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# Oblate Connections

Oblate Connections – No.40, 7th October, 2018

If there were one word that I would use to summarise the content of this our fortieth issue of Oblate Connections it would be “Thanksgiving”. This is the time of the year when we are invited to look around us and see the fruits of this year’s harvest. If we pause a look a little closer we see that each is different, not all regular in shape or size. In some ways they remind us of the uniqueness of God’s creation and our need to be thankful for the blessings that come in our lives.

In this issue we reflect with gratitude on the visit of Pope Francis to Ireland for the World Meeting of Families. We also give thanks for many years of service given by the large number of Oblates who have celebrated their jubilees this year. Elsewhere we are reminded of the journey of faith made by pilgrims to Lourdes, Paris and Lisieux and the sharing of faith that takes place through the missionary experience in Zimbabwe.

The German mystic Meister Eckhart is reputed to have said that if the only prayer you make is “thank you,” that will suffice. Bruce Epperly once wrote, “Thanksgiving

is the virtue of interdependence, the recognition that our achievements are not fully our own, but emerge from a network of relationships that sustain and shape us, giving us the materials from which we create our experiences moment by moment. Thanksgiving as a spiritual practice reminds us that all our gifts are communal as well individual. Our creativity and freedom, our ability to choose the good and noble, have their origins in forces larger than ourselves – God, this good earth, and persons who have guided, protected, inspired, and nurtured us.”

Maybe this time of the year is an opportunity for us to remember the gift we are to each other and to give thanks for the people who have enriched our lives this year and throughout our lives. We pause and remember our parents, our family, neighbours, friends and all those who have supported us, nourished our lives especially during the difficult times of the last year. In all, we give thanks and rejoice in the Lord who has blessed each of us with so much and in so many ways.

– Fr. Lorcán O'Reilly OMI

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# *The Mary of Scripture and the Mary of Devotions* – Fr Ron Rolheiser, OMI

There's an axiom that says: Roman Catholics tend to adore Mary while Protestants and Evangelicals tend to ignore Mary. Neither is ideal.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, has, in effect, two histories within Christian tradition. We have the Mary of Scripture and we have the Mary of Devotions, and both offer something special for our Christian journey.

The Mary of Devotions is the more well-known, though mostly within Roman Catholic circles. This is the Mary invoked in the rosary, the Mary of popular shrines, the Sorrowful Mother of our litanies, the Mother with the soft heart through whom we can get the ear of God, the Mary of purity and chastity, the Mother who understands human suffering, the Mother who can soften the hearts of murderers, and the Mother we can always turn to.

And this Mary is pre-eminently the Mother of the poor. Karl Rahner once pointed out that when you look at all the apparitions of Mary that have been officially approved by the church you will notice that she has always appeared to a poor person – a child, an illiterate peasant, a group of children, someone without social standing. She's never appeared to a theologian in his study, to a pope, or to a millionaire banker. She's always been the person to whom the poor look. Marian devotion is a mysticism of the poor.

We see this, for example, very powerfully in the effect that Our Lady of Guadalupe has had on much of Latin America. In all of the Americas, most of the indigenous peoples are now Christian. However, in North America, while most of the indigenous peoples are Christian, Christianity itself is not seen as a native religion, but rather as a religion brought to the native peoples from elsewhere. In Latin America, in every place where Our Lady of Guadalupe is popular, Christianity is seen to be a native religion.

But piety and devotions also run the risk of theological sloppiness and unhealthy sentimentality. That's the case too with the Mary of Devotions. We've tended to elevate Mary to divine status (which is simply wrong) and we have far too often encrusted her in so much piety that she, the Mary of Devotions, cannot possibly be the same person who wrote the Magnificat. The Mary of Devotions is often so enshrined in piety, over-simplicity, and asexuality that she needs to be protected from human complexity. Still, the Mary of Devotions offers us a lot vis-à-vis our spiritual journey.

Much more ignored is the Mary of Scripture and the role the various Gospels assign to her.

