us to remind you that O.L.J.C. has expiated this sin, by his death, and that the application which is made for us of his merits by baptism, wipes out in us this stain in such a way that it is no longer an obstacle to the eternal happiness to which we were called, and that we are delivered from the hell which should have been our heritage.

One would think, my brothers, that after such an excess of love, Our Saviour’s charity would have been satisfied, and that grateful men, happy to have escaped an inevitable doom would have devoted the whole rest of their lives solely to proving to the Lord by their fidelity how they appreciated the price of the grace that he had acquired for them by his blood.

That is how the early Christians understood it, and seeing how they lived one would have said that the Saviour had carried prudence to excess in instituting another sacrament which has the virtue of wiping out sins committed after baptism. A crime like that seemed impossible. But no, dear brothers, we have fallen away so dreadfully from the state of our Fathers, and from the tenderest age so multiplied our sins that it would be impossible for us to recall their number, and what would have become of us if the Lord, foreseeing our shipwreck had not left us a raft to save ourselves and get us out of the abyss of our iniquity. In a word, who in our day would have been saved if our divine Master had not established in his Church the sacrament of penance? Who would have been saved, since despite this saving sacrament most Christians damn themselves still. Who would believe it if we did not see it with our own eyes! What profound human malice, what ingratitude that hell with all its torments would not suffice to punish!

Let us try, brothers, to penetrate the cause of such disorder so as to bring a prompt and efficacious remedy.

The sacrament of penance is of no avail to two classes of people, those who no longer approach it, and those who do not approach it with suitable dispositions.

The details into which we are about to enter will, I hope, win over both kinds to a better frame of mind. The former will learn that by obstinately staying away from the sacrament of penance, as well as voluntarily depriving themselves of all the merits that they may have gathered up for eternity, place themselves in imminent danger of losing their souls, as the sacrament of penance is the only means for receiving remission of one’s sins. The second group, that their confessions as they make them serve but to render them more guilty, and to blind them on the very edge of the precipice, for when one goes to confession one must do it in the way prescribed by God.

The few virtuous Christians who are still able to appreciate the excellence of the gift that has been given them in this sacrament and who try to approach it with good dispositions, will have their attention drawn perhaps to various imperfections in what they do, and which place an obstacle to a greater abundance of graces that they might otherwise derive from it.

As there is so much to say, it will form the topic of my two remaining instructions.

Every Christian knows that there is a sacrament of penance instituted by O.L.J.C. for the remission of sins committed after baptism. That approved priests are the only ministers of this sacrament in virtue of the power that was given them by the Lord when he said to St. Peter: I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and those other words to all his Apostles: all that you unloose on earth shall be unloosed in heaven and all that you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and again: whose sins you shall remit shall be remitted, and those you shall retain shall be retained.

Now my brothers, from these holy words one must conclude with all the Fathers, and in conformity with the infallible teaching of the Church to the necessity of confession as in order that the priest may exercise this judgement “pay special attention to this argument” in order that he may remit or retain, that he may unloose or bind, that is, so that he may impose the appropriate satisfaction, it is necessary that he know the faults of sinners, since it is only in the light of the number and quality of these faults that he may ground a sure judgement, pronounce an equitable sentence, impose a satisfaction in proportion to the crimes, just as a judge will not dare to condemn or absolve someone whom he has not heard, both the accusation and the witnesses, etc.

How can I possibly fail to afford you the opportunity of seeing the constant tradition and the crowd of witnesses which demonstrates the uniformity and perpetuity of this teaching going back to the time of the Apostles? But, however consoling this imposing cloud of witnesses would certainly be for your faith, I have to refrain from this presentation and restrict myself, in a subject so vast, to the things that are most important.

So, my brothers, after having thus given solid proofs as I have just done from the scriptures of the necessity of confession, I will add only the decision of the holy Council of Trent which, based on the Word of God and the tradition of all ages, defined that the sacrament of penance is no less necessary for those who have fallen, after baptism, than baptism is for those who have not yet been regenerated.

No, my brothers, as you see, there is no other way to return to grace with God after one has offended him, and again we must count ourselves fortunate that the Lord has left us this raft to save us from the shipwreck. And what can you be thinking of when you stay away, to what dangers are you not exposing yourselves? How can you live in such a deplorable state; enemies of God, who will punish you all the more severely because he has been waiting for you for so long, your own worst enemies, depriving yourselves of all the merits, all the graces, all the consolations which would fill your souls once you had destroyed sin by virtue of the sacrament; even if you could be sure of experiencing a conversion at the moment of death, you would still be very guilty, you would be acting foolishly to deprive yourselves for the whole of your lives of God’s friendship and all the advantages which would follow that wonderful union. What will it be like when you are in the state of uncertainty over that last-minute conversion, why do I say uncertainty when in all probability you will die as you have lived. If you find it so hard to renounce sin now with your mental powers still intact, what will it be like when, enfeebled by illness, you will just be conscious enough to see the abyss you have dug for yourselves beneath your feet. Besides, how can you tell if you will have a period of sickness before you die? Have you made a pact with death for it to leave you the choice of your end? Who knows? Perhaps you are destined for a lingering death, or to die of a stroke, perhaps you will be dead before this day is out. How many examples have not shown that these unforeseen events can happen; and is it not a commonplace for people to remark on the number of sudden deaths there are, has not this town provided us with a large number of frightful catastrophes even in the course of this year? So is it your wish to die in your present state? No, certainly, since hell, and what a hell, would be your dreadful lot for all eternity. So be converted, come back to God, and to that end take the only means that the Lord has left you. Take this first step, the only one you will find difficult, come to us. [p. 9] Come and show your wounds to the only doctors whom God has established to cure them; as you know, the lepers in the Gospel were ordered to go and present themselves to the priests, and the Lord who had heard their prayer wished to heal them only through the ministry of those to whom he had given the power on earth. It is the same for us, it is the Lord who heals, for it belongs only to God to work this miracle; but he heals through his ministers, and he heals as God, for note that one word suffices for this resurrection, as he needed but one word to create the Universe.

