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# Oblate Connections

Oblate Connections – No.34, 17th February, 2017

This issue of Connections is dedicated to the group of Oblates who gave their lives as martyrs in Laos. Pope Francis calls them “heroic witnesses of the Lord Jesus and of his Gospel of peace, of justice, and of reconciliation.” In response to God’s faithful love the six Oblates and the eleven other martyrs of Laos gave up their lives for the sake of Jesus. In their absolute commitment to Gospel and the service of the poor they walked faithfully in the path of St. Eugene.

In an effort to capture the vision for this path St Eugene wrote our first Constitutions and each year on February 17th Oblates around the world recall and celebrate Pope Leo XII approval of these Constitutions. Fr. Louis Lougen, the successor of St. Eugene, reflecting on what strikes him from the Preface to these Constitutions notes, “there is the strong expression of what burned in Eugene de Mazenod’s missionary heart: the urgent need to evangelize, to preach the Gospel and reawaken the faith. ...He was aware of those who were being overlooked and whose faith was dying. He sought ways to speak to them in their language and to gather them. He met them on their own ground and took the Word to them. He longed to bring them into contact with the Church and to reawaken their faith so that they would come to know Jesus and become his disciples.”

This description of St Eugene’s vision captures many of the missionary efforts of the Martyrs of Laos. Cardinal Orlando Quevedo, OMI, in his homily at their Beatification in December said, “My brothers and sisters in the Lord, like our 17 heroes of the faith, we too can be witnesses of Jesus by proclaiming him and telling his story not by words but by the way we live. ...May our 17 Martyrs help us to love and serve others especially the poor and the needy so that God’s justice, peace, and reconciliation may always reign”

Flooded with news reports and troubling images of human suffering, we often feel our complete inability to help. In guiding us to respond to this, Pope Francis highlights the importance of prayer and acts of charity but he also states that “the suffering of others is a call to conversion, since their need reminds me of the uncertainty of my own life. As a way of overcoming indifference and our pretensions to self-sufficiency, I would invite everyone to live this Lent as an opportunity for engaging the formation of the heart.” With the example of the Martyrs of Laos and so many other heroic Christian men and women in our hearts, may each of be assured that while the Christian’s path is not always an easy one we believe that Jesus’s faithfulness will sustain us on our journey.

- Fr. Lorcán O’Reilly OMI

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# The Power of Fear

– Fr Ron Rolheiser, OMI

**Fear is the heartbeat of the powerless. So writes Cor de Jonghe. That's true. We can deal with most everything, except fear.**

The late Belgium spiritual writer, Bieke Vandekerkehoove: in a very fine book, *The Taste of Silence*, shared very honestly about the demons that beset her as she faced a terminal illness at age nineteen. She singled out three particular demons that tormented her as she faced the prospect of death, sadness, anger, and fear, and she suggested that we can more easily cope with the first two, sadness and anger, than we can with the third, fear. Here's her thought:

Sadness can be handled through tears, through grieving. Sadness fills us like a water glass, but a glass can be emptied. Tears can drain sadness of its bite. We have all, no doubt, experienced the release, the catharsis, that can come through tears. Tears can soften the heart and take away the bitterness of sadness, even while its heaviness remains. Sadness, no matter how heavy, has a release valve. So too does anger. Anger can be expressed and its very expression helps release it so that it flows out of us. No doubt too we have also experienced this. The caution, of course, is that in expressing anger and giving it release we need to be careful not to hurt others, which is the ever-present danger when dealing with anger. With anger we have many outlets: We can shout in rage, beat a drum, punch a bag, use profanity, physically exercise until we're exhausted, smash some furniture, utter murderous threats, and rage away at countless things. This isn't necessarily rational and some of these things aren't necessarily moral, but they offer some release. We have means to cope with anger.

Fear, on the other hand, has no such release valves. Most often, there's nothing we can do to lighten or release it. Fear paralyzes us, and this paralysis is the

very thing what robs us of the strength we would need to combat it. We can beat a drum, rage in profanity, or cry tears, but fear remains. Moreover, unlike anger, fear cannot be taken out on someone else, even though we sometimes try, by scapegoating. But, in the end, it doesn't work. The object of our fear doesn't go away simply because we wish it away. Fear can only be suffered. We have to live with it until it recedes on its own. Sometimes, as the *Book of Lamentations* suggests, all we can do is to put our mouth to the dust and wait. With fear, sometimes all we can do is endure.