In the Synoptic Gospels, Mary is presented as a model of discipleship. More simply, she's shown to us as the one person who gets it right from the beginning. But that isn't immediately evident. On the surface, the opposite sometimes seems to be the case. For example, on a couple of occasions as Jesus is speaking to a crowd he is interrupted and told that his mother and his family are outside wanting to speak to him. His response: "Who are my mother and who are my brothers and sisters? It's those who hear the word of God and keep it." In saying this, Jesus isn't distancing his mother from himself and his message, the opposite. Before this incident is recorded in the Gospels, the evangelists have been very careful to point out that Mary was the first person to hear the word of God and keep it. What happens here is that Jesus singles out his mother first of all for her faith, not for her biology. In the Synoptic Gospels, Mary is the paradigm for discipleship. She's the first to hear the word of God and keep it.

John's Gospel gives her a different role. Here she's not the paradigm of discipleship (a role John gives to the Beloved disciple and to Mary Magdala) but is presented as Eve, the mother of humanity, and the mother of each of us. Interestingly, John never gives us Mary's name, in his Gospel she is always referred to as "the Mother of Jesus". And in this role she does two things:

First, she gives voice to human finitude, as she does at the wedding feast of Cana when she tells her son (who is always divine in John's Gospel) that "they have no wine". In John's Gospel, this is not just a conversation between Mary and Jesus; but also a conversation between the Mother of Humanity and God. Secondly, as Eve, as universal mother, and as our mother, she stands in helplessness under human pain and within human pain when she stands under the cross. In this, she shows herself as universal mother but also as an example of how injustice must be handled, namely, by standing within it in a way that does not replicate its hatred and violence so as to give it back in kind.

Mary offers us a wonderful example, not to be adored or ignored.





# From the Provincial Archives

*This item is the first in what we hope will be a regular new feature of stories drawn from the archives of the Oblate Mission in Britain and Ireland. We begin the series with an extract from the account written by Fr. Lawrence Prideaux Fox – one of our earliest English Oblates – of his conversion to the Catholic faith and his Oblate vocation, after being brought up as a Quaker. It describes the event of his eventual baptism. It is a long cry from the way it is done today. The scene is set in Devon in the 1840's...*

## **'15 August, 1843 – The day I became a Catholic...'**

"I had spent a sleepless night, and I drove to Tor Abbey with a splitting headache. Father McDonnell had warned me not to take a drink of water in the morning, as I was to receive my First Communion at Mass immediately following my Baptism. Only for that caution I should certainly have refreshed myself; for I was not aware until then that a little water would destroy the fast. I had carefully avoided telling anyone in Torquay of what I was to receive on that day, and I had imagined that it was a profound secret; but to my great disappointment I found the little Chapel was overcrowded with visitors; and the numerous chairs had been borrowed from the House for their accommodation. But what gave me the greatest amazement was the sight of two handsome easy chairs with prie dieus in front of them, outside the Sanctuary rails. Just before the commencement of the Mass, a lady, magnificently dressed in her wedding robes with a beautiful veil covering her face and trailing on the floor behind her, was ushered up to one of the chairs, and I was led to the other. I was stunned, and quite incapable of resistance to anything that should be done with me. I felt so ill that even the thought that I should die before it should be all over with me entered my mind; and Father McDonnell had forewarned me on the previous day that the ceremonies would be long and fatiguing as in all cases of adult Baptism. I said to myself I shall have received the Sacraments of Baptism, Penance, and Holy Eucharist, and feel as if I were to receive that of Extreme Unction before all is over; but surely they are not going to administer that of Matrimony also. I was afterwards told that I was not the only one present on the occasion, who thought as I did, the majority of whom were Protestants. The mystery was solved in the short address which Father McDonnell delivered before the Baptism. The lady was a Mrs. Wallace, hitherto a Protestant, who had been married lately

to a Captain Wallace, a Catholic. She was to receive conditional Baptism only, but wore her bridal dress on this solemn occasion."

It is easy to see why Fr Lawrence was a very fine preacher – he knew how to tell a story. You can enjoy the whole of his memoir on-line at [www.oblates.ie](http://www.oblates.ie)

Lawrence begins and ends his story in the West of England – Devon and Cornwall, where the Quakers had then and still have a strong presence. But its main narrative takes us to the London of Charles Dickens, with whom – Lawrence remarks – he was 'on visiting terms'.

Lawrence does not show us the poor of London. Instead we see the emerging Catholic 'middle class' exemplified by the Fox's and the famous Ward family. Lawrence's memoir transports us to a world of high religious feelings and strong forms of piety: Quaker, Catholic and Protestant. We get an intimate view of Catholic lay people and clerics.