So what is it still holds you in these bonds of sin? Would it be because you think it will be easy for you to burst them when it pleases you? But apart from my having shown you that you could not prudently promise yourself a quarter of an hour’s life, and that death can surprise you when you least expect it, who has told you that this good will that you are suppressing at the moment when the Lord is giving it to you, will be given to you again? For myself I know that the more you delay, the less hope you will have of making a sincere return to God. Difficulties will keep on cropping up and you will die in your sins.

Imagine a poor man who is on the way to market and loses his purse; as soon as he finds out he becomes sad, loses his appetite, is inconsolable, he would give his life’s blood to find it again. This loss seems irremediable. He is wrong: time lessens it each day, slowly he recovers his good spirits; it gradually vanishes from his mind.

That is how it is with sin. At the actual moment that one commits it, remorse makes one feel it; it spurs the sinner to return to God, and the sinner would not be far from doing this as he has a lively feeling then of the enormity of his ingratitude, but he defers it, puts it off - Easter is not far off, he will do his duty then. Illusion, all is illusion. In the meantime remorse wears off, sin seems less horrible, one gets used to its ugliness, Easter comes and it is still not the right moment. Sins multiply, for as St. Thomas says, sin that is not wiped out by penance in no time at all and as if by an impetus of its own seduces one into committing another; one gets used to them, one becomes hard, and this is followed by impenitence, and that by eternal damnation.

Christians, I ask you in all honesty, has not that been the sad tale of our own experience? Perhaps you have reached that point of hardness when God’s word sounds in vain in your ears because of the obstinacy with which you bar it entry to your heart. You are perhaps like those swallows which take refuge in a belfry but at the first dong of the bell come flying out in all directions, but recovering then from their first fright gradually come back to the tower, eventually go back in, and become accustomed to the noise which had bothered them at first, they set up there again their home, and even build their nests there.

In the same way the first instructions you heard, after your sin, produced in you a salutary unease. You took some steps to deal with it. Who knows? Perhaps you even went so far as to take the resolution to give yourself to God and renounce sin for ever, but led by passion you became accustomed to the threats of the Holy Spirit, and became insensible to it. But tremble, sinners, for that divine Word is the two-edged sword that wounds, that kills when it does not heal.

I think, brothers, I have given you more than enough reasons to make up your minds and stop saying no to a precept whose violation would lead to your eternal damnation.

I am going to make use of the short time that remains to make you aware in a succinct way of the benefits that result from a good confession so that you do not labour under the impression that the price of returning to God and of giving him a heart that you ought never to have taken from him is too high.

Your experience, I hope, will be like that of the prophet Ezekiel. The Angel of the Lord showed him an enormous book full of threats, complaints, groans, and after ordering him to eat it, this book, bitter in appearance, was hardly in the mouth of the prophet when there flowed from it a delicious liquid that filled him with strength.

Yes, if you go only by appearances, the confession that the Lord is offering you seems bitter, *scriptae sunt in eo lamentationes et carmen et vae*, but put the book to your mouth, *comede volumen istud*, try, make the avowal of your sins, with a repentant heart, and you will experience how sweet it is to serve the Lord with a pure conscience, *et factum est in ore meo sicut mel dulce* (Ez. 2,9; 3, 1.3).

The first gain, one truly beyond price that the sinner derives from a good confession, is that of returning to God’s grace. One would have to grasp all that the friendship of its God means to a soul to have a just idea of this precious gain. Let him just remind us of what he himself says in Scripture: that the love of the tenderest mother for the dear babe at her breast is still not to be compared to the love he has for us; that he has reserved in his mercy ineffable treasures of graces and happiness for those whom he loves, that he prepares for them an eternal dwelling of glory and felicity, in a word, that nothing short of his omnipotence suffices to satisfy the passion that he has to make happy the faithful soul. Compare that state with the eternal punishments reserved for the sinner if he persisted in his unfaithfulness.

But the Lord does not wait until after death to give the penitent soul an experience of the whole breadth of his mercy. Already in this life he fills it with the most signal favours, the passions of every sort that formerly tyrannised the sinner’s soul give way to that peace of good conscience, that pure joy, that chaste love that make one swim in a sea of interior delights, foretaste of eternal happiness of which they are an overflow.

From child of malediction that the sinner was, he becomes a child of God, he re-enters on all his rights to the eternal inheritance that was won for him by the Blood of the Saviour. The merits he had managed to accumulate before his sin, and which would have counted for nothing if he had died in God’s enmity, are returned to him again. His soul made alive by the grace of his reconciliation no longer does anything that does not have value for heaven: a glass of cold water, the least of works done with faith and love and with still greater reason submission and resignation before all the evils that rain down on every part of this vale of tears, take on for this soul the value of degrees of glory infinite in their duration, of which God himself will be the reward.

There, my friends, there you have a feeble sketch of the precious fruits that you derive from your coming back to God. So are we not right, for your own advantage to place continually before your eyes your indispensable duty, and to do it even sometimes with a vehemence that zeal for your salvation as much as the freedom of our ministry fully justifies.

But my brothers our menacing tone is only for the pulpit, in the sacred tribunal our language is quite different, perhaps then we are all too indulgent. We are like those carters whose cart has got stuck in the mud, they set about pulling it out with all their strength; you see them shoving, now at the wheel, now at the shafts; when all these efforts are of no avail, they arm themselves with a whip, and with loud cries they strike out vigorously and in all directions until with a final heave the cart is righted. Then, leaving aside the whip, they take up the reins to curb the first steps from being too impetuous out of an excessive release of energy, they even go so far as to utter soothing words to these animals whose obstinacy had compelled them to be severe.

