

The relevance of St. Eugene de Mazenod for today

On May 21 the Church celebrates the memorial of St. Eugene de Mazenod, marking the anniversary of his death in 1861. During the Canonization Mass on December 3, 1995, Pope John Paul II said in his homily, "We are living in the second Advent of the world's history. Eugene de Mazenod was a man of Advent, a man of the Coming. He not only looked forward to that Coming, he dedicated his whole life to preparing for it, one of those apostles who prepared the modern age, our age."

By recognizing this John Paul II presented Eugene de Mazenod, his model of life and charism, as a gift to all, not exclusively to the vowed Oblates. So what is the relevance of this XIXth century saint for today?

Grace Builds on Nature

We are all called to be saints, to this ultimate union with our Savior in "being" and "doing". It's a life-long journey. Eugene's example testifies that despite of our complicated personalities, circumstances of life and challenges, God meets us where we are and guides us where He wants us to be. It's a journey of faith towards sainthood.

Christ-centered Relational Faith

Eugene's spirituality shows us that faith is "relational" rather than "doctrinal". Pope Frances echoes this truth, "Rather than being too concerned with communicating a great deal of doctrine, let us first try to awaken and consolidate the great experiences that sustain the Christian life." (*Christus Vivit* 212) Through his conversion journey Eugene discovered a true unconditional love of God and his life and mission became a response to this love. Keeping Christ in the center his whole life gained purpose and meaning.

During his human, psychological and spiritual development, Eugene was pulled in many directions, trying to fulfil the deepest longings of his heart. His conversion journey, Good Friday experience and formation in the Seminary of Saint Sulpice set his direction towards Jesus Crucified, from self-focused to God-focused life. In the beginning of his priesthood he wrote during a retreat in Aix-en-Provence in December 1812, "My chief occupation will be to love Him, my chief concern to make Him loved."

"Regularity"

From Latin *Regula*, the Constitutions and Rules were for Eugene and his Oblates a guiding principal in maintaining and deepening relationship with Christ, but, as well, a reference point to their mission and ministry. "There you will find the secret of your perfection; they include everything that is to lead you to God." (Eugene de Mazenod, Circular Letter no. 1, August 2, 1853)

Today, developing a personal or organizational mission statement helps us to focus on the journey of human development and mission. We practice this in St. Patrick parish by reading our Mission Statement before weekend Masses, and during our Pastoral Team meetings to help us keep in mind the focus of our call and mission.

Preferential Option for the Poor

The ministry to the poor is still deeply in the heart of the Church. Eugene's passion and dedication to the most abandoned helps us in recognizing the poor of today with their many faces.

Preferential option for the poor, marginalized and abandoned is like a compass that Eugene gave to us. A few years ago, in our inner-city neighbourhood, we started the outreach program called "De Mazenod Door", which offers food for close to 400 guests a day, as well, it helps us to address their needs regarding housing and wellbeing. Guests coming to De Mazenod Door are treated with dignity and respect. It is our goal that every single visitor to our door walks away with a true sense of community and belonging. There are many volunteers who are involved in this ministry because they see the value of preferential option for the poor and unprivileged, just like Eugene did.

Mission With Youth

The recent Synod on Young People and Vocations is a reminder that young people are integral part of the life of the Church; they are the Church of today. From Eugene's personal experience but, as well, from his involvement with Christian Youth Congregation in Aix-en-Provence we can learn and get inspired how to journey with the youth.

Eugene was reaching out to all who were not touched by the ministry of the Church. Young people experienced the effects of the French Revolution and Napoleon's anti-Church policies through the lack of any religious instructions. Through the activities of the Congregation of Christian Youth, Eugene gave the young people an opportunity to grow as Human, Christian and becoming Saints. It seems like this human and spiritual development was balanced through games and recreation (Human), catechises, study and instructions (Christian); and prayer and piety (Saints).

Pedagogy of Human – Christian – Saints Approach

Eugene's pedagogy is an inspiration in evangelization. The great commission given us by Christ, "Go and make disciples!" is a primary mission of the Church. Beginning with human needs of a person, respecting human dignity is a starting point in introducing them to Christ and journeying with them towards the discipleship. Eugene saw the ministry of the Oblates as "to lead people to act as creatures of reason, then as Christians, and finally to help them become saints." (Constitutions and Rules 1826 §7)

Leave Nothing Undared

In 1818 Eugene de Mazenod wrote in the original Oblate Rule in French, "We must spare no effort..." For the official presentation in Rome in 1826 the text of the Constitutions and Rules had to be translated into Latin. Translators, Fathers Albini and Courtes, for the phrase mentioned above used Latin "*Nihil linquendum inausum*" (to leave nothing undared). Bishop De Mazenod also wrote in his Lenten pastoral letter in 1847, "Charity embraces all and, if necessary, where there are new needs it

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invents new means.”

There is nothing impossible! Eugene encourages us to “dream big” and to trust in God's plan. St. Eugene is more relevant for today that we can even imagine!

St. Eugene de Mazenod, pray for us!

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