Above all, though, it is a personal story in which Lawrence acknowledges with gratitude that, under God and Mary, he owed the grace of his conversion into the Catholic Church entirely to the witness of a Catholic cousin and his wife and children. He does not present himself as one driven initially by some inner spiritual hunger. He comes from a happy home with settled beliefs. How to explain his ready response to the new grace offered him in his contact with his cousin's family? Simply, this is what he wants to do.

– Michael Hughes, OMI

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Lawrence Fox was born in 1820. At 23 years of age, he forfeited family esteem, friends and professional hopes when he became a Catholic. He was professed as an Oblate in 1849 and ordained priest four years later. His first assignment was to Scotland, where he soon won acclaim as a preacher. In June of 1856, he became a founder member of the Oblates at Inchicore and in Ireland. Subsequent labours were in England where he numbered amongst his friends such names as Newman and Manning and Frederick Faber. At an age when most think of retirement Father Fox accepted a mission that sent him to Canada, where he laboured in parochial work for over ten years. He was called to his reward on April 1st, 1905.

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# Jubilee Celebrations

On 1st September the community of Mary Immaculate, Inchicore hosted the annual Jubilee celebrations of religious profession and ordinations. Fr Michael "Hokey" McMahon preached the homily reminding us that this celebration is not only for the Oblates but an occasion for all the families and parishioners to celebrate their commitment and involvement in the mission of the Oblates.

Congratulations to our Jubilarians.



Ordination Class of 1958



Ordination Class of 1968

**Platinum 70 Years:**

Oliver Mohan (Canada)

**Sapphire 65 Years:**

Des O'Donnell

**Diamond 60 Years:**

John Archbold (Australia), Bert Bromley,  
Paul Byrne, Sean Coleman (South Africa),  
Peter Daly, Paddy Flanagan, Conor Murphy,  
Kevin O'Conor, Joe O'Melia, Owen McGreal



**Golden 50 Years:**

Francis Daniel (Jaffna), Benny Halpin,  
Michael McMahon (Australia), Dermot Mills,  
Christy O'Leary (Philippines),  
David Shelton (Australia)

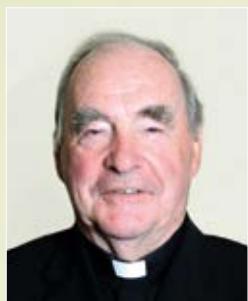
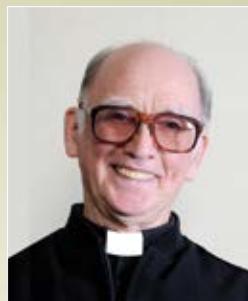
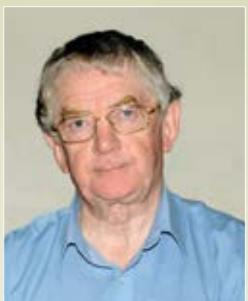
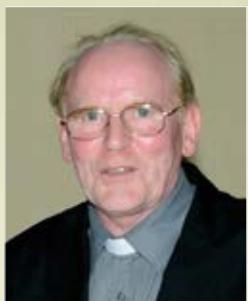
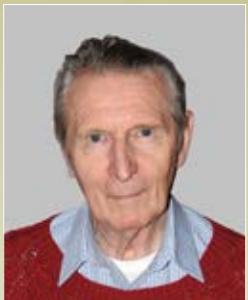
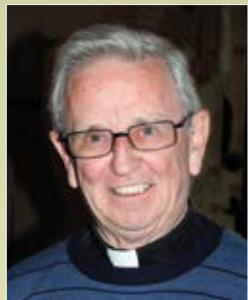
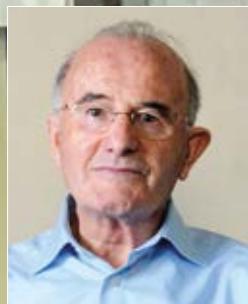


**Ruby 40 Years:**

Liam Griffin, Dominic Houlihan  
Ad Multos Annos!