In the same way the preacher of the Gospel, saddened at the sight of sinners sinking in the frightful mire of their crimes, bogged down with no desire of getting out, after futilely trying all that their tender charity inspires them to do to have them return onto the way, finally seeing their obstinate determination to be lost, they make to re-echo in their ears the most terrible truths; they arm themselves with the scourge of the holy Word, they redouble their blows until at last these sinners by a generous effort get out of the mire and free themselves, etc.

Then it is with open arms the ministers of Jesus Christ press them close to the hearts and take delight in pouring out balm on all their wounds to ease them.

Yes, my brothers, come, and you will see with what joy we will help you to take up your yoke that will seem too heavy only for the first few moments of your conversion, for when once you are freed from sin, light will take the place of the deep shadows that reigned in your souls, God will seem so lovable to you, he will fill your hearts with so great a consolation, he will invest you with so great a strength that, like new Samsons, you will pull down with vigorous arms the gates that held you captive, and loaded with these precious spoils, you will fly to the summit of the mountain, from where you will taunt your enemies who will then seem to you as contemptible, as odious as today them seem seductive.

**To M. Charles de Forbin-Janson, c/o the Bishop of Chambéry, in Chambéry.[[8]](#footnote-8)**

116:XV in Oblate Writings

*Success of the Lenten sermons preached in Provencal in the Magdalene church, Aix. After Easter Eugene was engaged in ministry for ten days at Le Puy-Sainte-Reparade. Notwithstanding his intense activity in the prisons, at the seminary and with youth, he is not doing a hundredth part of what Charles is doing. He waits on knowing better God’s will.*

L.J.C.

Forbin Janson

Aix,

April 9 [1813]

It is not actually April 9 I’m writing you, my dearest friend, but the 22nd, namely straight after my return from my apostolic journey to Le Puy-Sainte-Reparade.[[9]](#footnote-9) I did intend writing you from there and, if I have not done so, it is not for want of thinking of you, for it was impossible for me to go a step without seeing Villelaure,[[10]](#footnote-10) but as one cannot write while one is walking, and clambering over the hills in search of the sick, and preaching, teaching, confessing, baptizing, and carrying out the Holy Week and Easter ceremonies, I have had to postpone until my return what I really wanted to get done sooner. But so it is, having arrived none too soon, that I arm myself with my pen to allay a little your anger, of which I am all too conscious. I will never challenge, dear and wholly splendid Charles, that you do more in 24 hours than I do in 8 days. And you have known for a long time that I would gladly settle for doing a hundredth part of the good that you regularly do; I would never be up to doing all that you take on. And certainly you are quite right in saying that, since you often write to me, I must a fortiori have the time to do likewise. For it is not precisely lack of free time that hinders my writing, but I think I wrote you the real reason for my delay and it is completely true. For the rest, let’s leave it at that, for today I am very determined to go on writing to you until I run out of paper.

You want me to write and tell you what I’m doing. Let me first confess that the repugnance I feel in speaking about the little I do is equalled only by the consolation I get from learning of the little miracles God in his goodness is working through your ministry. Besides, what I do comes down to little enough. Each Sunday in Lent I have preached in Provencal at 6:00 am, in the Magdalene church for the instruction of the people.[[11]](#footnote-11) As you can imagine curiosity brought lots of others besides country-folk; but the latter and the low class of society, whom I had principally in mind, turned up in such numbers that I had reason to hope that it will in his goodness have redounded to God’s glory.

When I think how easy I found it to express myself in a tongue which I have never made great use of, as I have scarcely lived in the place, I am tempted to see in this a kind of miracle. There is nothing to be surprised at, however, as I used to ascend the pulpit as I descended from the altar, and you know that I did not forget to beg the Master present to speak himself by my mouth.

The fact is that on Saturday evening, as I was thinking over what I had to say, I found I could not string together three words in Provencal. On Sunday too, I used to go to the prisons to give an instruction to those unfortunates in French, after which I went on to the confessional to hear the confessions until 6:00 p.m. of those of the prisoners who presented themselves. Before and after the instruction, some hymns are sung. I finish up by giving them evening prayer. From there I hurry home, where is gathered together the finest flower of masculine piety in our poor town. After various exercises, I again give a small instruction, quite simple, in conversational vein, which God in his goodness sees to seasoning, and there you have it all.

Next, I go twice a month to the seminary and try, by the regularity of my conduct, to do no dishonour to the character the Lord in his infinite mercy has seen fit to invest me with; and I await orders for what it pleases him to command me. You see there is nothing in all that to marvel at, as everyone does around here. If you credited them, big and little, I am killing myself, etc. Unfortunately, a dreadful cold has taken an obstinate hold on me and won’t let go. Passion Sunday, I carried out all my exercises with a fever, quite a small one in truth, but it reduced me on Passion-week Friday to the point of being quite unable to do the ceremony in a church where I was supposed to do it, as my voice was gone; for that fine voice you are familiar with had entirely disappeared, and I was reduced to a mere cheep-cheep.[[12]](#footnote-12) Happily, I got from a vicar general the faculty of offering the holy Sacrifice at home. In it I asked God in his goodness to give me back the use of my throat for the next day, for I was to leave for Le Puy on that day; something that would never be allowed in the state I was in. The remedy worked and next day I fled more than made a normal departure, promising myself to look after myself properly on my return, in view of what I would be doing during the ten days of my mission. Now I shall hold my tongue, for at Le Puy I spoke or yelled all day and coughed all night. I’ll say no more about it, for it is to talk too much of myself; I have a scruple about that, such that I am inclined to scrap my letter. But I won’t as I fear you would find it affected if I said nothing of myself after the repeated requests you have made and be tempted to punish me by ceasing to give me the details that charm and edify me. Let us urge one another on to do good; God knows how long we will be able for it. Life is short. Yesterday again I was called to a poor woman who had dined well and was in her agony just a few hours later. Who knows how long we have to live?

