

OBLATE CONNECTIONS

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Missionary Oblates
– Always Close to the People

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CONNECTIONS

There is little doubt that as we approach Christmas this year there is a lot of anxiety and uncertainty in the air. The ongoing cost of living crisis is causing many people to struggle to heat their homes and feed their families. Food banks run in our parishes and other places are in demand like never before. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace we are all too aware of the ongoing war in Ukraine. In the face of such devastation people have responded with generosity and hospitality by welcoming refugees into our midst. The list could go on, yet as Christians we are a people of hope.

As we seek a way to bring hope in the midst of so many difficulties maybe we can look to the example of Mary. After receiving the annunciation Mary could quite easily have stayed at home and worried about her situation. That would have been a very natural response to what was happening! Yet, instead we are told that she “arose and went with haste” (v. 39). As Pope Francis reminds us, when Mary was faced with her difficulties “she did not become discouraged, she was not disheartened:

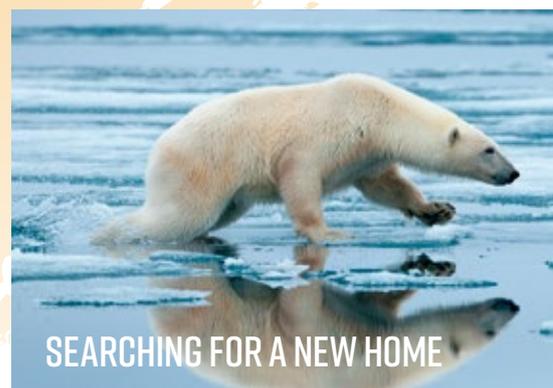
but she arose. She did not look down at her problems, but up to God So let us cast to him the negative thoughts, the fears that block every impulse and that prevent us from moving forward. And then let us do as Mary did: let us look around and look for someone to whom we can be of help! Is there an elderly person I know to whom I can give a little help, company? Or offering a service to someone, a kindness, a phone call? But who can I help? I get up and I help. By helping others, we help ourselves rise up again from difficulties. ...Let us not forget that the first act of charity we can do for our neighbours is to offer them a serene and smiling face. It is bringing the joy of Jesus to them, as Mary did with Elizabeth.”

May the upcoming Christmas season be a time of hope and blessing for us all. In the face our current challenges, let us not lose heart but rather turn to Mary and she will guide us towards an encounter with her Son, for he is our Way, our Truth and our Life.

- Fr. Lorcán O'Reilly OMI



“After an absence of three years, the Oblate pilgrimage set foot in Lourdes in September this year. If someone had said, as we left in September 2019, that the pilgrimage would not return for three whole years, not one of us would have believed it.”



“Our faith calls us to respond to the needs of our neighbours.”



A word from Fr. Oliver Barry, OMI

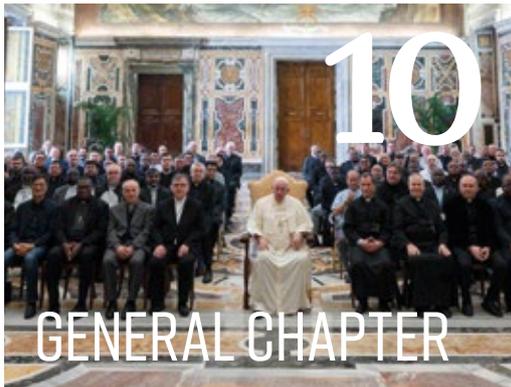
This year has been a dramatic and sad year for our Global Community. The war in Ukraine impacts on all our lives. The people who are the direct victims of this conflict continue to need the support and help of the world community including us. The economic crisis that has followed touches the lives of everybody and in particular those who are poorest.



Jesus was born into a situation of conflict. His homeland was occupied by a much stronger power that enforced its rule with oppression and cruelty. We can see the impact on the life of Jesus in the context into which he was born from the very earliest days of his life in Bethlehem to his death on Calvary.