## *Some of Our Jubilarians...*



**Remembering Veronica Finnegan (OMI)  
who died 17th January 2018 aged 98**

Veronica worked tirelessly for the Oblate Missions and was honoured for this commitment in 2000, when she was awarded the title of "honorary Oblate." Veronica (a parishioner of St Teresa's in Norris Green Liverpool) originally started working with Fr Joe Ryan at Holy Cross and in her later years, with Father Paschal Dillon. May she rest in peace.



# *World Meeting of Families 2018*



In August we had the privilege of welcoming Pope Francis to Ireland for an historic visit as we hosted the World Meeting of Families. It was truly a joyful and faith filled visit. As we reflect on it over the coming weeks, we will have time to reflect also on his words to us as he spoke at length of the importance of family life.

On Friday night, Bluebell Parish along with Partners in Mission, hosted a beautiful intimate evening prayer, which was open to all, but a special welcome went out to those that were visiting from Oblate Parishes abroad. It was followed by some refreshments.

Saturday was a very full day for the Pope, beginning with his visit to the President and followed by visits to the Civil Authorities, Young Married Couples, the Capuchin Day Centre, and Sean McDermott Street also meeting with some of the survivors of abuse, before a tour of Dublin city and wonderful concert in Croke Park. A memorable day.

The Oblate Parishes in Dublin also wanted to mark the occasion of the visit locally. Darndale, Inchicore and Bluebell hosted a Family Fun Day in the Oblate Basketball Hall, Inchicore. There were ice creams and burgers for all, with face painting, bouncy castles and a tree planted to mark day. We were delighted with the attendance and in particular all the young people that turned up for the fun and games.

Sunday came, the weather changed, dark clouds and plenty of rain, never the less Pope Francis was prepared for what was undoubtedly a long day. For him it began with a flight to Knock to visit Our Lady's Shrine in early morning. Despite the rain a vast crowd of people joined with the Pope in his prayer at the Shrine and spent time with the pilgrims as he travelled on his Pope mobile. All too quickly Pope Francis had to return to Dublin for further engagements.

With little rest Pope Francis had some meetings before setting out for the Phoenix Park and celebrating Mass for the final event of World Meeting of Families 2018. Despite the inclement weather, this was a most joyful and uplifting celebration for the many thousands who came to see and hear the Pope's words. Here are some of the sentiments expressed by those who were present: 'A wonderful experience', 'A privilege to be present' and 'A great encouragement.'

After the Mass, it was announced that the next meeting of 'WMOF' will take place in Rome in 2021. And so WMOF 2018 came to an end. Despite the rain, wind and for some a long walk, people were full of joy leaving the park. We thank the Holy Father for his visit, and we remember his three words, 'Please' 'Thank you' and 'Sorry'.





### Extracts From The Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis At The Final Mass Phoenix Park (Dublin), Sunday, 26 August 2018

At the end of this World Meeting of Families, we gather as a family around the table of the Lord. We thank God for the many blessings we have received in our families. And we want to commit ourselves to living fully our vocation to be, in the touching words of Saint Therese, “love in the heart of the Church”.

In this precious moment of communion with one another and with the Lord, it is good to pause and consider the source of all the good things we have received. Jesus reveals the origin of these blessings in today’s Gospel, when he speaks to his disciples. Many of them were upset, confused or even angry, struggling to accept his “hard sayings”, so contrary to the wisdom of this world. In response, the Lord tells them directly: “The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (Jn 6:63).

The task of bearing witness to this Good News is not easy. Yet the challenges that Christians face today are, in their own way, no less difficult than those faced by the earliest Irish missionaries. I think of Saint Columbanus, who with his small band of companions brought the light of the Gospel to the lands of Europe in an age of darkness and cultural dissolution. Their extraordinary missionary success was not based on tactical methods or strategic plans, no, but on a humble and liberating docility to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. It was their daily witness of fidelity to Christ and to each other that won hearts yearning for a word of grace and helped give birth to the culture of Europe. That witness remains a perennial source of spiritual and missionary renewal for God’s holy and faithful people.

Of course, there will always be people who resist the Good News, who “murmur” at its “hard words”. Yet like Saint Columbanus and his companions, who faced icy waters and stormy seas to follow Jesus, may we never be swayed or discouraged by the icy stare of indifference or the stormy winds of hostility.



But let us also humbly acknowledge that, if we are honest with ourselves, we too can find the teachings of Jesus hard. How difficult it is always to forgive those who hurt us; how challenging always to welcome the migrant and the stranger; how painful joyfully to bear disappointment, rejection, betrayal; how inconvenient to protect the rights of the most vulnerable, the unborn or the elderly, who seem to impinge upon our own sense of freedom.