**Diary of the Aix Christian Youth Congregation[[13]](#footnote-13)**

Oblate Writings XVI

*April 25: Preamble and founding of the Congregation. Admission [of the first members]*

Diary of the Aix Christian Youth Congregation

Aix

April 25, 1813

Jesus Mary Joseph

It is not difficult to grasp that the impious Napoleon’s plan and his infamous government’s is the total destruction of the Catholic religion in the States he has usurped. With the attachment of the bulk of the oppressed peoples to the faith of their fathers seeming to constitute an obstacle to the peremptory execution of the deplorable project he has conceived as serving his devilish strategy, it seems he is reduced to awaiting the effects of time and of the methods he employs in the meanwhile to arrive at his goals,

Of all methods the one he counts on most is the demoralization of the youth.

The success of his measures is frightening. Already the surface of France is bestrewn with lycées, military schools and other establishments where irreverence is encouraged, bad morals are at least tolerated, materialism promoted and applauded.

All these dreadful schools are filled with pupils whose parents’ avarice sacrifices to the lure of a free place or a half-scholarship, the hope of an advancement that is promised only to the adept. Empty places are filled with unhappy victims whom the tyrant pitilessly snatches from the bosom of their families and forces to drink of this poisoned cup, where they must find the germ of their inevitable corruption. Already the work is to a large measure accomplished. The 15-year old pupil of a lycée, the pupil of a preparatory or military school or polytechnic, a page, etc., all alike are become impious and depraved, and leave almost no hope of their return to good living, to good religious and civic principles. They are trained to recognize no other god than Napoleon. The will of this new providence that promises them impunity for their vices and advancement for their ambitions is their only rule of conduct, the only motivation for all their actions. And so one sees them fly at the least sign from their idol wherever his voice calls them, ready to commit every crime that it pleases him to exact of their sacrilegious devotion. This is a terrifying picture but a true one and I could embellish it still more without fear of being accused of exaggeration. Apart from what is evident to everyone’s eyes and can be seen by everyone, I have in my possession a thousand proofs of my thesis.

The evil is at its height and we are moving forward swiftly towards total collapse if God does not come very quickly to our help, as force of example has won the day among the youth, even among those who live under the eyes of their parents and one sees only too often the frenetic irreverence of the son in frightening contrast with the principles of the father whose powerless authority or culpable weakness is obliged to give way to, and often even to connive at, his disorderly conduct and apostasy. But how is one adequately to deplore the unpleasant encounters which grow daily more frequent with young fathers brought up during the Revolution who are no better than their sons brought up under Napoleon!

Must one, a sad spectator of this deluge of evil, be content to bemoan it in silence without supplying any remedy? Certainly not. And should I suffer persecution or be destined to fail in the holy enterprise of raising a barrier against this torrent of iniquity at least I shall not have to reproach myself with not having made the attempt. What means are to be employed to attain success in so great an enterprise? None other than those employed by the seducer himself. He felt he could succeed in corrupting France only by perverting the youth, it is towards them that he directs all his efforts. Very well, it will also be upon the youth that I will work; I will strive, I will make the attempt to preserve them from the evils with which they are menaced, that they suffer already in part, inspiring in them early-on the love of truth, respect for religion, taste for piety, horror of vice.

This method, however excellent it may seem, will appear feeble and ineffective if one considers it in isolation, as put into practice by myself alone, I agree, but what an effect it would have if it should be put into execution at the same time throughout our unhappy France!

The enterprise is difficult, I am not concealing that fact from myself, it is not without danger even since I am proposing nothing less than to oppose with all my power the sinister ways of a highly suspicious government which persecutes and destroys all who do not support it; but I am unafraid, for I place all my trust in God, because I seek only His glory and the salvation of the souls he has redeemed by His Son Our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom alone be honour and glory and power for ever and ever.

**April 25: founding of the Congregation. Admission of the first members**

On the 25 April, 1813, Low Sunday, were laid the foundations of the holy Association of Christian Youth. The Director of this nascent congregation called to his side Messrs. Louis Marie Maffée de Foresta, Joseph Gustave Balthazar de Laboulie, Joseph Mattieu Clément Olivier, Joseph Jacques Marcou,[[14]](#footnote-14) Charles Dominique Gaetan Guilelmy, Paul Laurent, Adrien Michel Elzéar Ginoux. After laying out for them his plan and showing them the advantages that would accrue to them from it, they began together the pious exercises of the Congregation to the great happiness of all. It was agreed seeing the unhappy circumstances of the times to keep to a small number of religious practices which one would be careful to disguise as games. The first session took place in the garden called the Pavillon l’Enfant.[[15]](#footnote-15) After a short prayer the group plunged happily into games. The day drawing to a close, we entered a salon of the Pavillon, and while the gentlemen rested, the Rev. Director gave them an instruction that was followed by a decade of the rosary. At nightfall we returned to town, sorry that the day had been so short and looking forward already to another meeting that would take place the following Sunday.

**To M. Bloquetti [Mazenod, in Palermo].[[16]](#footnote-16)**

118:XV in Oblate Writings

*Eugene tells his father about his vocation to the priesthood, in spite of his infidelities; joy at being able “to cooperate in the redemption of men”.*

Mazenod C.A. de

Aix

May 1 [1813],

anniversary of the death of the duchess of Cannizzaro

for whom I have just offered the holy Sacrifice.

My dear friend, it is high time I found a way of getting my news through to you. I am aware you have had some of it at various times from others than myself. It was difficult in fact for me to give it to you directly in view of the distance involved, but today I have the consolation of being able to do it, and I eagerly seize the opportunity.