For us the context in which we live shapes how we live as Christians. Our faith calls us to respond to the needs of our neighbours from wherever they might come. Our Faith calls us to care for the fragile planet which is our Common Home. We do so with Hope and in Communion with one another. During 2022 the Oblates of Mary Immaculate met in a General Chapter of the Congregation. The theme of the Chapter was “Pilgrims of Hope, in Communion”. During Advent we welcome once again the one who is the source of our hope, Jesus Christ. Faith in him is what unites us with one another. As Christians we will journey together through the context of the coming year in Hope. The old proverb reminds us the “It is better to light one candle than curse the darkness”.

- Fr. Oliver Barry OMI,
Province Leader





NO ROOM IN THE INN

– Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI

Jesus was born outside of the city, outside of a hospital, outside of a normal house. The Gospels tell us he was born in a stable, outside the city because there was no room for them in the inn.

We have always vilified the infamous innkeeper who turned Mary and Joseph away, and the lesson we took from this was the need for less self-preoccupation in our lives, that we should not be so busy and preoccupied that there's no room for the divine to be born in our lives.

Indeed, there's a lesson there, one I need for my own life. Given the pressures of the past few weeks, so far this year I haven't had the chance to give Christmas more than a passing thought. No room in my inn right now! And so, I nurse a lot of sympathy for that original innkeeper, knowing how easily we can over-pack our lives so that there's no room left to welcome in a divine visitor.

Now, while that's an important challenge, biblical scholars suggest there's a deeper lesson in the fact that Jesus was born in a stable outside the city because there was no room for him in the inn. The real point the Gospels are making is not so much the seeming callousness of an innkeeper, but rather the fact that Jesus was born outside of a city, outside of what's comfortable, outside of glamour and fame, outside of being recognized by the rich and the powerful, outside of notice by the everyday world. Jesus was born in anonymity, poor, outside of all notice, except by faith and God.

His birth outside the city also foreshadowed his death and burial. Jesus' earthly life will end as it began, as a stranger, an outsider, crucified outside the city, buried outside the city, just as he was born outside the city.

Thomas Merton once gave a particularly poignant comment on this: Into this world, this demented inn, in which there is absolutely no room for Him at all, Christ has come uninvited. But because He cannot be at home in it, because He is out of place in it, and yet must be in it, His place is with those others for whom there is no room. His place is with those who do not belong, who are rejected by power because they are regarded as weak, those who are discredited, who are denied status as persons, who are tortured, bombed, and exterminated. With those for whom there is no room, Christ is present in the world. He is mysteriously present in those for whom there seems to be nothing but the world at its worst.

Jesus was born into this world unnoticed, outside the city, outside of all persons and events that seemed important at the time. Two thousand years later, we now recognize the importance of that birth. Indeed, the world measures time by it. However, at the time, almost no one took notice.

What's the lesson? What's the takeaway? Among other things, this is meant to give us a different perspective vis-à-vis what's ultimately important in this world and what isn't. Who ultimately shapes history? The big movers and shakers or those on the outside?

Biblically speaking, most of us were born outside the city, meaning that in our lives we will forever be the outsiders, unknowns, anonymous, small-time, small-town, persons who are incidental to the big picture and the big action. Our photo and our story will never grace the headlines. Our names will never be up in lights and we will live and die in basic anonymity, not known by many outside of our own small circles.

“What’s deepest, most meaningful, and most important in life is often born in anonymity, unnoticed by the powerful, tenderly swaddled in faith, outside the city.”

Most of us will live out our lives in quiet obscurity, in rural areas, in small towns, and in the unknown parts of our cities, watching the big events of our world from the outside and always seeing someone other than ourselves as important. We ourselves, seemingly, will remain forever unknown and our talents and contributions will not be particularly noticed by anyone, perhaps not even by our own families. Figuratively, we will always be “outside the city”. We will live, work, and give birth to love and life in humble places.

Perhaps most painful of all, we will know the frustration of being unable to truly give our talents and gifts over to the world, but will find instead that the deepest symphonies and melodies that live within us will never find much expression in the outside world. Our dreams and our deepest riches will never find much of an earthly stage. There will never be a place in the inn for what’s best in us to be born. Our deep riches, like Jesus’ birth in our world, will remain “outside the city”, ultimately dying by the martyrdom of anonymity and inadequate self-expression (also “outside the city”).