Yet it is precisely at those times that the Lord asks us: “What about you, do you want to go away too?” (Jn 6:67). With the strength of the Spirit to “encourage” us and with the Lord always at our side, we can answer: “We believe; we know that you are the Holy One of God”

As we now prepare to go our separate ways, let us renew our fidelity to the Lord and to the vocation he has given to each of us. Taking up the prayer of Saint Patrick, let each of us repeat with joy: “Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me” [repeated in Irish]. With the joy and strength given by the Holy Spirit, let us say to him with confidence: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life”.



# A Return to Zimbabwe

## – The Oblate Missionary Experience 2018

Since 2011 over forty members of our Oblate Family have taken part in a missionary experience by traveling to Zimbabwe to share in the Oblate mission there. In this article Ronan Lavery, who has been leading the project, shares with us what it was like to return to Zimbabwe after a break of two years.

London – Johannesburg, Johannesburg – Bulawayo. It was a 17hr journey, but we were finally about to land in Bulawayo. I was back in Zimbabwe after two long years. I was so excited to get out to the Sandra Jones Childrens' Centre, but I was also incredibly nervous. What if they didn't remember me? After all, two years is a long time in the life of a child. Even worse, what if I didn't remember them? That thought terrified me. I determined to get out to the Centre to reunite with the kids as soon as possible...

The Sandra Jones Centre inhabits what was once the finest hotel in Bulawayo, just a few km outside of town on the old Esigodini road. It is currently home to one hundred boys and girls – primarily girls, as it was initially set up as a safe haven for young girls rescued from abusive situations. Today, many of the inhabitants of SJC have been removed from forced marriages or situations where uncles, grandfathers or family friends have taken advantage of the girls' innocence. These girls are barely in their teens, and generally the abuse is only discovered when the girls begin to exhibit the unmistakable signs of being pregnant.

As I pulled into the driveway, I honked the horn, and waited for one of the aunties to hit the remote control which would open the gate. As I waited, I heard the cry, "Uncle Roro!", which quickly became a chant. Suddenly 20 or 30 kids lined the fence, all shouting my name. They remembered me! Tearfully, I parked up, and was immediately engulfed in a horde of awesome children. These were the toddlers and primary



school kids. Later, I would go and collect the secondary school girls from their school. The team this year comprised six volunteers from the Anglo-Irish province. And they were incredible. Niamh, Issy, Mairead, Ciara, Juliette and Rachel were adored, not only by the girls, but by the staff members as well. We quickly fell into a routine – morning prayer, led by either one of our team, or one of the Centre staff. Then, after a quick coffee and some time playing with the toddlers, we'd begin the painting. (While the kids are at school, we like to try to add some value to the Centre. So between breakfast and lunch, we take on a painting project, which hopefully allows us to leave things a little bit brighter and fresher).

The team, however, all looked forward to lunchtime. That was when the Centre came alive. The nursery and primary kids were let out of school, while the vocational girls came down from the fields, and the huge, empty building began to fill with song, shouts, screams and laughter. After lunch, we had the joy of



just spending time with these incredible, wonderful, individual girls and boys. Some days we would play games, sometimes help with homework, sometimes sit patiently while the girls braided our hair (well, not mine...!) But our afternoons and evenings were always filled with joy. Each day, as the sun set, some of us would jump in the car to head home (home was the Oblate pre-novitiate, Mazenod House, where the resident Oblates looked after us incredibly well), while the lucky ones got to stay in the Centre, put the toddlers to bed, and then spend some quality time with the older girls. They didn't feel quite so lucky though, at the 4:30 wake up – or, for that matter, when the buckets of freezing cold water arrived for them to wash with!

The Oblate Missionary Experience is designed primarily to allow people to experience life as a missionary. We live together, eat together, work and pray together. It is humbling, at times it is challenging, but above all it is a privilege. To play a part in the lives of the incredible boys and girls who call SJC home, is a privilege. To be a witness to the suffering endured by countless children in Zimbabwe, while heartbreakingly, is a privilege. To live out the Oblate charism, “He sent me to bring the Good News to the poor”, is a privilege.