I duly received your letter dated December 6, we have not had any since.[[17]](#footnote-17) From it I was very happy to learn that you and your brothers were enjoying perfect health. I like to console myself with the thought that it continues the same, but I beg you to give me confirmation as often as you can; a positive assurance consoles quite differently from a vague hope. You must not be surprised that I do not do as much myself. Often I do not know until it is too late that I could have written you; one has to be on the spot to seize opportunities as they occur.[[18]](#footnote-18)

What things I would have to tell you if I had to go into detail as to all that concerns you, and would to God I had only to tell you of such happy events as Eugene’s vocation, elevation to the priesthood, his joy at dashing underfoot every worldly vanity and expectation, the happiness he feels, and that is renewed each day, of offering by the mediation of the holy Victim the prayers of all his loved ones to the Sovereign Majesty of God, to pray without cease for their sanctification, and that all these dear persons, whom he loves as much as he does himself, may live, as he tries to do himself, in such a manner that they may be reunited in heaven, since it is very likely they will not see each other again on earth. Great God, on that topic one could go on forever! Is there not good reason to bless for ever the mercy of God, when one thinks that in spite of so many infidelities, such sins, this good Father, drawing him by the hand away from the abyss into which he may well have fallen, not content to give him his good graces, raises him up to that sublime dignity which enables him to cooperate in the redemption of men, and to expiate his own offences by the efforts that he is able to exert to snatch from hell as many victims as he can. People who are subject to be hurt by his decision, one matured over a long period by reflection and after sufficient testing, do not know the gift of God, and can one really call in question that one can be truly happy only where the Master destines us.

**To Father de Forbin-Janson, vicar general of the Bishop of Chambéry, in Chambéry.[[19]](#footnote-19)**

119:XV in Oblate Writings

*Eugene has set up at the major seminary in Aix a pious association, similar to the one at the seminary of St. Sulpice, in Paris. This association enjoys great success.*

L.J.C.

Forbin Janson

Aix

May 12, 1813 N.2

That’s good, dearest friend, that really is what they call getting your own back. Neither my excuses, nor my long letter n.l have been able to regain for me the privilege your friendship entitled me to of your writing me more often than I would write you. You want nothing but payment cash down and *ad aequalitatem*. Let it be done, for I am languishing through not having had a word from you for what seems like a century. This time, I shall even get ahead. I am sending you the rule that has produced such good results in our seminary. You will see that it is based on our own. I inserted it in its entirety. I believed it useful to add the rest to it, and experience proves me right. Nothing could be more consoling than to see how this house progresses since this useful foundation; as everybody was aware, it had fallen into an alarming laxity. It is not that there was anything against morals, but piety, and especially the spirit of piety, had been, it seems, banished from the house along with those who had tried to inspire it. Since the setting up of the Association, there has been a complete about-face.

At first, the converts were made fun of. As I said before, there was nothing against morals. The whole problem was one of extreme dissipation, a sovereign forgetfulness of every rule, no spirit of piety at all. People could not help noticing the punctuality, recollection, exactness in the smallest things, renewal of fervour, greater frequenting of the sacraments, etc. They called those thought to be aiming in this way at perfection “mystics”. It was claimed that it would surely not last. But soon, carried away by their perseverance, good example and, no doubt, their prayers, they were all drawn in by them, and it is a question of who will imitate them best. One would travel a hundred leagues to assist at the recreations of these dear children; one would say they were angels. All the talk is of God and his goodness; there is hymn-singing, and that in groups of 25 or 30. Hike-days are like retreats; they make use of the freedom given them to gather in groups, for spiritual reading, for saying the office of the Blessed Virgin which is not of obligation. In a word, the day is almost wholly employed in pious practices; it brings tears of joy to my eyes. You would have to see how their meetings are spent: the humility, charity with which they accuse themselves and make amends, the zeal that is expended there to correct one another and help others to improve, the feelings of gratitude towards the Lord with which they are all filled, for having procured them so efficacious a means of salvation. Finally, I assure you that I never leave these little meetings without feeling filled myself with the desire for my perfection, by the odour exhaled by the example of these angels.

You may judge their calibre by the deed I am about to recount. It is forbidden to talk in the sort of vestibule located between the door and the parlour. Previously one hardly even remembered this point of the rule. The other day, the mother of one of our dear colleagues called on him. It was the first time that she had seen him since the death of his brother. Judge the emotion of this poor mother and the feelings of the young man. She ran up to him expressing all her tenderness. This new St. Aloysius Gonzaga, without answering a word, takes his mother by the hand, leads her to the parlour, and waits until he has entered before he unburdens himself of all that his heart inspired him with at a moment at once so sweet and so bitter. I know nothing more beautiful in the lives of the saints we cite most readily as models; one must needs be perfect to so command human nature in a like circumstance.

Here is something another one wrote me who was sent a little while ago to be professor in the minor seminary: “As for myself, I am always united with you, as when I was at ... always carrying out, so far as I can, the practices you were so kind as to give me. The good that these practices have done me obliges me again to give you testimony of my sincere gratitude. You can assure my dear brothers on my behalf that they will see infinitely better even than now the importance of the service you have rendered them, when they have left the major seminary. I do not ask you if fervour is being kept up there; love of God and of salvation appear too strongly rooted there to be so soon extinguished. I regret being too far away to chat with them a little on the things of God. I was so happy! My heart was so full, when I was with them. Did I have to be deprived of it so soon and at the moment I least expected! ... Please convey to them my affectionate regards; tell them to really love God in his goodness…”

There you see the stuff these dear children are made of! What hope for the future! I have gone into these details for your edification and for the benefit and encouragement of those you will choose. Again I have to warn you that they only consented to have the rule passed on to you on condition that there will be communion of prayers between them and those whom you will form on their model. All that is deliberately done according to rule. And that is enough on that subject. I return now to make complaint on your silence at a moment when you know that I badly need to get some news from you. Don’t you realize that I only get it from you? Have you seen my Father? How is he? Tell me at length about him, for he treats me as if I were not his son. He gives me no sign of life; you can judge how that hurts!…[[20]](#footnote-20)

**Diary of the Aix Christian Youth Congregation**

Oblate Writings XVI

*June 6: admissions*

Diary of the Aix Christian Youth Congregation

Aix

June 6 1813

In the meeting of June 6 there were admitted to form part of the Association Messrs. Jean Joseph Heyries, Hippolyte Joseph Courtès[[21]](#footnote-21) and Melchior Sébastien Lambert, Henry Anne Honoré Daime […]

**M. R[oze]-Joannis, property owner, medical doctor, in Grans, near Salon.[[22]](#footnote-22)**

120:XV in Oblate Writings

*Eugene is going to spend some days in St. Laurent with his mother and uncle Roze-Joannis.*

L.J.C.

