**REFLECTION ONE: GOD FORMS AND PREPARES THE INSTRUMENT TO PRODUCE THE MUSIC OF OUR CHARISM**

[*This reflection has been inspired by the image of Caryl Houselander who speaks of Mary as the “Reed of God” – the instrument through whom God played the music of the Incarnation*.]

**CALL TO PRAYER**

R/ “Come, let us worship the Lord, who formed and prepared Eugene to be our founder”

Come, let us sing to the Lord and shout with joy to the Rock who saves us.

Let us approach God with praise and thanksgiving and sing joyful songs to the Lord.”

R/ “Come, let us worship the Lord, who formed and prepared Eugene to be our founder”

**REFLECTION**

It has been said that a violin or a guitar are nothing more than a piece of wood and a dead cat – yet once that wood and the gut are carefully worked on, they can produce powerful music at the hands of a skilled player. A person could remain a useless “piece of wood and a dead cat” unless given the opportunity to be made into something useful like a musical instrument.

The celebration of our bicentenary begins with us recalling the one whom God prepared to use as instrument. As we do so, it is an invitation to recall how God has formed each of us – and thousands of Oblates and lay associates over 200 years.

The life of Eugene de Mazenod was filled with persons and events that molded, formed and prepared him to become the founder of the Oblates. Let’s look at three areas:

*Schooled to be close to people and build family*.

Born into a well-off family, and not lacking anything, he knew that he was loved and he learnt to love in return. Looking back he wrote:

***I have not changed over the years. I idolize my family. I would let myself be cut up into little pieces for some members of my family… Generally speaking I love with passion everybody I believe loves me..***

*Self-evaluation written for his spiritual director in 1808, O.W. XIV n. 30*

We trace this characteristic throughout his life. The model of family love was essential to him and was a guide for him in his ministry. His major ministry in Aix as a young priest was to the youth of city. It was a time of learning how to create a family spirit among them as a means of evangelization and growth. Three years later he was able to apply this method when he brought the first Oblates into being.

***Happiness awaits us in this holy Society which will have but one heart and soul…***

***… All depends on how we begin. We need perfect unanimity of sentiments, the same goodwill, the same disinterestedness, the same devotedness – that sums it up.***

Letter to Henri Tempier, 9 October 1815 O.W. VI n 4

Often he spoke about the Oblates as the family of which he was the father, and his dying threefold call to charity was a call to deeper family unity. Here is the reason why he insisted that a close community life be a non-negotiable value of Oblate life. Here too is the root of his legacy that the Oblates always be close to the people.

*Strength of character and leader*

Eugene had a strong character and was a born leader – qualities which matured and carried him through the difficulties of his adolescent years of exile in Italy. Qualities which made it possible for him to survive the difficulties in founding the Oblates and guiding us through difficult situations. Qualities which made him stand up to kings and civic leaders, to hostile bishops and priests, and to incredible political and social difficulties. Qualities which were necessary to ensure the foundation and fragile growth of the young Oblate family.

*Sensitivity to the most abandoned*

His warm, sensitive heart led him to a sensitivity to the needs of others and to search for the most loving response possible in any situation.

Eugene, the musical instrument, realized his potential and became what he was – with an overwhelming sensitivity to those whom society cast out as worthless and nothing more than a “piece of wood and a dead cat.” The one who had been formed in this way, now became the instrument of change for others. This was the only reason why he was capable of preaching and dedicating his life to evangelizing the most abandoned in such an effective way:

***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.***

Notes for the first instruction in the Church of the Madeleine
O.W. XV n. 114

**WE LISTEN TO THE WORD OF GOD**

Hosea 11: 1-4

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

But the more they were called, the more they went away from me.

They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images.

It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them.

I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them.

Matthew 10: 19-20

Do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, 20 for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

**WE LISTEN TO OUR RULE OF LIFE**

Constitution 45 Jesus personally formed the disciples he had chosen, initiating them into “the mystery of the Kingdom of God” (Mk 4:11). As a preparation for their mission he had them share in his ministry; to confirm their zeal he sent them his Spirit.

This same Spirit forms Christ in those who endeavour to follow in the Apostles' footsteps. As they enter more deeply into the mystery of the Saviour and his Church, he moves them to dedicate themselves to the evangelization of the poor.

**WE RESPOND**

Eugene was formed to become the instrument that received the music of our charism and transmitted it to us. Several possible reactions suggest themselves in response:

* A moment of thanksgiving for Eugene as our Founder and Father, whose “yes” to being used as instrument to bring our Oblate family into existence.
* Thanksgiving for the gift of my vocation and the contribution of my personality, talents and the grace of God.
* Gratitude for the way in which I and my community have been molded by God, people and events to become an Oblate musical instrument.
* Recommit myself to a more generous use of my gifts, talents, abilities to serve those who are most in need
* Other…

**CONCLUDING PRAYER**

(This is the prayer for the forthcoming General Chapter, slightly modified for the bicentenary)

God our Father, we thank you for the gift of the charism which

you have given us through St. Eugene de Mazenod

You have called us to a missionary life

in order to preach the Gospel to the most abandoned:

*Evangelizare pauperibus misit me.*

*Pauperes evangelizantur*

At this time of celebration of the 200th anniversary of our foundation,

we ask you for the grace of finding in your Son,

Jesus Christ, the center of our life and of our mission.

We hear the call to a profound

personal and communal conversion.

Help us to become the salt of the earth

and the light of the world,

so as to proclaim in today’s world

the values of your Kingdom in word and deed.

We beg you, Lord, to send upon us your Spirit.

Help us to be yours, inflamed with your love,

sparing no effort to extend your Kingdom

and totally committed to the good of today’s poor.

We ask this through the intercession

of Mary Immaculate, our Mother,

and of Saint Eugene de Mazenod.

Amen.

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| “Our talents are the gift that God gives to us... What we make of our talents is our gift back to God.” Leo Buscaglia |