Mary gave birth to the Christ in a barn outside the city because there was no room in the inn. This is a comment on more than just the inhospitality of one over-stressed innkeeper. It’s an important teaching on how we need to assess what ultimately shapes life. In essence, it tells us that it’s not necessarily those who seemingly preside at the center of things (the powerful, the rich, the famous, the government leaders, the entertainment celebrities, the corporate heads, the scholars, the academics) who will have time measured by their lives. What’s deepest, most meaningful, and most important in life is often born in anonymity, unnoticed by the powerful, tenderly swaddled in faith, outside the city.

Sunday Reflections

Each week a reflection on the Sunday Readings is published on our website oblates.ie

These reflections are prepared by Fr. Brian Maher OMI who writes: “A Gospel reflection is no more than one person’s response to the Gospel. We can each respond in our own way and from our own situation.”

If you would like to receive the reflection please sign up online or email communications@oblates.ie

If you have any comments, questions or thoughts on the weekly scripture reflection, please feel welcome to email Fr. Brian at b.maher@oblates.ie



A RETURN TO LOURDES

After an absence of three years, the Oblate pilgrimage set foot in Lourdes in September this year. If someone had said, as we left in September 2019, that the pilgrimage would not return for three whole years, not one of us would have believed it...

Because of the need to be super-cautious about the continued presence of Covid-19, we could not bring our Assisted Pilgrims with us. It was not an easy decision to make; Lourdes is about the sick. We would carry them in our hearts in a unique way this year.

And 2022 was not without its challenges! In the last few weeks, we had to make so many travel and accommodation changes but it worked out and so it was that we gathered on Sunday morning around the Crowned Virgin Statue, with only the Edinburgh group still to arrive, and the pilgrimage had begun!

In the years since we had last been in Lourdes, our much-loved Bishop Ray Field, stepped down because of health issues. Finding someone with the simplicity, temperament, and overall 'sense of Lourdes' was never going to be easy. But God does provide and so it was that Bishop Eamon Walsh accepted Fr. Lorcán's invitation to lead our pilgrimage.

When going to Lourdes, there are a number of exercises (as they used to be called) or liturgies, that are part and parcel of the pilgrimage. These include the Marian Torchlight Procession, the Blessed Sacrament Procession, our Grotto Mass, as well as the service of reconciliation and the baths.



Our first morning began with the Stations of the Cross. This time of prayer, reflecting on the Passion of Jesus, was an ideal start to our pilgrimage. Afterwards, it was clear that not just our bodies, but our hearts and minds were now firmly on pilgrimage. That evening, we led the torchlight procession. It is always a very special evening as we make our way, holding our candles, and praying the Rosary. The torchlight is a faithful and ongoing response to Our Lady's request to "come in procession."

From here, the days seemed to flow effortlessly one to another. In 2020 and 2021, the years when pilgrimage to Lourdes was not possible, we introduced the virtual pilgrimage. This was hugely successful and in those two years, people joined us online for our pilgrimage who, for whatever reason, had never been able to come with us to Lourdes in person. Even as 2021 ended, we resolved that when we returned to Lourdes, that we would never forget, nor leave behind, those who encountered us through the virtual pilgrimage. Thankfully, in the intervening years since 2019, Lourdes itself has

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invested in a lot of technology so as to be able to bring Lourdes to a wider audience around the world. Through our meetings with the Lourdes Communications team, we arranged our pilgrimage so that we could maximise the technology available and offer the opportunity in 2022 to people unable to be with us in person, to join us, just as they had in 2020 and 2021. We are determined to continue and expand this in the years ahead.

As we planned it, we commented frequently how this would be so different to those of previous years. And yes, it was different. But what was not different was the sense of sacredness that permeates each moment there. Of course, we missed our sick, our Assisted Pilgrims, but through the ordinary interactions that took place, whether over coffee or a drink, our theme for the year, “Healing the Healer” was alive. Pilgrimage became very personal.