## What's the lesson in this?

In her memoirs, the Russian poet, Anna Akhmatova, recounts an encounter she once had with another woman, as the two of them waited outside a Russian prison. Both of their husbands had been imprisoned by Stalin and both of them were there to bring letters and packages to their husbands, as were a number of other women. But the scene was like something out of the existential literature of the absurd. The situation was bizarre. First of all, the women were unsure of whether their husbands were even still alive and were equally uncertain as to whether the letters and packages they were delivering would ever be given to their loved ones by the guards. Moreover the guards would, without reason, make them wait for hours in the snow and cold before they would collect their letters and packages, and sometimes they wouldn't meet the women at all. Still, every week, despite the absurdity of it, the women would come, wait in the snow, accept this unfairness, do their vigil, and try to get letters and packages to their loved ones in prison. One morning, as they were waiting, seemingly with no end in sight, one of the women recognized Akhmatova and said to her: "Well, you're a poet. Can you tell me what's happening here?" Akhmatova looked at the woman and replied: "Yes, I can!" And then something like a smile passed between them.

Why the smile? Just to be able to name something, no matter how absurd or unfair, no matter our powerlessness to change it, is to be somehow free of it, above it, transcendent in some way. To name something correctly is to partly free ourselves of its dominance. That's why totalitarian regimes fear artists, writers, religious critics, journalists, and prophets. They name things. That's ultimately the function of prophecy. Prophets don't foretell the future, they properly name the present. Richard Rohr is fond of

saying: Not everything can be fixed or cured, but it should be named properly. James Hillman has his own way of casting this. He suggests that a symptom suffers most when it doesn't know where it belongs. This can be helpful in dealing with fear in our lives. Fear can render us impotent. But, naming that properly, recognizing where that symptom belongs and how powerless it leaves us, can help us to live with it, without sadness and anger.

## Carpenter from Nazareth Seeks 'Joiners'

### *A Discernment Weekend for Religious Life and Priesthood*

#### Hosted at

The Oblate Retreat Centre  
62 Chamber Street  
London E1 8BL, England  
Friday, 31st March - Sunday, 2nd April 2017

#### For more information please contact:

Fr. John McFadden OMI  
Tel: 0044- (0)207-624-1701 Email: j.mcfadden@oblates.co.uk



## Taizé

#### July 30th - August 8th

In August 2017, young people aged between 15 and 17 are invited to join a group of teens from the Britain and Ireland, who will travel to Taizé in France. There, they will meet up with thousands of other young people from all over the world for a week of prayer, community, sharing and fun.

The fun of camping, of sharing life with young people from incredibly diverse backgrounds, and the unique experience of Taizé prayer, all combine to make this one of the most memorable, life changing holidays a young person could ever have.

**Full Board Cost: £225 / €265pp (ex London)**

#### For more information, or to book a place on the trip, please contact:

Ronan Lavery, Oblate Partners in Mission,  
Dennis Hurley House, 14 Quex Rd, Kilburn  
London NW6 4PL  
Tel: (+44) 020 7624 7296  
Email: lavery.ronan@googlemail.com

# The Story of the Oblate Martyrs of Laos

– *Fr. Roland Jacques, OMI Postulator & Translated by Fr. James Allen, OMI*

Laos presents to Christianity its “Witnesses of the Faith in the 20th century,” 17 men who died as martyrs between 1954 and 1970: a young Laotian priest, 5 priests of the Foreign Missions of Paris, 6 Oblates of Mary Immaculate—an Italian and 5 French, 5 Laotian laymen. The beatification ceremony for all 17 Martyrs of Laos (including six Oblates of Mary Immaculate) took place in the city of Vientiane, Laos, on 11 December 2016. The Holy Father’s personal representative at the ceremony was His Eminence, Orlando Cardinal Quevedo, OMI, Archbishop of Cotabato in the Philippines.

As in times past at Rome or Lyon, the Church was born in Laos from the blood of martyrs. In 2000, St. John Paul II called on Christians to honor the Witnesses of Faith in the 20th century. Responding to this call, Laos presented to the judgment of Rome 17 men, Laotians and European missionaries. The story of their life and their death takes us into the turmoil of World History which, after the Second World War, saw nations of East and Southeast Asia fall into the hands of atheistic communism. These men heroically remained at their posts, faithful to the end to Jesus Christ, to Roman directives and to the ordinary people of God entrusted to their care. Between 1954 and 1970, they were killed “out of hatred for the faith.”

Joseph Tiên, the first martyr, had been a priest for 4 years. When ordered to get married so as to become a “normal citizen,” he made his choice without hesitation: “I obey the word of God on which I have sworn to remain faithful. I am ready to give my life for my Laotian brethren.” Thomas Khampheuane, who was just 16, was ready too. His school teacher states: “Fr. Lucien Galan asked me if there would be any volunteers to accompany him to see the catechumens, but none of the 30 students was willing to go: the danger was obvious. Then Thomas volunteered: he would not let Father go alone into that danger.” As for Jean Wauthier, while returning from a missionary journey to a distant village, he died standing, his bag on his back, a rosary in his hand, after having found protection for his young companions...

