**13.**

## **Eugene bequeaths charity for his Oblates**

**Before the meeting**

Prepare the place where the community is going to meet.

**Symbolic gesture**: bring something which symbolizes how you would express joy in the community or the way you would like to commit yourself to give joy to your community. Begin with a song highlighting charity as the heart of community life.

**The word of God (**1Co 13:1-13)

If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. If there are prophecies, they will be brought to nothing; if tongues, they will cease; if knowledge, it will be brought to nothing. For we know partially and we prophesy partially, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I put aside childish things. At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known. So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

*(Other texts may be chosen, like those passages*

*where charity is put forward as the character of Jesus’ disciples)*

**From our Constitutions and Rules**

We fulfil our mission in and through the community to which we belong. Our communities, therefore, are apostolic in character. The Founder left us a legacy: “Among yourselves practice charity, charity, charity – and, outside, zeal for the salvation of souls.” In fidelity to that testament, each member’s zeal is sustained by the bonds of fraternal charity. By growing in unity of heart and mind, we bear witness before the world that Jesus lives in our midst and unites us in order to send us out to proclaim God’s reign. (C 37)

**Witness of Fr. Tempier** at the moment of the death of the Founder:

“Before receiving Holy Communion, our venerated Father wanted to show us the full beauty and quality of his heart. Since he could not speak himself, he had asked Archbishop Guibert to tell us two things in his name: that he had always loved us and would always love us, and that he wants us, for our part, to love each other as brothers; that this mutual affection would make us happy, holy and strong to do good. … Let us never forget the words that our Father spoke on this solemn moment. They are a summary of his life, they are the core of the holy Rules that he gave us.”

(Circulaires administratives, vol. I, no. 2: January 29, 1861)

**From the writings of Eugene de Mazenod**

Charity is the pivotal point on which our entire existence revolves. The love we are to have for God has made us renounce the world and devote ourselves to his glory by any sacrifice even that of our life. To become worthy of God to whom we have consecrated ourselves, we have made the vow to deny ourselves through obedience, to give up wealth through poverty, and forego pleasures through chastity. I have nothing to complain about this last point, I have little to say about the second point, but the first one is not understood by certain persons. Hence the disorders which I have had to deplore. Never cease to meditate on this all important point; we are not religious if we observe it as badly as we have done so far.

Charity towards the neighbour forms another essential part of our spirit. We practise it first of all among ourselves by loving one another as brothers, by considering our Society as the most united family found on this earth, in rejoicing as much over the virtues, talents and other qualities which our brothers possess as if we ourselves possessed them, in gently bearing up the little defects which some have not yet overcome and in covering them up with the mantle of the most sincere charity, etc.; with regard to the people outside, by considering ourselves as the servants of the common Father entrusted with relieving, assisting and leading his children by assiduous labour, in the midst of tribulations and persecutions of all sort, without claiming any other reward than that which the Lord has promised to the faithful servants who accomplish their mission worthily.

(*To Father Guibert,* July 29, 1830, in “Selected Texts”, no. 322)

**A commentary**

Eugene de Mazenod shared his experience of love with the whole Congregation in such a way that charity has become the distinctive trait of the Oblates. He forged an unbreakable link between fraternal charity and the missionary work of his Institute. The last testament of the Founder remains one of the moments when his teaching was at its zenith. Indeed, if our personal relationship to Christ is the source of our life and our apostolate, fraternal charity is the fruit and the sign of the new life born from him.

It is fraternal charity which makes of us a community, which makes us witnesses, which makes us Oblates. It is at the heart of our charism; it is an essential part of our family spirit; it is characteristic of our identity. We are all familiar with the last words of the Founder: “Among yourselves practice charity…, charity…, charity”. But it was not only at the end of his life that he achieved this farsighted vision; this, in effect, was the vision he had from the beginning; he adopted it as the foundation of formation and of the animation of the Institute. (…)

So what is particularly new in Oblate charity? (…) Father Maurice Gilbert, founder of the review *Vie Oblate Life*, and a great specialist on the Founder brought to a close his article on the last words of Saint Eugene by saying this: (…) for the Oblate, what is the road to sanctity, the Oblate way of sharing in the paschal mystery of Christ? It is certainly not the silence and solitude of the contemplative, nor even the poverty of the Franciscan. Might it not be precisely the ideal of fraternal and apostolic charity? […] The Oblate ideal of charity seems to play the same role in their spiritual life as that of silence and solitude in the lives of the purely contemplative orders.

The ‘testament of the heart of the Founder’ expresses well ‘the soul of our soul’.” I agree with this conclusion and, to charity I would add zeal. The Oblate ideal of charity and zeal is a characteristic of our charism. It is the main and most important way for our interior purification and our union with God, our road to holiness. It is our way of communicating the paschal mystery. The Constitutions and Rules of 1982 emphasize even more the demands of charity. They present an ideal of community which is first of all Gospel inspired, and therefore infused by charity, and only then functional and structural. The word “charity” is used to indicate fraternal relationships inspired by faith, whereas that of “love” points above all to relationships with God and with the Church. In continuity with the Founder’s thought, the term charity is associated with that of obedience to indicate an important complementarity. The term “brother” or “fraternal” is used to designate all Oblates and their type of relationships. Constitution 37 points to the essential relationship between charity, community, witness and mission. “By growing in unity of heart and mind, we bear witness before the world that Jesus lives in our midst and unites us in order to send us out to proclaim God’s reign” (C 37). Charity and witness are attached in a special way to the vow of chastity. The Constitutions and Rules of 1982 present two former texts of the Rule on fraternal charity. The one included in the section on apostolic community is from 1826. It stresses mutual support, a joyful charity and respect for one another. The other dates from 1850 and is placed at the end, almost as a synthesis of the Constitutions and Rules. It extends an invitation for a renewal in the spirit of one’s vocation and in apostolic boldness. Its final words are as follows: “Mindful of these words, (which marvelously sum up our entire Rule), “all united in the bonds of the most intimate charity under the direction of the superiors, may they form but one heart and one soul”.

F. Ciardi, *Charity,* in “Dictionary of Oblate Values”, pp. 109-111)

**Pause for reflection**

It may now be good to invite those present to pause for a few minutes, meditating on what has been read and preparing to share their own experience.

**Sharing**

The animator of the meeting may now invite those present to share their experience around the theme of love and charity, with all the virtues that are similar aspects or facets of charity, always in connection with community life (i.e. service, forgiveness, friendship, etc.).

Here are a few points that can guide and help the sharing.

* What could help our community grow in love, unity and charity?
* Where do I find it more difficult to experience the bonds of fraternity and unity within our community?
* Is there a common practice, a daily or weekly exercise that can help our community become more united, more joyful?

**Common spontaneous prayer**

The animator may now invite the group to turn the sharing and the listening into a spontaneous prayer. The animator may begin, just to set the tone of the prayer and to help others, especially those who are not used to pray aloud or in public, to formulate their own prayer.

**Concluding song**

It may be a song that takes up a theme that has come out during the meeting, a song to our Lady (i.e. the Oblate “Salve Regina”) or any other song that helps the community tighten the bonds of love, friendship and unity.