Roze-Joannis

Aix,

June 28, 1813

… then we will spare no effort to look after you in St. Laurent. The air and the waters and our happiness at being together will all contribute to bringing us good health. For myself, it is not health I shall be looking for in that pleasant temperature; but I could not resist the pleasure of being one of the trio, especially after you had expressed the desire for it to be so. It would perhaps have been more perfect to offer it as a sacrifice and carry on putting in my time at the little tasks of the holy ministry that I perform here with some consolation thanks to the blessings the Lord has been pleased to bestow on it; but, as my absence should not be a prolonged one, I thought I could, without being at fault and without putting the fine children Providence seems to have entrusted me with in danger, give way to mother’s wishes and to yours…

**Diary of the Aix Christian Youth Congregation**

Oblate Writings XVI

*October 24: admissions*

Diary of the Aix Christian Youth Congregation

Aix

October 24, 1813

Admission of M. Matthieu Dominique François André. During the major seminary’s holidays meetings were held at the seminary. We played in the courtyards. Father de Janson[[23]](#footnote-23) was so kind on one occasion as to give the instruction.

**Diary of the Aix Christian Youth Congregation**

Oblate Writings XVI

*November 3: meeting*

Diary of the Aix Christian Youth Congregation

Aix

November 3, 1813

The meeting took place in the dwelling-place of the Rev. Director.[[24]](#footnote-24) To conform to the usage of the country the Director regaled the youth with chestnuts and mulled wine; we did not break up until 8 o’clock. All the time that was not devoted to instruction and prayer was employed in games

**Diary of the Aix Christian Youth Congregation**

Oblate Writings XVI

*December 5: meeting at the home of the Misses Mille*

Diary of the Aix Christian Youth Congregation

Aix

December 5, 1813

The Misses Mille have had the kindness to offer the courtyard of the garden they occupy at the gate of the town for games, and the house itself when there is bad weather. The Rev. Director has gratefully accepted the kind offer of these ladies; consequently the Association moved there today; the games, instruction and prayer took place in this agreeable locale.

**Diary of the Aix Christian Youth Congregation**

Oblate Writings XVI

*December 12: expulsions*

Diary of the Aix Christian Youth Congregation

Aix

December 12, 1813

The following were expelled from the Association: Messrs. Pélissier and Mathieu Marius Ange Auguste Marin whose inscription was overlooked in its proper place. The motivation for this expulsion is the obstinacy that these gentlemen displayed in their determination to continue to keep bad company. Jean Baptiste Dubois who was admitted only after a long probation and reiterated promises to behave has similarly been expelled as incorrigible and better suited to delinquency on the streets than to profiting from the good example of the members of the Association.

**Retreat Notes.[[25]](#footnote-25)**

121:XV in Oblate Writings

*Penances he will do for every failure in keeping his rule. His failings. Remedies against pride. Resolutions.*

Retreat notes

Aix

[December 1813].[[26]](#footnote-26)

I think I have discerned what most harmed my progress during the course of this year, namely, an excessive inconstancy in my resolutions, and a total lack of discipline in my exercises occasioned by my relations with my neighbour, and by the dissipation consequent on it.

If I want to progress as I ought this year, it is indispensable that I be stern with myself and let nothing sway me from the exact observance of my personal rule. All that is laid down there is necessary to sustain my fervour.

So as not to forget what is contained in it, I will reread it every first Friday of the month, a day I choose for making so far as is possible a retreat of at least half a day.

I will impose a penance on myself for each inexcusable failure to keep the articles of my rule. This penance will be proportionate to the gravity of the point neglected. If it is meditation, for example, the penance could not be less than wearing the hairshirt for three hours the next day. If it is the visit to the Blessed Sacrament, 1 hour’s hairshirt the next day, if it is spiritual reading, the Miserere said prostrate face down on the ground, or arms crosswise, if it is the reading of Holy Scripture, two hours’ hairshirt the next day.

The fact is that I have no other means of escaping from the deplorable state of languor into which I have fallen, than to bind myself to the exact observance of my rule. So it is in all seriousness that I commit myself to follow it, and if this promise that I make with myself were still insufficient and I perceived that I was beginning to fall away, I will not hesitate to oblige myself to the principal articles such as meditation, scripture reading, visit to the Blessed Sacrament, etc., by a vow in the strict sense.

In this absence of order the dominant failings have wreaked havoc with me; I recognised it even before going on retreat. I will labour therefore to wage war implacably on them, for I am quite determined to labour more seriously at my perfection, or to express it better at my conversion which is still very imperfect.

The first and most imperious of them all is pride and its numerous cortege: vanity, self-love, etc., an excessive tendency to speak of the good I do.

Then sensitivity of heart which makes me love with too much tenderness those men in whom I see lovable qualities and those especially by whom I am loved, I say men not women because I have nothing to correct in regard to women with whom, in general, I have only very distant relationships and then surrounded by many precautions.

Then again a huge negligence, or to be frank, a veritable laziness in fulfilling my duties of piety, a habitual failure to direct my intention in my actions, and to subject them to scrutiny after I have acted.