Two of the Masses that we celebrate are very special to all of us. First, of course, is the Grotto Mass. After all, the Grotto is the heart of Lourdes. It is here that Our Lady called out to Bernadette and thankfully, for all of us, Bernadette responded. To have a pilgrimage Mass here is one of the highlights. This year, and again because of the technological advances in Lourdes, our Mass was broadcast throughout all of France! Each day, the 10:00am Mass at the Grotto is broadcast, irrespective of the language. On the evening of the

Grotto Mass, we ended our day when a small group from the Kairos Community Trust in London led us on a reflection on the theme of our pilgrimage. It was a very personal, sometimes emotional, and always deep exploration of the theme. A number of the Kairos family shared very personally about their lives, their hopes, and what it is that sustains them. It was a moving experience and such an honour to be there and listen to them.

The other Mass that is loved by us all is the Mass with Anointing of the Sick. We pray for good weather as this means we can have this Mass outdoors, on the Esplanade Altar. We have been blessed most years with sunshine and this year was no different.



One person described this year's pilgrimage to me as being, "very deep." And if that, indeed, has been a description of this pilgrimage, then the Mass with Anointing of the Sick was the epitome of it..

It was a beautiful Mass, with a wonderful homily given by our 'new' bishop, Bishop Eamon Walsh. He captured the sense of the pilgrimage. And as the anointing took place among the hundreds gathered there at the St Bernadette Altar, outdoors, and beside the great doors of the Rosary Basilica, the sun shone down on us and a felt sense told us that this truly, was a grace-filled moment.

As the saying goes, all good things must come to an end and after our closing ceremony, when Geraldine Walsh received the McGonagle Medal for 50 years' service with the pilgrimage, it was time to pack our

bags. There is no doubt that our 2022 pilgrimage was different, maybe never to be repeated? We can only hope and pray that in 2023, we will return once more and then, with our beloved Assisted Pilgrims. 2022 was everything – and more – that we hoped it to be. The pain of separation over 2020 and 2021, not having the Oblates in Lourdes, was its own reminder that these days are important ones in our lives, reminding us of who we are, and what our baptism calls us to be. Our Lady of Lourdes, pray for us.

– Gerard Bennett



THE OBLATE SISTERS

The Missionary Oblate Sisters of Mary Immaculate, are a young Religious Institute that came into existence in Spain in 1997, when nine women came together to live in community with the intention of following St. Eugene de Mazenod and the footsteps of his sons.

The Sisters make up a part of the greater Oblate Family, and they see the birth of their Institute as a grace of the canonization of Eugene de Mazenod in 1995. As women consecrated to God, they live the same charism as the Oblates: “To bring the Good News to the poor.” This year marks the 25th anniversary since they first came together in community.

On September 14th, the Oblate Sisters commemorated 25 years of community life and on Saturday, September 24th, a Mass was held to celebrate this milestone.

Back in 1997, on a day just as ordinary as today, a courageous group of young women, aged 19 to 24, commenced to experience community life in the Emmaus retreat house, in Pozuelo de Alarcón, Madrid. These women, who were deeply in love with Jesus the Saviour and felt called to live out the charism of St. Eugene in religious life, set out to respond to God’s call, thereby embarking on a new journey in the Church.

This seed of the Spirit has been growing in each of these sisters. Their communities are places of hospitality and welcome – places where they live and experience the joy of the Gospel, despite the ups and downs of life. From the beginning of their existence they have lived the gift of internationality, being a very great challenge for our communities and in mission. They describe their mission in the following way:



Jola and Theresa at the beginning of their Novitiate

Our missionary spirituality, driven by our Oblation motivates our actions and keeps us continually available and open for mission. We carry it out as apostolic women following the example of Mary, virgin and mother, in communion with the Church and her shepherds and open to collaboration with others gospel workers. Our way of carrying out the mission is characterized by the evangelization of the poorest from the personal experience of salvation, wanting to arouse or awaken faith in those we meet.

As the Sisters celebrate 25 years, the guiding theme which will accompany and inspire them this year will be: “Giving life to the heart of St. Eugene in our times”.