These 17 admirable men, who identified with Christ in life and in death, form with Him the foundation on



which is built the Church of Laos. The Martyrs of Laos, to be known as “Father Joseph Tiên and his Companions,” include the following, in the order of their martyrdom: Father Joseph Tiên (Diocesan priest in Laos); Father Jean-Baptiste Malo, m.e.p. (Foreign Missions of Paris); Father René Dubroux, m.e.p. (French); Father Mario Borzaga, o.m.i. (Italian); Catechist Paul Thoj Xyooj (Laotian); Father Louis Leroy, o.m.i. (French); Father Michel Coquelet, o.m.i. (French); Father Noël Tenaud, m.e.p. (French); Catechist Joseph Outhay (Laotian); Father Vincent L’Hénolet, o.m.i. (French); Father Marcel Denis, m.e.p. (French); Father Jean Wauthier, o.m.i. (French); Father Lucien Galan, m.e.p. (French); Student catechist Thomas Khampheuane (Laotian); Father Joseph Boissel, o.m.i. (French); Catechist Luc Sy (Laotian); and Layman Phô Inpèng (Laotian).

Their feast day will be celebrated on December 16.

## Who were the six Oblate Martyrs of Laos?

Blessed Mario Borzaga, Omi was born in 1932 in Trent, at the foot of the mountains in northern Italy. He was the youngest of a family of four children: three boys and a girl. He was ordained in 1957 and received his first obedience to Laos in that same year. He worked with the Hmong people



in that country at a time when the Pathet Lao communists were trying to take over the government. (The Hmong had been cooperating with the U.S. forces.)

On May 1, 1960, he and his young catechist were killed during one of their missionary journeys. One of the communist soldiers testified:

“On the path along the Mun Phou ridge, we met an American spy, accompanied by a Hmong. We forced them to dig a hole. It was I who shot them. The Hmong died instantly but the American, falling into the hole, cried: ‘Why have you shot me, the Father?’ Without waiting, we covered them with earth; then we rummaged through the backpack of the American. There was not much: some granulated cords with two pieces of crossed iron, some pictures of a radiant woman, alone or with a child, and those of a man with the heart on the outside...”



Blessed Louis LEROY was born on October 8, 1923, in Normandy (France), in the village of Ducey. Shortly after his ordination, he arrived in Laos in 1955.

On April 18, 1961, Father Louis Leroy was praying in his poor church. A detachment of guerilla soldiers

came looking for him. According to the villagers, he knows that his departure would be final: he asks to put on his cassock; he puts his cross in his cincture; he takes his breviary under his arm and says farewell. Head bare and barefoot, he follows the soldiers on the uneven path. According to a witness, Louis Leroy was interrogated, beaten and burned on his face till it was disfigured. Some Christians from another village who were passing through there saw the scene from afar, but they did not recognize him. A bit later, some shots were heard in the forest and it was over... His dream as a young man had come true.

Blessed Michel Coquelet was born on August 18, 1931, in northern France, at Wigneihies. He arrived in Laos in 1957.



On or about April 19, 1961, not far from Xieng Khong, Michel was stopped by the guerillas. The soldiers told him: “Your superior wants you to return to Xieng Khouang.” He answered:

“That is not true: my superior would have told me otherwise; there are enough persons going to Xieng Khouang and coming back.” Leaving the bicycle behind, the soldiers take him along the old French road toward Ban Sop Xieng. A little away from the road, they tell him to dig his grave. Michel throws the shovel aside. He would die standing up, fearless, for Christ and for the Laotians. His parishioners could not find his grave; a passerby told them not to look any more: his executioners came back and threw his body in the river. At the same time, the house-chapel of Sam Tôm was ransacked and destroyed by another detachment. Then it was the turn of Phôn Pheng; the village chief, a Christian, and his secretary were beaten, bound and led through the village and then shot, like the Father, on the edge of the road.



Blessed Vincent L'HÉNORET was born on March 12, 1921, at Pont l'Abbé, France. For his studies in philosophy and theology, he was sent to La Brosse-Montceaux in Île-de-France. There, he personally saw the drama of July 24, 1944: the summary execution of five Oblates of his community by Nazi German soldiers.

He and his confreres were deported to a prison camp at Compiègne; but they would be liberated shortly thereafter, at the beginning of September, by the advancing allies. After his ordination in 1947, he received his obedience to Laos.

On Thursday morning, May 11, 1961, he was seen leaving Na Thoum by bicycle at seven in the morning, as he had announced to his parishioners. A little later, between Ban Na Thoum and Ban Fai, he was stopped by three men wearing guerilla uniforms. A peasant woman who was working in her field was witness to the first part of the scene: the Father brought

out a paper, his pass, undoubtedly. That seemed to satisfy the soldiers, because the Father got on his bicycle again and took to the road. The peasant woman did not see what followed, but a little later, she heard some shots: she barely paid attention because that had become common. Nevertheless, as she returned to the village, she found the bicycle and then saw a body barely covered in a trench. Terrified, she did not dare say or do anything for the moment. The next day, a little group of villagers went to the site. At about 1500 meters from the village, they saw a large pool of blood on the road and discovered the body of the Father which had been carried to ditch farther into the forest. Frightened, they just covered it with a little earth and branches. On Saturday, they went to get Father Khamphanh, and with him proceeded to give a dignified but quick burial, without dawdling because all remained aware of the danger. A cross was placed on the grave.

