**REFLECTION TWO: THE OBLATE CROSS, OUR SPECIFIC MUSICAL THEME**

**CALL TO PRAYER**

R/ “Come, let us worship the Lord, who gave his life for us on the Cross”

Today, listen to the voice of the Lord:

Do not grow stubborn, as your ancestors did in the wilderness,

when at Meriba and Massah they challenged me and provoked me,

Although they had seen all of my works.

R/ “Come, let us worship the Lord, who gave his life for us on the Cross”

**REFLECTION**

The first 25 years of Eugene’s life had certainly been extraordinary! Born into the privileges of the nobility, he was chased out of his country by the revolution and lost security, status, wealth, and even endured the breakup of his family. At a time when an adolescent most needed stability, he was buffeted from one extreme to the other: from the care of the Zinelli family in Venice to poverty and loneliness in Naples and then into luxury and the world of the nobility with the Cannizzaro family in Sicily. At age 20 he returned to France and continued to fluctuate between the search for pleasure, wealth, an aimless existence, and aridity as he searched for meaning and purpose in life.

*One Good Friday*

These strands all came together one Good Friday, when the 25 year-old Eugene looked at the Cross and received the life-changing intuition:

***I had looked for happiness outside of God and for too long with resulting unhappiness.***

Referring to his past fluctuations, he acknowledged how distressed and tormented his life had been:

***How often in my past life had my wounded, tormented heart taken wings for God from whom it had turned away!***

The sight of the Cross became a resurrection experience for him, a call to new life:

##### *****Never was my soul more satisfied, never did it feel such happiness; for in the midst of this flood of tears, despite my grief, or rather through my grief, my soul took wings for its last end, towards God its only good whose loss it felt so keenly…*****

##### *****So I had looked for happiness outside of God, and outside him I found but affliction and disappointment.*****

At this moment his life changed and its focus would always continue to be on God, his Savior:

##### *****Blessed, a thousand times blessed, that he, this good Father, notwithstanding my unworthiness, lavished on me all the richness of his mercy.*****

The instrument, whom God had been fashioning for so many years, was finally focused enough to be capable of recognizing and receiving the music whose melody became the theme of his life:

***to act in everything and for everything only for God, to love him above all else, to love him all the more as one who has loved him too late.***

Retreat Journal, December 1814, O.W. XV n.130

*The Oblate Cross*

Eugene had received his specific characteristic life-melody – and ours - at the foot of the Cross. The melody was the Cross. He became aware of the loving eyes of Christ the Savior focused on him. He saw himself through those eyes and understood himself and the purpose of his life. He was transformed by the loving look and wide-open arms of the Savior on the Cross. Experiencing the oblation of Jesus , he responded with the oblation of his life. This is his Oblate melody – and it is ours.

The symbol of the Cross became the vehicle of the invitation of Jesus Christ to give "all for God" and to invite others to that same love. The Cross was the invitation to oblation and the sign of oblation.

Consequently, the only distinctive sign possible for the Missionary was the Cross:

***Their only distinctive mark will be the crucifix, which is proper to their ministry. They will always wear it on their chest, inserted in the cincture and hanging from a cord to which it is attached.*** (1818 Rule, Part Two, Chapter One. Regarding other principal observances)

Today, "our only distinctive sign is the Oblate cross" (C64) because it was the only distinctive sign possible for Eugene:

***The Oblate cross which is received at perpetual profession is a constant reminder of the love of the Savior who wishes to draw all hearts to himself and sends us out as his co-workers.*** CC&RR, Constitution 63

It is powerful to see that as people feel called to share in Eugene's vision and mission as laity, as religious or as priests - it is the Oblate Cross that becomes the uniting and transforming symbol of our quest. It is indeed our symphony!

**WE LISTEN TO THE WORD OF GOD**

Luke 4:16-21

He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.”

Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, “Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.”

I Corinthians 2: 1-5

When I came to you, brothers, proclaiming the mystery of God, I did not come with sublimity of words or of wisdom. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. I came to you in weakness[m] and fear and much trembling, and my message and my proclamation were not with persuasive words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of spirit and power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

**WE LISTEN TO OUR RULE OF LIFE:**

The cross of Jesus Christ is central to our mission. Like the apostle Paul, we “preach Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2: 2). If we bear in our body the death of Jesus, it is with the hope that the life of Jesus, too, may be seen in our body (cf. 2 Cor 4:10). Through the eyes of our crucified Savior we see the world which he redeemed with his blood, desiring that those in whom he continues to suffer will know also the power of his resurrection (cf. Phil 3: 10). CC&RR Constitution 4

**WE RESPOND:**

The unforgettable jazz trumpeter, Louis Armstrong, declared: “My whole life, my whole soul, my whole spirit is to blow that horn.” we can paraphrase that to say that for Eugene, his whole life, his whole soul, his whole spirit was to blow the melody of salvation: to bring the Cross into every situation. He invites us to do the same.

Some possible responses:

* Spend time observing my Oblate Cross and allowing the eyes of my Crucified Savior to look at me and my life, my mission, my community, my world…
* How does my community, and my province, put into practice seeing the world through the eyes of the Crucified Savior?
* Luke 4:18-19 is an invitation to recognize personal and communitarian poverty, captivity, blindness, oppression, and need of the Lord’s time of grace. Then, through the eyes of our Crucified Savior, to see the invitation of the world around us to recognize the same.
* Oblation means to let the melody of the Cross play in and through the instrument of my life. Oblation means to respond to God’s love with all my heart, soul and spirit, oblation means loving my neighbor, especially the most abandoned, with the love of Christ the Savior; oblation means loving myself and allowing the Savior to love me and forgive me and transform me (perhaps the most difficult of the three).
* Other…

**CONCLUDING PRAYER**

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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| “Not that our salvation should be the effect of our work, but our work should be the evidence of our salvation.” Charles Spurgeon |