While on the Missionary Experience in Zimbabwe, our team is asked only one thing – to love. To show the children of SJC that they are beautiful, divine, and dignified. Or, in the words of St Eugene de Mazenod, “You are God’s children, the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, heirs to his eternal kingdom, chosen portion of his inheritance; you are, in the words of St. Peter, a holy nation, you are kings, you are priests, you are in some way gods, You are gods, children of the Most High”

– Ronan Lavery

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We are very excited to announce that in February 2019, Debbie Brennocks, co-founder of the Sandra Jones Childrens’ Centre, will be visiting the Anglo-Irish Province. She is currently booked to speak at masses in the London and Anglesey Centres of Mission, as well as giving presentations in a number of local schools.

Details of Debbie’s itinerary will be included in the December issue of Connections. If, in the meantime, you want further information on her visit, please contact me at:

[lavery.ronan@googlemail.com](mailto:lavery.ronan@googlemail.com)

### Introducing **Rebecca Roughneen**

Rebecca is our new social media communications specialist.

She will be working with us to support and raise awareness of the work of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate through digital communications - online and on social media platforms, and highlight our projects within our communities, and ultimately to help grow the Oblate mission “respecting the dignity and sacredness of each person, we seek to grow close to Christ and make him known through our way of life and ministry”. If you have any ideas or suggestions, please drop her an email at: [socialmedia.oblates@gmail.com](mailto:socialmedia.oblates@gmail.com)





# Lourdes 2018

*Come to the Water all who are thirsty (Isaiah 55.1)*

This year marked the 160th anniversary of Our Lady appearing to young Bernadette Soubirous. Pilgrims have been travelling to Lourdes ever since and the Missionary Oblates of Mary have also been part of this Sacred Story and Journey. This September, the Oblates travelled to Lourdes with people from across Ireland, England Scotland, Wales and the Channel Isles.

There are two primary Christian symbols to be experienced while in Lourdes; water and light. In John's gospel we read that Jesus, tired by the journey, sat by a well. He sat down to rest himself. In a similar way perhaps, those who travelled to Lourdes did the same. We all arrived tired and carrying our own crosses; some very visible, some invisible. We came to Lourdes at the invitation of Mary who points and leads us to Jesus her Son who offers life-giving and healing water; he himself is the Water of Life. Through the healing and ancient water of Lourdes we are restored, renewed and refreshed. The buying and lighting of candles in Lourdes is also an ancient tradition. People lit candles as they prayed for those who asked to be remembered at the Grotto. These flickering flames are a visible reminder of the words of Jesus; 'I am the Light of the World, whoever follows me will have the light of life.'

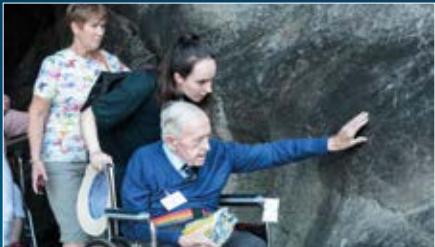
Our pilgrimage in Lourdes was a time of Christian community. While we were there we were not just there on our own. We were surrounded by others who were praying with and for us. Our Assisted Pilgrims were cared for with love and compassion by Oblate Hospitality Groups including our Youth Service, our medical staff, our Handmaids and by so many others. Our Pilgrimage was truly a living and vibrant example of what it means to be The Body of Christ. Everyone who was there had a part to play and the Pilgrimage would not have been the same without them. In fact, the Pilgrimage could not have



been such a success without them. We are so grateful and indebted to all those who freely gave of their time, talents and energy to be part of our experience in Lourdes this year.

The message of Lourdes this year was taken from the gospel of the Wedding Feast of Cana when Mary simply said to servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' Jesus told and showed us that he came to serve and not be served. He bent low, took the place of a slave and washed our feet and asks us to follow his example. At the end of every mass, we are sent out with these words, 'Go now to love and serve the Lord.' This year, as always, we saw love and service in action every moment of our time in Lourdes. Having returned home, may we now continue to hear what Mary says to us, may we do whatever Jesus tells us to do as we love and serve each other in ours homes, our families, our work places, our parish communities and neighbourhoods.