Pilgrims of Hope in Communion. This was the theme that drew together 78 Missionary Oblates to the beautiful hillside town of Nemi in Italy, about 30km south of Rome.

This was the very place where in 1965 representatives of the Second Vatican Council, among them our former Superior General Fr. Léo Deschâtelets, drew up the final draft of the Vatican II decree on the missionary activity of the Church called 'Ad Gentes' (To the Nations), which affirmed that 'the pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature'.

From the 14th September to 14th October, Oblate Brothers and priests representing 70 countries gathered to pray, listen and discern the movement of the Spirit of God in the lived reality and felt needs of the people, the church, and the world around us.

A General Chapter is a very significant and transformative moment in the life of a Religious Congregation. It's like an AGM (Annual General Meeting) of a corporation or a charity – except "General Chapters" take place every six years with representatives (called Chapter delegates or Capitulars) coming from all parts of the Oblate World. It is a privileged time of personal and communal reflection and conversion. Together, in union with the Church, we evaluate the past six years, with its joys and hopes, struggles and challenges, and discern God's will in the urgent needs of our times. During the Chapter, the delegates discern and elect the leadership for the next six years entrusting them to accompany and animate all the members of the Congregation and the wider Oblate Family.



Fr. Chico offers the cross of St. Eugene to Pope Francis to venerate

Permit me to highlight some significant moments for me in the life of the 37th General Chapter:

During the first week, we were inspired by the presence of seven Oblate Lay Associates representing the five Regions of the Oblate World. They presented the experience of the 2nd Oblate Lay Associates Conference (OLAC) that took place earlier this year and brought recommendations for the Chapter delegates to consider and approve as action plans for the next six years. The Chapter delegates unanimously accepted their proposal – key among them the setting up of an International Oblate Lay Associate Committee to animate and support Regional Conferences and Local groups in embracing the Mazenodian Spirit and Oblate Mission.



As Missionary Oblates, we are a Congregation of Priests and Brothers bound by religious vows. In the western hemisphere the Oblate Brothers are an endangered group. The Brothers at the Chapter, made a sincere and heartfelt call to keep alive the vocation to be an Oblate Brother. The Brothers remind us of our core identity as consecrated religious men united as “brothers” through a common Oblation, lived each day in apostolic communities, for the mission of evangelization.

Our leadership elections recalled the experience of the Prophet Samuel who went in search of anointing a new King for Israel and did not find him among the assembled, but out in the fields minding the sheep. Likewise, for the first time in our General Chapter history, the newly elected Superior General was not among the assembled Oblates at the Chapter. Fr. Chicho Rois was called out of the desert (Western Sahara) to take on the mantle of our Founder, St Eugene de Mazenod, as 14th Superior General. He is viewed as the successor of Eugene and called to be the focus of unity and inspiration for the Congregation. Within two days of the election, Fr. Chicho joined us with a deep sense of acceptance and openness to what God was asking of him through the Chapter delegates. With his presence the delegates of the Chapter numbered 79. The leadership of the Congregation was renewed with new members elected to various posts.

Following the election of the new leadership, we made a pilgrimage to the Vatican to have an audience with the Pope. Debilitated by knee troubles, he walked in looking fragile of health, stick in hand. Once seated, he welcomed us with a broad smile and a warm gaze of love, that of a father delighted to be in the company of his children. This meeting is a moment of grace and blessing not just for us delegates gathered, but for the entire Oblate Family and the people with whom we mission. The encounter is an affirmation of our communion with the Holy Father, with the Universal Church who calls us forth and sends us out as missionaries to the most abandoned. Pope Francis encouraged us on the theme of our Chapter and urged us: “It is a theme that sums up your identity on the streets of the world... called to bring the Gospel of hope, joy, and peace.



Pauline Thomas (Wales)

Fr. Louis Logan
(outgoing Superior General)

The disciples of Emmaus recognised Christ in the breaking of bread. They spoke of how their hearts burnt within them as he spoke to them on the road. The Chapter is a time of pilgrimage –walking together in prayerful silences and shared reflections, in small group discussions and plenary sessions, with deep listening and heartfelt discussions, willing to set aside own personal agendas and look to the common good, letting go “our hopes” to embrace our blessed Hope, Jesus Christ. The Chapter encompassed moments of joy and laughter, of excitement and tiredness, long nights and early mornings, birthdays marked and jubilees celebrated, anniversaries remembered and deaths commemorated.

