**14.**

## **Oblate Mission is lived in and through Community**

**Before the meeting**

****Prepare the place where the community is going to meet.

**Symbolic gesture**: bring something which symbolizes how you express your participation in the oblate mission through your community or the way you would like to commit yourself to it.

**Initial song**

on the theme of mission

**Opening prayer**

Gracious and compassionate God, we gather as Oblates of Mary Immaculate and celebrate that at the heart of our lives you have called us to community life. Help us deepen authentic ties among us O Lord so that our communion of life together is a reflection, even just a little glimmer, of the life you share as Three Persons in One. May our community life help us grow in holiness so that we grow in selfless service to the mission to which you have called us: to preach the Gospel to the poor and most abandoned. We trust that Saint Eugene intercede for us always so that we live with great charity among us and unlimited zeal in the mission. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**The word of God** (Acts 2:43-47)

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

**Oblate Sources**

I. From Fr. Wilhelm Steckling’s , Letter to the Congregation on Apostolic Community, March 24, 2008

*C. Apostolic Community according to the Oblate charism*

***1. St. Eugene de Mazenod***

In Aix, St. Eugene constituted the Missionaries of Provence as an apostolic community even before he led his initial group to religious life. It is only subsequently that the group chose religious life too. A rule was written when the second house had to be founded.

The founder felt inspired by the community of the twelve with Jesus (C. 3) and the community in Acts 1, of the apostles after the resurrection (CC. 21 and 37). Our Founder did not look for people with very high qualifications, like his friend Forbin Janson, but rather for men who were giving themselves totally to the mission and who were ready to make the new community their family. This common life had a personal touch, a family spirit which has persisted until today. De Mazenod added to the model text for his first rule the expression: “United by the bonds of familiarity and love”.

An interesting article has been published by Fr. Yvon Beaudoin. From this study, we find that the Founder expressed what he thought of community in three ways:

(1) by his strategy when creating houses: he always did what was possible so that real communities came into being;

(2) by his policy regarding dismissals from the Congregation: around 1840 the Congregation had about 50 members; another 23 had been dismissed by the Founder and for approximately 15 of them, the reason was lacking suitability for community life. Some of them remained good friends of de Mazenod.

(3) By his spiritual will (“charity, charity, charity, and zeal”). (Y. Beaudoin, *La communauté apostolique selon le fondateur,* in “Vie Oblate Life” 54 (1995), p. 136.)

II. From Frank Santucci’s article on community in the *Dictionary of Oblate Values*, I take one particular point of St. Eugene’s founding vision, namely: “Community life is not to be sacrificed to the mission.” St. Eugene writes in an 1835 letter: “beware of driving yourself as if it were a challenge. In God’s name, go back to the bosom of the community to renew yourselves in the spirit of your vocation … otherwise it is all up with our missionaries …they will soon be no more than sounding cymbals.” The Founder insists on several occasions that an Oblate should not live alone, saying things like “Living in community is essential to their style of life.” and “It is essential that you should continue to demand that you be left in pairs. If there is only enough for one you must share what there is, but I can never agree that a subject be alone without at least one companion.”

As bishop of Marseille, Saint Eugene even introduced common living among his diocesan priests and saw this as the key-stone of his episcopal ministry at the end of his life.

Time and again, we need to go back to St. Eugene’s founding vision.

**Sharing the experience of community for mission**

– Share a time in your life where you experienced the mission as the fruit of your community life.

– What dimensions of community life enhance your commitment to mission? How does communion with other Oblates affect the mission?