Insufficient purity of intention; there is always some self-seeking in everything I do.

Remedy against pride:

1. In my meditation, I will recall all my sins in general and I will ask myself then if there is anything there to boast about.

2. I will not speak of the good I do either directly or indirectly, except when this is necessary for the glory of God or to repulse some attack; but then I will speak only after directing my intention.

3. I will gladly speak of the good of those whose reputation might overshadow mine, and I will acquiesce with all my soul in the praises that they might receive, even if they seem to me to be exaggerated.

4. I will patiently and with resignation and even with joy if possible endure the contradictions I meet with in the accomplishment of my plans, and in the works that God inspires me to do. I will redouble my prayers, both for the successful outcome of the affair and for the people who, seemingly deceived, go against me; especially I will absolutely refrain from grumbling, complaining about them, and getting my own back by heaping ridicule on them. However, I will not be afraid to press my case with those who are in a position to accede to it.

5. Before beginning an action of any importance, and before every one if possible, I will offer it to God, entirely renouncing my own mind and the complacency which might be mingled with it.

6. Before leaving my room, if I am alone, I will prostrate myself at the feet of my crucifix to offer to God all I do outside the house, and to beg my Saviour to watch over me so that I do not offend him, etc. I will also kiss the feet of the crucifix.

If there are people present, I will perform outwardly only this last action. The rest I will do interiorly.

Some of my relations with my neighbour are necessary, some could be reduced in part, or at least regulated.

In the year that is ending, I have been too much at the disposition of the first-comer; this is a misunderstood charity, my time has been wasted, it is my fault; this must be dealt with. So, unless someone has some pressing business to communicate to me, I will keep out of everyone’s sight in the mornings.

I will only be available during my dinner or afterwards, i.e., from 4 to 6:30.

On the stroke of 6:30 I will leave for the church to make my visit. There is no one who would not have the grace to excuse me. For the rest, whether they like it or not, it should be all the same to me.

Thursday being a day of upheaval on account of the congregation, I will take advantage of the intervals either to see the people with whom I have business or to write letters, etc.

I will keep watch over my heart to keep it always free from every too-lively affection, and over my senses not to expose them to rebellion.

One last thing I must mention is that next year I must take precautions not to be disturbed during my retreat as I was this year; too often people stormed the barriers that separate me from the world, during this brief period of days; should it be for the good, utility of my neighbour, well and good, but is it not just that out of the 365 days there should be ten for me alone?

Reformation[[27]](#footnote-27)

122:XV in Oblate Writings

*Resolutions.*

Resolutions

Aix

1813-1815[[28]](#footnote-28)

1. To hold myself to the letter of my rule.

2. And especially to get up early enough to do my oraison before Mass.

3. To keep strictly to not receiving anyone except by appointment, excepting urgent business or that of strangers.

4. To eat only two courses at dinner.

5. To fast not only on Fridays but Saturdays too.

6. To have the mirror taken out that is in my room.

7. To sleep on planks on Fridays; wear the hair-shirt that day.

8. Say my office on my knees or seated or standing, never walking.

9. To make particular examen and do the New Testament reading after lunch.

10. To oblige Maur to accuse me of my faults in the morning at oraison.

Duties towards my neighbour: superiors, equals, inferiors, priests, men, women, children.

Prayer, good example, help in spiritual and corporal needs.

Duties towards the Church: the most absolute devotion, filial love. Blind obedience toward all her decisions. Inviolable attachment to the faith, zeal for discipline and to spread her spiritual empire which is none other than that of Jesus Christ.

1. Orig.: Arch de la Post. DM IV-6. There is extant (ibid.) another page, certainly written before this one, entitled: “Examples of priests serving Mass.” It lists only the names of St. Thomas. St. Bonaventure, and St. Philip Neri, followed by an “argument that I am building up on this question” more or less the same as, but shorter than, that published here. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. An undated text, but written after Eugene’s return to Aix at the end of 1812. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Orig.: Paris, arch. de la Sainte-Enfance. The rule of life Eugene made in 1812 might lead one to think that he intended to live more like a monk than an apostle dedicated to an active apostolate. The few letters that we still have, written in the period 1813-1815, allow us to see however that he gave himself with zeal to a number of ministries; for this reason we publish some extracts from these letters as well as the retreat notes.

   From the advice Eugene gives here to Forbin-Janson, one can conclude that he himself shows prudence in the way he plunges into active apostolate, but that he is ready to lay down his life for it when circumstances so warrant: “There will perhaps come a time when I will indeed say to you: ‘Come, let us die now, we are no longer good for anything else. Let us press on to the death!’ ”