Blessed Jean Wauthier was born on March 22, 1926, in the North of France, in the little town of Fourmies. Upon his arrival in Laos on October 26, 1952, he was immediately sent to serve at the mission among the poorest, the Kmhmu'.



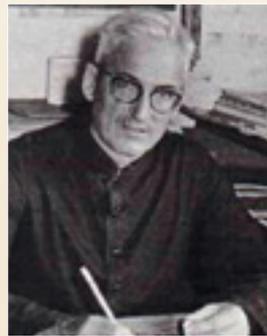
On the night of December 16 – 17, 1967, Jean Wauthier was killed at close range. He had come to spend two nights in the tiny village of Ban Na, catechumens for about three years, in a region near the Plain of Jars. At 800 meters from there was a small military post on a hill. Those who sought his life feigned a guerrilla attack.

At once he was up, knapsack on his back — because in this region permanently at war, one had to be always ready to run for the forest. He gathered the two children who were staying with him and a couple of catechumens and went down with them to a flowing stream at 200 or 300 meters below the village. He sheltered them in a gully in the ground and reassured them: “Do not move, do not be afraid, pray,” he told them.

He moved away to assess the situation and took a few steps while reciting the rosary. The children hear “Kill the Father.” A shot rang out. Hit at the base of the neck, Jean Wauthier begged his attackers hidden behind a small hedge, “Why do you shoot me? Stop! I am really hurt.” “Stop talking!” was the reply.

And the shooting resumed. Shot three times in the chest, he collapsed. The children ran away, terrified. Father Jean Wauthier has given his life so that the Gospel might bear fruit in Laos.

Jean’s body was taken to Vientiane. He rests in Laotian earth, in the Catholic cemetery of the town.



Blessed Joseph BOISSEL was born December 20, 1909 in the marches of Brittany (France), in the hamlet of La Tiolais, outside the town of Loroux. He arrived in Laos in 1938.

In March 1945, the Japanese hit Laos. On June 1, Joseph Boissel was captured with his companion Father Vincent

Le Calvez, and the Apostolic Prefect, Mons. Jean Mazoyer, OMI. All three were taken to Vinh, Vietnam, where they were held among a hostile population. Back in Laos in 1946, Joseph again found his Tran Ninh and contact with the Hmong.

On Saturday, July 5, 1969, he decided to go to Hat l-Êt, a village of Kmhmu’ refugees a good 20 kilometers from Paksane, going up along the River Nam San. Because of the lack of security, that year he was unable to go there for ministry for several months. The catechist André Van was there and he needed to know that he was supported.

Setting out around four in the afternoon, he took two young Laotian Oblate Missionaries with him; as usual, they were to help him with the visits, the care of the sick and the religious service.

The following is told by one of the two passengers, the only survivor able to do so: Two or three kilometers before arriving at the village, at a bend in the road, I heard a burst of gunfire aimed at us. The tires blew out and I was hit in the hand. I saw a red flag moving in the forest bordering our route. A second burst of gunfire and Thérèse was hit in the head; since I am smaller, the bullets did not hit me. The firing came from the left, on the driver’s side.

Father Boissel was hit in the head – near the mouth and in the skull. The jeep went into a ditch, turned over on us and burst into flames. Father’s glasses were broken; he died on the spot... His big eyes were open. All three of us were completely covered with blood.

Father Boissel was dead; Thérèse was unconscious. I was in a huge daze... not moving... like dead. But I saw three young Vietnamese soldiers going around the vehicle three times. He said: "Let's kill them!" – "Let's burn the vehicle and its occupants!" They moved away and threw a grenade at the car. The grenade exploded – it was the explosions that caused our injuries. I said, "O Lord!" but veil of darkness came over me...

I don't know how long we stayed like that in the car. But Thérèse came to first. She pushed me to get out... The grenade had deafened us... It was difficult for us to communicate, to understand one another... Both of us prayed to the Lord: "If you still need us... send someone to help us." We went to sleep along the road. I put my hand on Thérèse's heart and she put hers on my heart: united in suffering. Oh, we had to wait a long time, from 4:30 until about 9:30. Finally some people arrived to pick us up. Father's body had been burned to the point that his face was totally unrecognizable. Thérèse, hit in the head, remained mentally handicapped as a result of the attack.