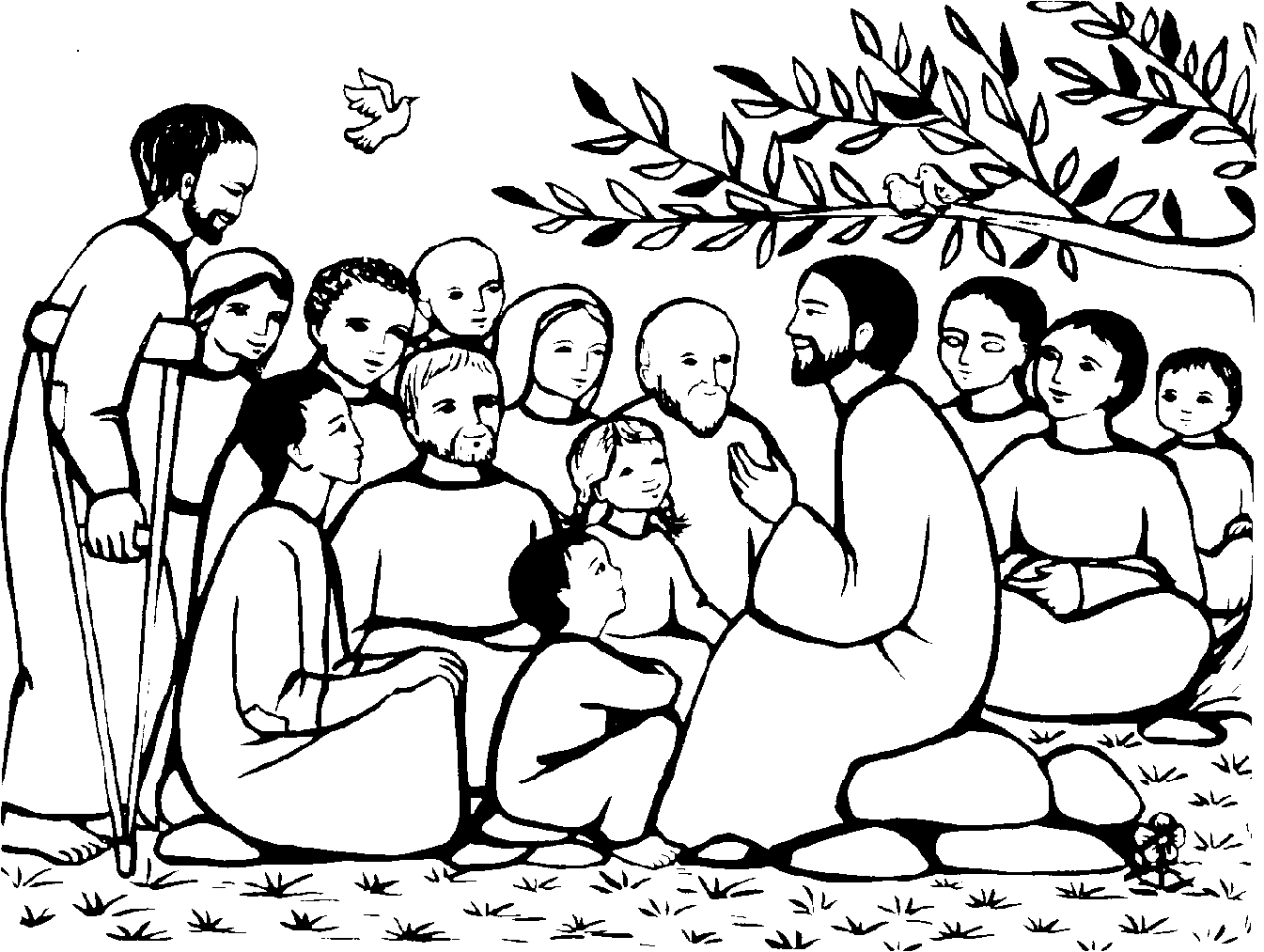
– In the texts for reflection, what called your attention? Share with others what that text means to you.

– In what ways, heeding the call to conversion, can we deepen the communion of life among us.

**Closing the Sharing of Faith**

The animator may invite each one to pray for the community and the Congregation. After each prayer, the community may respond: ***“Deepen our communion of life, Lord Jesus, so that our community may be flesh for the life of the world.”***

**Final prayer**

Enflame our hearts, Father, with the spirit of your love, so we can think and act according to your will and love you in our brothers and sisters with a sincere heart.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.