And without fail, always accompanying us on this pilgrimage is the ever-faithful presence of Mary, the Mother of Christ and our Mother. She is the pilgrim par excellence, who in trust is always moving out to those in need. This year the Oblates mark the 200th anniversary of a moment of grace, which St Eugene recounted in his diary. In 1822 when the Oblates were a fledgling group, he found himself at a crossroad, wondering if this small band of committed missionaries had a future in the church. In prayer, he was moved by what he saw as a smile forming on the statue of the Virgin Mary in the chapel. Comforted by this image, he went forth in confidence. Assured that Mary continues to smile upon us, let us go forth together as pilgrims of hope in communion.

- Fr. Leo Philomin, OMI



“LAUDATO SI’, mi’ Signore” – “Praise be to you, my Lord”. In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us.

LOOK AT THE WORLD

These words sum up indeed a reverie, which depicts a harmonious abode that serves as a bridge among all living creatures. Yet, the reality is far from St Francis Vision of Creation. Pollution, waste, climate change, wars and the breakdown of societies are significant themes, which Pope Francis discusses in detail in his LAUDATO SI’ encyclical on care for our common home.

This year while reflecting on the above issues, I wondered how many people have read and reflected on LAUDATO SI’? Especially in today’s fast-paced world when readership is lessening more than ever. “How could I help in conveying the message of LAUDATO SI’ in different way?”

Generally, our thoughts and senses are provoked by audible, sensory, and smell elements. However, for many, the visual aspect remains unrivalled. In a way, art can serve as a connecting bridge between the artist and the viewer. This is often to provoke and alert us or perhaps to awaken something within.

My journey was filled with enthusiasm and dedication. Rivers of inspiration emerged; it felt almost like interpreting a cinematic scenario into still yet moving pictures. And so, I have created seventeen works of art that interweave the story of the environmental, cultural, and ethical concerns raised in LAUDATO SI’. This exhibition entitled “Look at the World”, urge us to take a quantum leap in our consciousness from every conceivable angle: love, relationships, generosity, greed, politics, power, the media as well as despair, life, and death.

Discarded materials; such as broken glass, bits of wood, stones, foam, plastic cable ties, fabric and the like were used to weave unique stories that relate to us in one way or another. The main motive behind this was about both rejecting the throwaway culture, and giving a new lease of life to something no longer of use or in need. Another intention was that I wanted to show people that even junk and waste can sometimes become a new, yet interesting landscape; a symbol of resilience and of finding beauty in imperfection.



“even junk and waste can sometimes become a new, yet interesting landscape; a symbol of resilience and of finding beauty in imperfection..”

Nature, people, and animals were the focal points of each canvas. They were the protagonists that helped in conveying an important message through different styles, which at times, needed to be dramatic. Such techniques were not meant to leave the viewer cold but to provide a deep focus and urgent awareness.

Searching for a New Home takes us on a virtual journey to witness the disturbing phenomenon of climate change and its effects. Since the industrial revolution, carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions have raised temperatures, and especially higher in the poles. The results, as we now know are the rapid melting of glaciers. This has brought about the extinction of part of the planet’s biodiversity and its many creatures are gradually being chased out of their natural habitat.

Using foam, fabric, and acrylic paint, I tried to depict a story of a polar bear hopping from one ice plank to the other. Here, we get to witness the impact of the unthoughtful actions of human activities on this faraway land. Not only our Bear friend’s home is in danger, but also his own existence. By distancing ourselves from nature and other creatures, which is becoming the norm in our many fast-paced consumerist cultures. We are not only destroying Mother Earth but also profiting at the expense of its biodiversity.

Co-existing in harmony and peace alongside everyone is proving a challenging task in today’s world. And so, this piece sums up in brief the imbalance between humans and their relationship with their surroundings.