– Michael Moore OMI



**This year a group from Leith joined the annual pilgrimage to Lourdes for the first time. Here Veronica Halloran and Rosemary Gillon share their experience with us:**

Having travelled to Lourdes for 17 years as helpers on our diocesan pilgrimages, it was refreshing to have had time for reflection and private prayer, to visit new places and to appreciate the beauty of nature in the Domaine.

The painting of the Last Supper in the Carmel Church was a poignant depiction of Jesus and the apostles seated in a circle. At the Masses of our little group from Leith, we sat in a circle and were transported back 2000 years. We felt so close to each other, then and throughout the pilgrimage with everyone looking to the needs of others. That bond was manifested among all the pilgrims and it was amazing to think of 'one hundred years of service' being recognised at the thanksgiving and missioning ceremony.

At the Mass of St. Eugene we sang 'I will come to you in the silence'. We had many opportunities to enjoy silence, and in the Carmel Church we read the words of St John of the Cross – 'God speaks to us in the eternal silence'. The silence of the Chapel of Adoration was moving and powerful and gave an inner peace. At the Holy Hour we experienced the beauty of silence, interspersed with the gentleness of the Taize music. Sitting under the trees on the prairie the sun's diffused rays reminded us of an Oblate's expression, 'under the waterfall of God's love'.



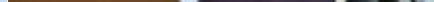
For the first time we noticed the figure of the Crucified Christ looking down on the pilgrims as they entered St. Joseph's gate. The High Stations were made more challenging in the heat but we were rewarded with Brother Michael's thought-provoking reflections. Here again help was at hand to keep everyone safe and able to complete the exercise.

The anointing ceremony was especially moving as the priests moved around the pilgrims. As the priest said our names we were again reminded of the words of Thursday's hymn, 'I have called you each by name'.

We were inspired by the patience in evidence at all times – the patience of the assisted pilgrims and their carers, of those waiting to enter the Baths or the Grotto, but all the other fruits of the Spirit were present, shining in abundance – love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self control.



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# French Women of Faith

## – the Oblate Pilgrimage to Paris and Lisieux

After whizzing across the channel on Eurostar we arrived in Paris to begin our pilgrimage. We stayed at the Sacre Coeur Convent attached to the beautiful basilica with its spectacular views and all night access to the golden, mosaic filled church. It was wonderful to pray at night in the quiet of the church after listening to the nuns singing evensong.

There is a historic link between Sacre Coeur and the Oblates. It was an Oblate, Cardinal Hippolyte Guibert OMI who was the patron of the project to build a Basilica in honour of the Sacred Heart. He chose Montmartre as the site of the future basilica because it was the Mount of the Martyrs, the spot where the first missionaries of the Ile-de-France shed their blood for the Gospel. Another motivating factor for the Cardinal's choice was that, at this time, Montmartre was one of the poorest residential quarters of the city and, in order to remain faithful to the Oblate motto, he wanted first and foremost to evangelise the poor through prayer. In the parish church of Saint-André d'Europe, there is a stained glass window depicting Saint Eugene and Father Tempier and in front of them Cardinal Guibert presenting the church of the Sacred Heart to St. Eugene.

On our first tour we met our first great lady of faith, Catherine Labouré. She dedicated her life to the poor and worked among the needy for over 40 years. Her dedication was rewarded with a vision of Mary and from her came the miraculous medal so loved today. Many miracles have been attributed to it and the church was full of pilgrims praying at her grave. Thousands of names adorned the walls of the chapel thanking her for her help in so many ways. The work of her followers, the nuns of St Vincent de Paul, are still known for their work with the marginalised of our society. Someone so pertinent to us today as the gap between rich and poor widens.

A little over a year after his Good Friday conversion, St Eugene entered the seminary of Saint Sulpice in Paris in the autumn of 1808. Walking in the footsteps of St. Eugene we visited St. Sulpice Seminary. It is majestic in design but it was also humbling to find out that priests from our country went there to train in French. It also highlighted the dedication of the young men who left their homes to follow their vocation. This includes Fr Dick Edwards from my own town of Holyhead. I can't help thinking it must have been daunting for him as Welsh was his first language and had no French at all. We listened to the seminarians sing beautifully, a sound that must have been heard in St Eugene's time.

