**17. The challenge**

**of Perseverance in the first companions**

Biblical Text – John 13:1; 15:4-11

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. …

Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

**Oblate Text**

Jesus “always loved those who were his own in the world,” and to the very end “he showed how perfect his love was” (Jn 13: 1). His Spirit inspires all Christians to constancy in their love. The same Spirit develops in us a close attachment to the Congregation. Our perseverance is thus a sign of Christ's fidelity to the Father.

We will help each other find joy and fulfilment in our community life and in our apostolate, supporting one another in our resolution to be faithful to the Congregation, whatever the circumstances which could provoke its dispersal or tempt us to withdraw from it. (C 29)

# Deepening the Conversation – Oblate Sources

Article 29 states the motives for perseverance and its means. The first motive, the greatest support for our fidelity is the example of Jesus himself and the power of his Spirit. “Jesus always loved those who were his own in the world and to the very end he showed how perfect his love was... His Spirit inspires all Christians to constancy in their love.”

This fidelity and perseverance links the Oblates to the Congregation and that is why “our perseverance is a sign of Christ’s fidelity to the Father”. Our link to the Congregation is a bond of life. The Congregation has given much to us and we ourselves have decided, with Christ’s grace, to make our way to God through the Congregation, to journey to God as members of our Institute. Unless there are serious reasons that have been pondered before God with the help of a spiritual advisor, we cannot after perpetual profession any longer call this adherence into question. As in marriage, though in a different order, we have made a definitive decision to belong, for life until death.

Perseverance may at times appear to be an external thing: I am in and therefore I stay! In the context here it especially means an internal disposition to be faithful. I persevere because I love, even though the sensitive attitudes of my heart might change. I commit that in me which is most stable and profound, that in myself which in some-way transcends time and can remain unchangeable. Thus it is first of all the spiritual part of my being that I commit; at the same time, it is understood that I commit myself to strive in orienting my sensitivities into the same direction.

It is worthy of note that this article mentions all three Persons of the Trinity: the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the Father. God is faithful, faithful to himself and faithful to his people. From him first of all, from the grace of the Spirit and of his Son, we receive the gift of fidelity. My fidelity thus consists in that I never on my own call into question the gift of my person in a given institute that I made to God. He himself is faithful; he does not change. He gave me a sign; I believed in him, I loved him and have followed him on this given road. Through his grace I too will be faithful, I shall not change; in humility and patience I shall overcome difficulties. Fidelity is not based on pride, on presumption of oneself: “patience and humility mirror each other in the depths of its eyes” (Gabriel Marcel, *Être et Avoir,* Paris, Aubier, 1935, p. 79). And this leads us to speak of the conditions that make fidelity possible.

The article mentions two of them: “We will help each other find joy and fulfillment in our community life and in our apostolate” and we will support “one another in our resolution to be faithful to the Congregation”, and that “whatever the circumstances which could provoke its dispersal or tempt us to withdraw from it.”

It is normal that we should be happy and remain happy in the situation that the Lord has placed us, that is to say, in the community and in the mission. Through mutual support and friendship among Oblates we ought to help each other find our happiness therein and fully live out our situation with joy. On no account should we ourselves provoke or freely entertain temptations of infidelity, that is to say, consciously entertain sentiments of bitterness and revolt, in times of crisis refuse to open oneself to a confrere who is a friend or to one’s superior, allow oneself to go to the very limit of all possible worldly distractions; or in periods of crisis amuse ourselves with such thoughts as: “We don’t know what we are doing when we commit ourselves at 20 or 25 years of age!” – “Religious life, celibacy are inhuman; surely God cannot be so demanding!” – “If the Church keeps on doing badly, I will end up by asking for a dispensation...” Voluntarily toying with such ideas is already being unfaithful in one’s heart. True love does not take back what it has given.

It was painful to note that in a Congregation such as ours, dedicated as it is to the support and renewal of the clergy, we had, during the recent crisis of the Church from 1965 to 1985, more or less the same losses as other Institutes had: about 15% of our personnel left the ranks of the priesthood and the religious life. Our Founder knew similar moments of trial. On November 26, 1825, he wrote to Father Tempier on the occasion of a Father’s departure: “We must nevertheless not fail to submit ourselves to the decrees of divine Providence; the humiliation which results therefrom for the whole Society is perhaps a way more useful than prosperity, and we ought to profit from it to become more perfect and more faithful to the observance of our Rules and the spirit of our Institute. Such is the conclusion I draw from all these woes which overwhelm us”. *(Oblate Writings*VI, p. 200)

F. Jetté, *O.M.I. The Apostolic Man. A commentary on the 1982 edition*

*of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules,* Rome 1992, p. 181-184.

# Sharing our Faith

– What have been some of the challenges in remaining faithful to your missionary vowed life?

– How have you dealt with these challenges?

– What have been some supports for your Oblate life, so that you have grown in faithfulness?

– Share the hopes and joys you experience in your life as a Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate.

# Closing

Let one of the Oblates present begin by taking the Oblate Mission Cross and giving it to another Oblate. As he presents the Cross to his brother Oblate, he is invited to express some qualities seen in that Oblate’s life and bless him with prayerful words. Then, the Oblate who was blessed, presents the Cross to another brother Oblate, and so on.