Here, Pope Francis invites us to reflect on the world around us, and to see nature as a book that grants us a glimpse of infinite beauty and goodness. We have a mission and that is to protect and look after our common home, not destroy it. We must open our eyes to see how God is present throughout creation.

“Searching for a new home” can also be a bewildering metaphor for our life journey; an alienating experience of leaving behind the familiar and venturing out into the unknown. Unimaginable rising challenges of noise, pollution and waste are creating such a conflict that is leading inevitably to tragic consequences. Our dear Bear is going through his own destitution, so will other creatures follow suit including us. There comes a moment in life, where destitution is not about losing one’s home but it is rather that unsettled inner feeling of chaos and instability that is brought by today’s world.

At its heart, LAUDATO SI’ is not about an artificial crisis with a happy ending, it is a close look into the current state of our environment. This is as it must be: “Look at the world” is both direct and provoking, and while some themes were obvious to the naked eye, others were open to interpretation, as everyone sees something different through their own lens and perception. I hope I managed to capture an intriguing yet enriching experience for those who came to view this exhibition.

– Chaher Rhomaei



75th Birthday

“Oh! When will he return again?”

For us, in 2022, a 75th birthday is not exceptional. When Eugene reached 75, average life expectancy at birth was about 40 for men and 42 for women. So what was Eugene doing in Yorkshire for his 75th, a second arduous visit to England in seven years?

He came for the opening of the splendid new Oblate church of Mount St Mary's on Richmond Hill in Leeds, at that time in the diocese of Beverley. Its sanctuary, designed by Edward Pugin, with its ample liturgical space, was later described by Cardinal Heenan, then Bishop of Leeds, as the most beautiful sanctuary in England!

It is closed now, but its opening on Wednesday July 29, 1857, caused a stir and was celebrated by the whole city, Catholics and Protestants alike. Bishop Briggs the local bishop was present but, gracious man that he was, he yielded first place to Eugene as Oblate superior general and bishop of Marseilles. No less a person than Cardinal Wiseman of Westminster preached at the mass while Dr (later Cardinal) Manning - who was just then establishing the mission of St Mary of the Angels, Bayswater, in London to serve the workers building Paddington Station - preached in the evening at vespers. Also present was Bishop Brown OSB of the large neighboring diocese of Newport and Menevia. The celebration concluded with a banquet in one of the city hotels.

Next day, Eugene visited the principal families of Leeds who had made donations to build the church and on Friday 31st visited Henry Maxwell, to thank him for the invitation to stay with him during his visit to Leeds, along with Cardinal Wiseman, who did stay there during his visit: Eugene had declined this offer as it was too far from Leeds. There now Eugene spent the night. The next day 1 August was Eugene's 75th birthday and he celebrated Mass with the family in the Maxwell mansion. He left in the afternoon for Sicklinghall where he celebrated the 75th anniversary of his baptism on the 2nd.

If Eugene had done no more than this, it would have been enough. Although new missions like this one in Leeds,



and others in Liverpool, Sicklinghall, Galashiels in Scotland, and Dublin in Ireland were going well, others - in Penzance, Maryvale, Ashbourne, Aldenham and Everingham had been closed. Recruitment was erratic - and no good solution had been found to the Ashbourne debt problem. The Province was suffering the consequences in financial terms and in its reputation. A former lawyer and businessman, Fr. Pinet OMI, was brought in from Canada to handle the financial affairs of the mission. In this state of affairs, Eugene's visit gave a much-needed boost to the mission.

He had been able to spend time with Cardinal Archbishop Wiseman and Dr Manning, the two most influential Catholic churchmen of the day in England. These two great figures had now seen the work of the Oblates at close quarters in Leeds and would remain on intimate terms with the Oblates. In a remarkable letter to Fr. Fabre of the London Oratory dated 27 October 1852, Wiseman had poured out his disappointment at not having found in England a religious order ready and willing to take up the work of evangelizing the poor in his diocese in a 'steady, continual and persevering way'. He must surely have been struck

with what he had seen in Leeds when he assisted at the opening of Mount St Mary's. Indeed, it would not be long before the Oblates would be able to open a mission in the East End of London. The Cardinal Archbishop formally confided the Rosemary Lane (Tower Hill) mission in London to the Oblates in February 1865, along with Kilburn – which was then still a semi-rural backwater on the edges of the great city of London.