In the next few days we visited and celebrated Mass together in some beautiful churches. We visited Notre Dame, the historic heart of the church in France where the Crown of Thorns is believed to reside. Though packed with tourists, it is still a truly spiritual place to visit. How many millions of pilgrims have walked in the same steps as us? After Paris it was on to Amiens where St. Eugene was ordained to the priesthood in 1811. The stained glass and elegant pillars soar into the air making this a spectacular sight. The masons tried to capture heaven with light and height. Here, they truly succeeded.

The final part of our pilgrimage brought us to Lisieux to meet the another of our women of faith, the writer of "Journey of a Soul" Thérèse of Lisieux. I have to confess that I had rather a chocolate box idea of her and prior to the visit could really feel no connection to this enclosed nun who died at only 24 years of age. Thérèse only emerged from the rosy mist when our excellent guide told her story. There is nothing like walking in the footsteps of someone to bring them to life. Her belief in the power of love was all consuming. Through her sister's photographs you can see the





change in her as she lived happily in the convent. It was moving to see her writing desk, her notebooks. Her writing was to carry her message of love to the world. They would give great comfort to the troops caught in the horror of the First World War. It shows the impact of her work that when she was first buried only a handful people were there yet when she was reinterred in the convent only ten years later thousands of people lined the way along with a film crew.

She was quickly recognised as a saint and in 1925 Oblate Bishop Charlebois together with the bishops of the Canadian missions, decided to ask the pope to proclaim St. Thérèse as patroness of the missions. Since then she has remained very dear to many millions across the globe including Pope Francis. We had our final mass in the crypt of the Basilica built in her honour. My encounter with The Little Flower, the thinker, has been rewarding. She shows how little things are important. As she herself said: "Miss no single opportunity of making some small sacrifice, here by a smiling look, there by a kindly word; always doing the smallest right and doing it all for love."

If we all did that maybe the world would be a much better place. Faith takes many guises and, in Northern France, I found some great examples to follow in my journey of the soul.

– Christine Hunt

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*Advent Retreat*

# *The Lord is in Our Midst*

(Zep 3.11)

## **Overnight Retreat**

**Mon 10th (supper) – Wed 12th (lunch) December**  
**Fri 14th (supper) – Sun 16th (lunch) December**

An opportunity to prepare for the great Feast of Christmas, to bring our focus to what is at the heart of Christmas, the birth of a child in Bethlehem and the amazing wonder of a God who loves us so much more than we can ever understand.

This Retreat will include some reflective inputs, Eucharist, moments of prayer and periods for quiet and gentle reflection. The Sacrament of Reconciliation can also be celebrated with anyone who wishes to truly “come home” to God this Christmas.

**Cost:**

Residential – £130 Non Residential – £80  
Deposit – £10

**For information please contact**

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89 Broughton Lane, Crewe, CW2 8JS, England

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

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

## **Day Retreat**

**Tuesday 4th December 2018**

The coming of God into our world, the Feast of Christmas, expresses, at its deepest level, the incredible love of God for us... and yet, amid the hype and energy of Christmas, we so easily lose sight of the miracle which is Christmas. This Day Retreat is ideally suited for groups or individuals who wish to stop for a few moments, to step outside their busy schedules, to rest, be at peace and reflect in a gentle and prayerful way on the Glory of Christmas.

The Retreat will include a reflective input, Eucharist, quiet times for reflection and an opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Each day begins with Registration and Coffee at 10.00am and finishes at 4.00pm.

**Cost:**

£17.50 per person  
– With soup & rolls, scones, jam & cream at lunch time  
£12 per person  
– With tea & coffee (bringing packed lunch)

## **OBLATE SALE OF WORK**

**In aid of the Oblate Missions****STALLS INCLUDE**

\*Books \*Plants \*Bric-a-Brac\*  
\*Wheel of Fortune \*Christmas Cards  
\*New Woollens \*Toy Stall \*Tea & Sandwiches

**Sat 17th & Sun 18th Nov 12–4pm**In Arus Mhuire Hall, Inchicore,  
Dublin 8.**ALL WELCOME!****For more details contact Fr. Vincent or Barbara mamioblaze@eircom.net**

If you would like to share your thoughts or ideas with us please contact: Fr. Lorcán O'Reilly OMI, Partners in Mission Office, Denis Hurley House, 14 Quex Road, London NW6 4PL or email [oblite\\_partners@btinternet.com](mailto:oblite_partners@btinternet.com)

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