

WHO AM I AND WHY AM I HERE

“He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’” Matthew 16:15-16

When Oblates gather, there is one thing that we are certainly good at: Telling the stories! Interestingly, retold stories always become more colorful, intriguing with many life lessons learnt from them. Once one of our Oblate Bishops, shared the story from confirmation that he presided at years ago. There was a big number of confirmandi that day. Considering that they are usually “shy” speaking to the Bishop, the parish leaders came up with the idea to put a name tags on their confirmation gowns, helping the Bishop the “see” their names rather than try to hear shy whispers of the candidates. It worked very well... until one of the girls came up to the Bishop without a name tag. Well, that’s not a big problem! The Bishop just leaned over and quietly asked the girl, “What’s your name?”. We tears in her eyes she answered, “I lost it...”

Don’t we all feel at times like we lost who we are and what we are about?

When Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?”, he didn’t ask for affirmation of his identity or confirmation of his mission. He knew exactly who he was and what his purpose of life was. He simply asked his disciples to recognize who they are in relation to him. This is the only way to discern our identity and vocation!

In his early twenties, young Eugene de Mazenod experienced significant internal crisis. We could say he “hit the wall”. It seems like everything that he intended to do in order to bring some peace and stability into his life, was falling apart. He deeply missed his father and uncles, who remained on exile in Palermo, while he returned to Aix-en-Provence. At the same time the atmosphere within his mother’s (Joannis) family “suffocated” him. After failing in a couple of opportunities for marriage, he had no other prospects at hand. The unsuccessful trip to Paris, where he hoped to obtain a passport, crushed all his dreams about a military career and splendid noble life in Sicily. During this time of crisis, disappointment and lack of direction was an opening moment for the grace of God to fulfil the emptiness of Eugene’s life.

Everything changed on one Good Friday... Often, we refer to this experience as a moment of his conversion. However, this cannot be seen as an isolated event, but rather as a part, a phase of his journey of conversion. Nevertheless, it was an experience that influenced the rest of his life, a moment of a conscious turning from being self-focused to God-focused. This was the moment when young Eugene became an adult, with a clear sense of purpose and direction in life. This was the moment when Eugene recognized who he was in relation to redeeming love of God.

When Jesus asks us this weekend, “Who do you say that I am?”, let’s have the courage to seek our identity in relation to Him and our answer to God’s calling.

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