**Extract from the homily of Cardinal Orlando Quevedo, OMI, at the Beatification of the 17 Martyrs of Laos**

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord:  
 Today is first of all a celebration of God's enduring love, God's love for the people of Laos, God's love especially for our 17 Martyrs. In response to God's faithful love they gave up their lives for the sake of Jesus. This is why Blessed Joseph Thao Tien and his 16 companions are heroes of faith. They gave up their lives in the service of the Lord and in the service of their brothers and sisters of the faith. They believed and so they spoke of Jesus (see 2 Cor. 4:13) not only in words but with their lives.

We have to tell and retell their individual stories of heroism to every generation. ...Faithful to Jesus to the end, each of them, priests, foreign religious missionaries, and Laotian lay people, could undoubtedly exclaim with the Psalmist: "The way of loyalty I have chosen; I have kept your judgments. I cling to your testimonies, Lord" (Ps. 119:30-31).

You, my dear People of God, are a very "small flock" among the millions of people in Laos. But if, indeed, "the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church", then we shall surely see the fruit of their spilled blood:

- in the various places in Laos where they gave up their lives;
- among priests and religious men and women;
- among lay people of various callings, married and unmarried, parents and widows;
- and among the young.

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The grain of wheat has fallen to the ground and has died. With the utmost certainty it shall bear fruit (see Jn. 12:24) in the number of Catholics, in the quality of your faith, in the number of vocations to the priestly and religious life, in the greater dynamism of the young, and in the spiritual energy of lay movements and communities.

Today, the Spirit of the Lord calls us to follow the life and ways of our 17 Martyrs. They are heroic witnesses of the Lord's work of justice and mercy, of peace and reconciliation. For these values of the Gospel, they died. We honor them not only by praying to them, for they are definitively in heaven. We honor them by living our faith the way they lived their faith, by loving the Lord the way they loved the Lord -- in our daily struggles to persevere in the faith and in the daily insecurities of living our faith.

My brothers and sisters in the Lord, like our 17 heroes of the faith, we too can be witnesses of Jesus by proclaiming him and telling his story not by words but by the way we live. St. John Paul II tells us that the faithful living of a Christian life is the quiet but most eloquent witnessing to Jesus (see Ecclesia in Asia, no. 23).

May our 17 Martyrs help us to love and serve others especially the poor and the needy so that God's justice, peace, and reconciliation may always reign in your beautiful country of Laos.



# Eugene Follows In The Footsteps of The Apostles

“Is St. Eugene Irish?” someone asked. “What makes you think that”, I asked. “The Oblates are always celebrating some feast or other...”

Maybe that “someone” had a point. The Oblates have just celebrated the anniversary of their foundation on January 25. On February 17 they celebrate another “foundation” - the anniversary of the day the Pope approved their Rule of Life and they ceased to be secular clergy and became religious.

What immediately occasioned this big change of life style was a problem of organization. As secular clergy, the missionaries could be recalled to ordinary diocesan duties by their bishops at any time. The Society could not flourish with the sense of insecurity that this caused. A greater guarantee was needed of the stability of its members in its work and community. The solution was: become a religious congregation.

But the deeper reason is Eugene's understanding of his vocation and that of his fellow-missionaries. The period of fourteen years in which he was effectively a secular priest (1812-1826) gave St. Eugene an opportunity to appreciate and venerate that state of life and its spirituality. Later he would be a bishop, and the backbone of the clergy in his, as in every, diocese would be the secular clergy.

What drew Eugene to the religious life was the sense that the life of the missionary demanded it.

The model of the missionary, said Eugene, must be Jesus the missionary. And his Twelve Apostles too. They lived and journeyed with Jesus on the roads of Galilee, Samaria, Judea, preaching the coming of the Kingdom of God. The life Jesus and the Twelve shared together is religious life as St. Eugene understood it.

So like Jesus and the Apostles the missionaries must be, not only celibate, as is every priest, but also have a vow of poverty and a missionary's vow of obedience, and be committed to an apostolic community lifestyle.

This had always been Eugene's vision. He wrote in 1815 to the man he called his “other self” (Father Tempier OMI), “We wish to choose men who have the will and the courage to walk in the footsteps of the Apostles.” “Our Lord Jesus Christ,” he said, “has left us the task of continuing the great work of the redemption of mankind...”