But leading this great event in Leeds was not all that Eugene did on this visit. Before going there he had made his first visit to Ireland, and after Leeds he made his first visit to Scotland.

In an exemplary act of pastoral leadership, and as ambassador of his Congregation, Eugene was establishing good relations with major figures in every part of the country in which his Oblates were ministering. He covered large distances and moved at high speed, with scarcely any time for himself – “journeyings and goings to and fro without number”. “I cannot find a quarter of an hour of respite to converse with the absent”. “I have not been able to put anything on paper about all these wonderful things”. He moved easily among all classes of people. In Dublin he had won the trust of the hugely influential Archbishop Cullen. In Edinburgh, he lodged with Bishop Gillis who scarcely left his side during the whole visit!

Eugene's own horizons too were widened. His positive contact with Protestant Britain astounded him (while not diminishing his horror of the Protestant Reformation). The fervour of Irish Catholicism astonished him. Eugene landed in Ireland late in the evening of Monday 20 July. He was brought to Inchicore where he was to stay with the Oblates in the small farmhouse which was their residence at that time. It was a warm summer's evening and although it was 11 o'clock there would still have been light in the sky. News of his arrival spread quickly and crowds came to welcome him. He was deeply touched. Later he would tell the people that he was delighted to see their faith, which was the same as his own and that of his ancient diocese of Marseilles, said to have been founded by Lazarus.

At the same time Eugene strengthened his men's spirit and resolve in the new directions they were taking. The



account of the visit in the Sicklinghall Diary ends with the plaintive cry: “Oh! When will he return again?”

– Fr. Michael Hughes, OMI
Long term author of many of our archives articles, Fr. Michael wrote the above article a number of weeks before he died. May he rest in peace.

RETREAT OPPORTUNITIES IN CREWE

Icon Workshop

24th – 26th February Suggested donation £165.00

This retreat will offer reflections that inform, inspire and invite interested 'seekers' and faithful on a journey through the image and beauty of the icon.

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15th March Suggested donation £25.00

Enrich your Lenten journey through the transformative embrace of scripture, reflection, adoration and prayer.

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17th – 19th March Suggested donation £165.00

Our Lenten retreat is an opportunity to prepare our hearts to commemorate and celebrate the mystery of Easter. We hope you will join with us to pause and reflect on the last days and death of Jesus and we prepare our hearts to joyfully greet the Risen Christ on Easter morning.

Individually Guided Retreats

6th – 10th March Suggested donation - £235

An individually guided retreat gives you the time and opportunity to spend some time alone and with God. This is an opportunity for you to reflect on the “things that matter” in your life and to deepen your relationship with God. An IGR helps you to be more aware of how God works in your life and it allows you to become more aware of the many ways God is present to you.



For Information or Booking

Contact Rachel: +44 01270 568653 or email: rachel.challoner@oblateretreatcentre.org.uk

www.orc-crewe.org

Download a booking form or book online.

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Please phone Barbara in the Mission Office on: 01-4542888 or email: mami@oblates.ie
For further information please visit:
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€5.00
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A Prayer In Perplexity

O mysterious and creative Spirit, as our awareness of this vast universe grows, we frequently feel lost in all its complexity. We wonder who you are, and how you sustain all things in both concord and chaos; who can ever plumb the depths of this mystery, and the manner of your loving presence to us all? Strengthen our trust in your loving providence, our confidence in your saving power in all creation, and our hope that our frail existence can safely pass through death to on-going life with you. We make this prayer through your Anointed One, Jesus, whom you have made Lord of all. Amen.

– Richard Haslam, OMI

If you would like to share your thoughts or ideas with us please contact: Fr. Lorcan O'Reilly OMI, Oblate Retreat Centre, Wistaston Hall, 89 Broughton Lane, Crewe CW2 8JS or email pim@oblates.co.uk



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