



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE GENERAL CHAPTER
OF THE MISSIONARY OBLATES OF MARY IMMACULATE***

*Clementine Hall
Friday, 7 October 2016*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers,

It is with particular joy that I welcome all of you, who represent a missionary religious Family dedicated to evangelization in the Church. I greet you all with affection, beginning with the recently elected Superior General, and also his new Council. You are here for the General Chapter, in the year in which you are *celebrating the bicentenary of your foundation*, through the work of St Eugène de Mazenod, a young priest who was eager to answer the call of the Spirit.

At the beginning of its history, your Congregation endeavoured to rekindle the faith that the French revolution was extinguishing in the hearts of the poor of the countryside of Provence and overwhelming many ministers of the Church. Over the course of a few decades, it spread into the five continents, continuing the journey that was started by the Founder, a man who loved Jesus passionately and the Church unconditionally.

Today you are called to renew this twofold love, commemorating the 200 years of your religious Institute's existence. This Jubilee you are celebrating, by joyful and providential coincidence, forms part of the Jubilee of Mercy. And indeed, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate were born from an experience of mercy which the young Eugène had experienced on a Good Friday before Jesus crucified. May Mercy always be the heart of your mission, of your commitment to evangelize the world today. On the day of his canonization, St John Paul II called Fr de Mazenod a "man of Advent", docile to the Holy Spirit in reading the signs of the times and in assisting the work of God in the history of the Church. These characteristics are present in you, his sons. May you also be

“men of Advent”, able to recognize the signs of the new times and to guide our brothers along the way that God opens up in the Church and in the world.

The Church, along with the entire world, is experiencing an age of great transformation, in the most diverse of fields. It needs men who carry in their hearts the same love for Jesus Christ that lived in the heart of the young Eugène de Mazenod, and the same unconditional love for the Church, which strives to be an ever more open house. It is important to work for a Church that is for everyone, a Church that is ready to welcome and to accompany! The work to be done in order to achieve all of this is vast; and all of you also have your own specific contribution to offer.

Your missionary history is the story of many consecrated people, who have offered and sacrificed their lives for the mission, for the poor, in order to reach distant lands where there were still “sheep without a shepherd”. Today, every land is “mission territory”, every human dimension is mission territory, awaiting the proclamation of the Gospel. Pope Pius XI called you “specialists of difficult missions”. The current field of mission seems to expand every day, embracing the poor again and again, the men and women bearing the face of Christ who ask for help, consolation, hope, in the most desperate situations in life.

Therefore there is need of you, of your missionary courage, your availability to bring to everyone the Good News that frees and consoles. May the joy of the Gospel shine forth firstly on your face, making you joyful witnesses. Following the example of the Founder, may charity among you be your first rule of life, the premise of every apostolic action; and may zeal for the salvation of souls be a natural consequence of this fraternal charity.

During these days of Chapter work, you have broadened your gaze and heart to the dimensions of the world. May this fraternal experience of prayer, encounter, and communal discernment be the stimulus for a new missionary impetus, a starting point for new horizons, for encountering the new poor, in order to bring them with you to encounter Christ the Redeemer. It is necessary to seek adequate evangelical and courageous responses to the questions of the men and women of our time. For this you must look to the past with gratitude, live out the present with passion and embrace the future with hope, without allowing yourselves to be discouraged by the difficulties you encounter in the mission, but instead to be strong in faithfulness to your religious and missionary vocation.

As your religious family enters its third century of life, may the Lord allow you to write new pages that are as evangelically fruitful as those of your brothers who, over the past 200 years, have borne witness, sometimes even with blood, to that great love for Christ and for the Church. You are Oblates of Mary Immaculate. May this name, which was defined by Eugène as “a passport to Heaven”, be for you a constant commitment to the mission. May Our Lady sustain your steps, especially in moments of trial. I ask you, please, to pray to her for me too. May my blessing, which I wholeheartedly impart to you and to your entire Congregation, accompany you always on your

journey.

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