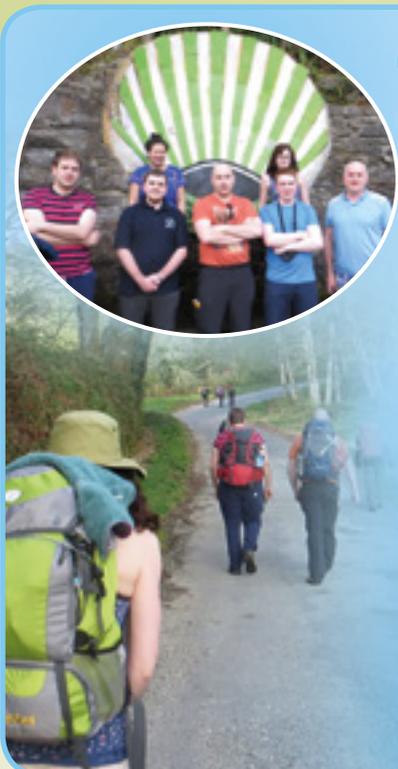
For Eugene, the founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate was not himself but Jesus Christ. He and his men were called to be co-workers with Jesus in the very same work that Jesus undertook when he came on earth. A lofty vocation indeed. A lofty conclusion follows.

What did Our Lord Jesus Christ do? He chose a certain number of apostles and disciples whom he trained in piety and whom he filled with his own spirit. And after schooling them in his teaching and in the practice of all the virtues, he sent them out.

“What must we do in our turn, if we are to succeed in winning back to Jesus Christ the many souls who have thrown off his yoke? We should seriously strive to become saints. We should courageously walk in the paths trodden by so many apostles... we should wholly renounce ourselves...”

These then, are the motives that led St. Eugene to take the long road to Rome at the end of 1825 to seek from Pope Leo XII the approval of the society as a religious congregation. He and the Pope got along famously, and on February 17, 1826, Eugene was able to write back joyfully to France of his success. So please pray for the Oblates on this day.

– Michael Hughes, OMI



# The Camino de Santiago

## An Easter Pilgrimage in 2017

This year, why not make your Easter a journey of faith – a pilgrimage? Join a small group of Oblate pilgrims from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales as we set out to walk the final 135km of the ancient Camino route through northern Spain, arriving in Santiago de Compostela just in time for Easter Sunday Mass in the beautiful Cathedral. Celebrate the Triduum along the Way, in beautiful, intimate surroundings.

Dates: 10th-18th April 2017  
 Cost: £450pp (Half board, ex London)

For more information please contact:  
 Chris Cullen, St. Mary Star of the Sea,  
 106 Constitution Street, Leith,  
 Edinburgh, EH6 6AW  
 Tel: +44 (0) 131 555 2179  
 Chris.oblate.partners@gmail.com



## Oblate Retreat Centre

### Day of Reflection

**Saturday 4th March or 6th May**

We invite you to 'come away to a quiet place, where you can find rest'. During 2017 we will have 6 individual days of Reflection.

Each day will begin at 9.30am. with tea/coffee and conclude in the afternoon at 3.30pm.

You are invited to bring your own packed lunch (Tea and Coffee provided). **Cost: £5.00**

### Lenten Day Retreats

**Tuesday 4th March or Wednesday 22nd March**

This Day of Retreat is an opportunity to take a short time-out to reflect on the mystery we celebrate each Easter. The day will include an input on the mystery of Easter, time for personal reflection, the Sacrament of Reconciliation (for those who wish it) and will conclude with Mass.

### Lenten Weekend Retreat

**Friday 7th April – Sunday 9th April**

This Weekend of Retreat is an ideal opportunity to enter into the dramatic events of Holy Week and journey with the Lord through his death and to his Resurrection. The Weekend will include reflective inputs on the mystery of Easter, times for prayer and meditation, an opportunity (for those who want it) to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation or talk one-to-one with a trained Spiritual Direct and daily celebration of the Eucharist.

### Holy Week Preached Retreat

**Sun 9th April – Sun 16th April**

An opportunity to journey with the Lord through Holy Week, preparing to enter into the last days of Jesus in his journey to the cross and Resurrection. Each day will include reflective inputs on the mystery of Easter, times for prayer, reflection and meditation, an opportunity (for those who want it) to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation or talk one-to-one with a trained Spiritual Direct and daily celebration of the Eucharist. The solemn celebrations of the Lord's Supper (Holy Thursday), Passion (Good Friday) and Resurrection (Easter Vigil, Saturday evening) will be celebrated as part of this Retreat.

**Cost: £419**

Some may wish to join us only for the Easter Triduum (Holy Thursday) [arriving before Supper at 5.30pm] until Easter Sunday [after a full cooked breakfast]

**Cost: £171**

**For information on these and our other events please contact the Oblate Team at:**

Oblate Retreat Centre, Wistaston Hall,  
 89 Broughton Lane, Crewe, Cheshire, CW2 8JS

**Tel:** +44 (0) 1270 568 653 or

**E-mail:** director@oblateretreatcentre.org.uk  
 www.orc-crewe.org

# Rome Pilgrimage

As part of the 200 anniversary celebrations of the foundation of the Oblates a group travelled to Rome on pilgrimage. The group was drawn from many different parts of our Oblate Family and here three members of the group share their experience.