   We still have a letter written on January 23, 1813, containing practically the same advice, addressed to Father Joseph de Courti, in Lyons, another co-disciple of Eugene in Paris. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Orig.: Rome, arch. de la Post. DM V-3. We have in our possession the reasonably complete text of the sermons for the five Sundays of Lent: Lent and fasting, truths necessary for salvation, sin, confession. The preliminary instruction on the contrary consists of simple notes. We publish it because of the importance of a few paragraphs on the dignity of the poor and Father de Mazenod’s interest in them. On the basis of these ideas, he proceeded to improvise a text in Provencal. We have however a translation of the key passages of this sermon, a recent translation, given to Father Deschâtelets on the occasion of the centenary celebrations of the death of the Founder in Aix in May 1961: “I’ aura dins aqueste tems de Caremo, fouesso predicanço per lei riche, per aquelei qu’an pouscu ana cis escolo ... Sias Leis enfant de Dieu, lei fraire Jesus-Crist, leis eiritie tamben de soun reiaume eterne ...” etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Orig.: Rome, arch. de la Post. DM V-3. This instruction, like the others given during Lent 1813, seems to be a personal composition of Father de Mazenod; it lets us see that his teaching was solid, no doubt a little difficult for his audience to follow, all the more as he used few concrete examples. We publish this sermon as a specimen, but also because in it Eugene expresses his joy at seeing the church full despite his lack of familiarity with Provencal and he speaks, at the end, of the confessors’ dispositions of welcome and mercy, thus shedding light on himself and, later, on his first collaborators who spent so many hours in the confessional. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In the margin: “Our temples are your asylums. There it is in your needs and sufferings you find the helps and consolations that you looked for in vain elsewhere. Your Master lives there and awaits you there to bring you an efficacious remedy for all your ills. By the ministry of his priests he regenerates you in the waters of baptism, he reconciles you in the tribunals of penance, instructs you in the truth-demanding pulpit. He gives himself to you to be your strength against the enemies of your salvation, your support in the fatigues of your pilgrimage. Take your delight then in living in this holy place.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In the margin: “Parable of the million and the small coin. It is as if a great king…” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Orig.: Paris, arch. de la Sainte-Enfance. The last paragraph is omitted where Eugene speaks of Charles family and invites his friend to moderate his zeal. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Le Puy-Sainte-Reparade is a village 16 kilometres north of Aix. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Villelaure, on the right bank of the Durance. opposite Le Puy-Sainte-Reparade on the left bank, was one of the seignories of the Forbin-Janson family. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Eugene wrote out the French text of his instructions. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Literally: “Piou-piou”: onomatopoeia based on the sound made by young chicks and the groans of the sick. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Orig.: Rome, arch. de la Post. DM VIII-2a, pp. I-3. We have several hundred pages written by Eugene de Mazenod on the subject of the Association of Christian Youth in Aix: the Rule and the Statutes (editions of 1813 and 1815-1816). Act of consecration of the Congregants and Journal of minutes ... [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. J.J. Marcou (1799-1826) entered the novitiate of the Missionaries of Provence on December 21, 1822. He was ordained priest in 1823 and died on August 20, 1826. L.M. Maffée de Foresta and Gaetan Guilelmy became diocesan priests. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Pavillon l’Enfant: former promenade of the major Seminary at the gates of Aix. It was a park with fountain and edifice built in the 17th century, cf. J.P. Coste, *Aix-en-Provence*, 1960, p.122. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Orig.: Aix, Bibliothèque Méjanes. In the second part of this brief letter, Eugene gives news of the birth of Caroline, Eugenie’s second child, of the death of his grandmother two years since, the marriage of Emile Dedons, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. President de Mazenod had also written on April 12, 1812. He began by saying that he had not received any letters from Aix for 4 years and that the last letter from Eugene was dated December 26, 1807. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Napoleon’s France was then isolated, thanks to the continental blockade decreed by Napoleon against England on November 21, 1806. The English were masters of the seas and made communication with Sicily difficult, except for the occasional over-land contact. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Orig.: arch. de la Sainte-Enfance. In the few short paragraphs omitted, Eugene speaks of some of Charles’ friends. On the association founded by Eugene in the seminary in Aix, cf. J. Leflon. Eugene de Mazenod. I, pp. 407-408. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. He is probably referring to M. Duclaux, Sulpician; his last letter dates from February 23, 1813 (Rey I, 151). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. H. Courtès (1798-1863) entered the novitiate of the Missionaries of Provençe on October 15, 1816. He was ordained priest July 30, 1820 and died June 3 1863, after having been superior of the house at Aix from 1823 until his death. M. Sébastien Lambert became a priest. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Orig.: Aix, Hôtel de Boisgelin, Joannis papers. A short letter in which Eugene says that his mother is with Emile Dedons in St. Julien and that Madame de Boisgelin, Eugenie’s mother-in-law, is ill. We are publishing the paragraph in which Eugene is speaking of his apostolate and the Youth Association, already set up just a few months after his return to Aix. Already on February 23. 1813. M. Duclaux was praising him for his Lenten sermons and other activities, adding: “I am carried away with what you say about the young lay people you want to give instructions to every Sunday; there is no work like it; give it all your attention, call upon all your zeal to give them a good formation; give them a rule”.

    Roze-Joannis. who had doubted the purity of Eugene’s intentions on entering the seminary, wrote him on March 13, 1813, after the first Lenten sermons to the poor in the church of the Magdalene: I cannot tell you, my dear friend, the satisfaction I feel when I learn of the admirable results of the zeal that the spirit of God animates you with is producing. The graces that He communicates to you so abundantly are not for you alone but for the good and salvation of many. The Church needs, today more than ever, ministers who by their instructions renew the faith that is becoming extinct, and by their example serve as models for the flock and disturb the negligence of the shepherds. I have the greatest confidence that God has raised you up for this two-fold reason. By observing and teaching at one and the same time, as you do, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, you give proof to certain folk, who entertained absurd doubts, that you did not enter the sanctuary by a human pathway but by God’s call. I hope that God, who is filled with good will and mercy for all mankind, has united me in blood-ties with a minister according to his heart, so that his powerful intercession may obtain for me pardon for the multitude of sins of which I acknowledge myself guilty. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Charles de Forbin-Janson (1785-1844), a native of Aix and a great friend of Eugene was ordained priest like himself in 1811. Almost immediately he was named superior of the major seminary in Chambéry and acting vicar general. Named Bishop of Nancy in 1823 he remained as such until his death in 1844, but he never resided in his diocese after the revolution of July 1830. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Eugene was living at that time with his mother in the Joannis’ house, rue Papassaudy, n.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Orig.: Rome, arch. de la Post. DM IV-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. The context shows that these Notes were certainly written in December and, no doubt in the year 1813. During his 1812 retreat he had drawn up his rule; furthermore we have his retreat notes of December 1814 and there is no allusion in our text to his activities of 1815-1816. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Orig.: Rome, arch. de la Post. DM IV-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Undated, but before the departure of Brother Maur in December 1815, cf. Rey I, 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)