Rome is truly the Eternal City. It is one of the few cities you can walk in the same places, touch the same stone or kneel in the same pews as someone did two centuries ago, following in the footsteps of St Eugene. While we worry about dwindling church attendance Rome is like a beating heart of our church, full of people from all corners of the planet, full of enthusiasm for the faith and hope for the future. St Eugene must have felt this anticipation too as he wandered around the Vatican City waiting to hear from the pope about the future of his new community.

As we listened to the Latin international mass I thought how St Eugene must have heard the same words. He must have looked at the pieta, old even at that time. Walked on the marble from the old basilica turned brown from the sweat of pilgrims waiting over 1000 years before, in the first St Peters, now long gone. As our happy band visited the long list of beautiful tourist sites, 2000 years of the history of our church is beneath your feet and in front of your eyes. St Clemente with its three layers of worship; the catacombs, St Paul outside the walls with its beautiful peaceful spiral columns; Maria Major; the Scavi underneath St Peters to see the grave and bones of St Peter. We prayed and celebrated mass in these places where our church was born and developed even praying at the place where Eugene had stayed and prayed. We visited the Oblate General House where new Oblates train, the fruit of his prayer.



Around all this heritage and history, full of people who worship the selfie stick, we found people of real faith, kneeling and praying, finding peace and looking for meaning amid the tourist throng. And in the centre of all this is our Pope, just as in St Eugene's day. A man who can silence 5000 people with one finger during his audiences. A man who is a total human presence, the great bringer of hope of our church. During an audience you feel he is talking just to you. He literally throws away the script and talks from his heart. As he blesses the people you can feel that all their waiting was worth it as they clap and cheer with true love for this man. This must be what St Eugene must have felt as his vision was given the papal seal of approval. They say if you want to lose your faith visit Rome but in my case I find it is the opposite. It was a great experience that taught me that like St Eugene, we too can wait in hope.

- Christine Hunt (Anglesey)



On the 29th November 2016 we set out for Dublin airport as we had an early departure for Anglo-Irish pilgrimage to Rome. The last time I was in Rome was when we were on honeymoon in 1981, 35 years ago and then I was looking at the eternal city through 'misty eyes'!! We had spoken about returning one day so this proved to be an ideal opportunity. I'm a woman of faith and pilgrimage so this was another opportunity to enhance, renew, and nourish my soul both with my husband Aidan and like-minded people. Following our arrival and greetings at Fiumicino airport, we got a coach for our journey to our hotel Lancelot which is situated close to the Colosseum, and not too far from Vatican city.

The highlights of our pilgrimage for me included:

1. The general audience with Pope Francis in St Peters. We experienced a great joyful atmosphere as Pope Francis entered the auditorium.
2. Our visit to the Oblate Generalate House of Mary. We were welcomed at the gate by the Oblate community, followed by the celebration of the mass on 21st anniversary of the canonisation of St Eugene de Mazenod. Our visit also included a tour of the Oblate museum.
3. Our coach then dropped us off at the Vatican museum where we took off on our own to visit the Trevi Fountain and enjoy some lunch together. The weather was lovely, ideal for walking. In fact, it was hard to believe that Christmas was only four weeks away as there was no hustle and bustle like back home.

One of our experiences that tested my faith was the shock I received at seeing so many homeless from the bus depot to St Peters Square and also visible along the sides of the River Tiber. It brought home to me that this is a major problem throughout Europe.





We enjoyed a well-planned, organised and full programme including a comfortable hotel. The staff were helpful, warm and friendly. Food was delicious, not forgetting the sweet jar, must have cost them a fortune in sweets!

All of this was helpful but more important was the 42 fellow pilgrims I met and got to know over the course of the week, where we enjoyed each other's company, laughed, cried, and prayed together, as we walked in the footsteps of so many pilgrims gone before us. It brings to mind an old Irish saying "Ar scath a chéile a mhaireann na daoine", (it is in the shelter of each other that the people live).

My faith journey was renewed, refreshed and reaffirmed by my return visit to Rome on our Anglo-Irish pilgrimage and P.G. I hope to return. St Eugene made 6 visits!

- Frances Murphy (Dublin)

### **A pilgrimage in the Footsteps of St Eugene**

On a bright Rome afternoon 44 pilgrims met in the dining room of the Lancelot hotel, a stone's throw from the Coliseum, at the start of the Oblate Pilgrimage celebrating St Eugene de Mazenod's founding of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate two hundred years ago in 1816. St Eugene spent four months in Rome liaising with Pope Leo X11 for the constitution of the OMIs to be recognised by the Holy See.

Pilgrims came from the parishes in the Anglo Irish province of the Oblates, Dublin, London, Birmingham Holyhead and Anglesey. Fr Lorcan O'Reilly, an excellent 'good shepherd', organising the group with good humour, infinite patience and great organisation welcomed us warmly.

Pilgrims who had met in Lourdes or Aix en Provence, Madrid or Crewe or through The Friends of St Eugene renewed old friendships. A joy of being part of the Oblate family. All were full of anticipation for the days ahead, those who had been to Rome before and the first timers. We were not disappointed. In addition to visiting important places associated with St Eugene we visited all the main basilicas, the Catacombs and saw the amazing classical Roman archaeological sites on a daily basis as we crossed Rome in our coach. We were a busy, happy group of pilgrims.



After a tasty lunch we set off for the Basilica of St Clemente (named after the fourth pope) and then to The Basilica of St John Lateran both close by. We celebrated mass in a side chapel of St John's, a special experience, as it was our first Eucharist as a pilgrim group and in this ancient foundation the bishop's seat of Pope Francis as Bishop of Rome. It is an awe-inspiring Baroque building. An added joy was Fr Ray Warren, Provincial of the Anglo Irish Province, who joined us for Mass. He was in Rome for two days for a meeting and took the opportunity to come and say hello.

Next morning we set off early for St Peter's for the weekly papal audience. Pope Francis entered the auditorium to great applause and chanting of 'Papa Francesca'. Pilgrims from all corners of the world, young and old, disabled and able bodied were united in prayer and enthusiasm for seeing Papa Francesca in person. He spoke the need for prayer in our lives. People shone with happiness.

Later in the day we made our way to Santa Maria in Portico in Campitelli Church for mass. This was the church St Eugene worshipped in on his 1816 stay in Rome. This church has been a centre of devotion for the conversion of England since 1719 when the Stuart exiled court of James 3 arrived in Rome. We then went to the church of San Silvestro al Quirinale, where St Eugene had lodged with the community during his stay. It is a beautiful small church.

On Saturday December 3, the 21st anniversary of the canonisation of St Eugene, we visited the Oblate House on Via Aurelia to be warmly greeted by Father Thomas, Leader of the Household, and Father Pavel, well known to the Birmingham group and Brother Elvis well known to the Kilburn group. We had mass in the chapel and felt that close connection with St Eugene and each other as members of the Oblate family. We enjoyed the great views over Rome and some of us wished we could move in for a while.

Our final day, Sunday, was spent at St Peter's where we attended mass in the splendid Chair chapel behind the high altar. Fr Lorcan and Fr Danny concelebrated with a cardinal, three bishops and about twenty priests. Even so, with a small choir, a very prayerful aura was created. We had visited St Peter's earlier in the week and had an excellent guided tour and visited the tombs of the Popes in the crypt.

We then went into the Piazza where Pope Francis said the angelus and blessed the faithful. This was a very fitting end to a wonderful pilgrimage.

- Mary Ryan (London)



# Roberto Durette, a life of struggle

A Bolivian journalist, Lupe Cajías, writes about a courageous Oblate priest, Fr. Roberto Durette.



There are journalists who struggle for one day and they are appreciated; there are others who fight from time to time and they contribute a lot; some dedicate their work and their daily life to the defense of freedom. Only a few sacrifice their time on this earth as a gift to the destitute, to the poorest of the poor, to the saddest and most inhospitable settings. Neither their land of origin, nor their family, nor their health takes them away from their commitment.

That's where you will find Roberto Durette, an unknown among those who live in the cities. However, he is the best one of all after a half-century dedicated to the miners and the indigenous of the historic region of Catavi-Siglo XX-Llallagua, Province of Bustillos, Potosí.

Born in 1935 in the United States, the second in a family of eight children, he felt the Lord's call at school and was ordained an Oblate of Mary Immaculate in 1960. Two years later, he arrived in Catavi, when priests were already involved in the social struggles. Watching close-up the agony and death of dozens of patients of silicosis as they spat out their lungs in the hospital of Comibol sealed forever his devotion to the working masses.

After a couple of years in Cochabamba he returned to Llallagua in the critical moments of the dictatorship of René Barrientos; he was already working at "Radio

Pío XII" with Father Gustavo (PELLETIER). After the workers' mobilization of 1975, the military occupied the area and closed the station created in 1959. Some priests considered that it was better to close it and others defended it as their most important work. It was Roberto who offered to manage it in the midst of the repression.

"La Pio" was there in the most significant moments of both the miners' struggles and those of the Aymara peasants. Roberto supported the broadcasting and condemnation of the abuses against the people and, for that reason, he suffered successive closings down of the station and even the destruction of the transmitters.

At the end of 1977, the Oblates of the area encouraged the women to start the historic hunger strike to recover democracy and Gustavo took over the logistics. In 1980, the radio was the last to be silenced after a week of resistance coup. It stayed with the few workers who remained after the relocation and in the democracy, it continued as an alternative voice.

An incorrigible smoker, at the age of 80, he continues to encourage the press at the service of the Common Good, of fraternity and of the living Gospel.

– Los Tiempos, 12/02/2016

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