

Reflection questions - presentation 1



PRAYER USED BY ST. EUGENE BEFORE MEDITATION:

O Mary Immaculate, faithful adorer of the Father, Mother most admirable of the Son, Spouse of the Holy Spirit,

inspire within me the same sentiments that were yours while pondering the revealed mysteries which you treasured in your heart.

Grant that I may ever live in union with your Son, my Saviour, together with all who, by meditation, give honor to the most Holy Trinity. Amen.

PRESENTATION 1: A PRIVILEGED CHILDHOOD RADICALLY CHANGED BY THE POLITICAL UPHEAVAL OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

“Let me show you who you are in God’s eyes”

⇒ **1/ We are shaped by our geographical environment, cultural background and childhood events. How does God use culture, geographical location, family background etc. to instill values into us? Reflect on how our expression of values is colored by our background and how our values become the windows through which God’s grace can shine forth in the world.**

Eugene de Mazenod’s biographer, Jean Leflon, writes:

“Eugene de Mazenod was born according to the flesh in the capital of Provence... To Provence would he owe his generous and warm nature, his lively disposition and personality, his sparkling and effervescent vitality, his ingenious imagination, his somewhat combative zeal, his fluent easy, colorful and musical manner of speech, his sensitive and ardent heart, his simple and demonstrative faith and his keen intuition. Therefore, in order, to give a complete portrayal of his natural and supernatural character we must take into consideration the speech, manners and characteristics of that section of France from which he sprang.” (Leflon I, p. 3-4)

In Scripture the prophets excelled in tracing the hand of God in all events. **Jeremiah 1:4-7:**

The word of the LORD came to me: Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you. “Ah, Lord GOD!” I said, “I do not know how to speak. I am too young!” But the LORD answered me, Do not say, “I am too young.” To whomever I send you, you shall go; whatever I command you, you shall speak.

Also **Isaiah 49: 1- 26**, of which here are some excerpts:

1-3 Before birth the Lord called me, from my mother's womb he gave me my name. He made my mouth like a sharp-edged sword, concealed me, shielded by his hand. He made me a sharpened arrow, in his quiver he hid me. He said to me, You are my servant,

6 I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

8-10 Thus says the Lord: In a time of favor I answer you, on the day of salvation I help you; I form you and set you as a covenant for the people, to restore the land and allot the devastated heritages, to say to the prisoners: Come out! To those in darkness: Show yourselves!

Along the roadways they shall find pasture, on every barren height shall their pastures be. They shall not hunger or thirst; nor shall scorching wind or sun strike them; For he who pities them leads them and guides them beside springs of water.

14-16 But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me." Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you. See, upon the palms of my hands I have engraved you.

I ended the lesson with a brief summary of Eugene's childhood characteristics which were to be seen in action later when he was an adult Christian, a priest, a religious founder and a bishop.

⇒ **2/ The presentation of this formative phase of Eugene's life, can be an invitation to you to spend some time and reflection on your own childhood. How did God form you as God's beloved child and how is God using your talents and personality in the world and Church of today?**

Here is something of what **Eugene** wrote about his childhood, when he was 26.

Nature is best observed during infancy when it is evolving artlessly. Thus the absolute, resolute and willful caliber of my character is deducible from the following traits. When I wanted something, I did not beg or wheedle or cajole. I called for what I wanted in an imperious tone as if I had a right to it. If I was refused I would not cry. Crying was as rare with me as laughter, but I acted up, and tried to take by force what was not given me by consent.

Nothing was ever to be got out of me by chastisement, you had either to play up to my self-love or get through to my heart. It is hard to understand, given the portrait of myself I have just painted, how sensitive a heart I have, overly so in fact. It would take too long to give you all the stories of my childhood traits I have had related to me and

which are really rather surprising. It was quite normal for me to give away my breakfast even when I was hungry to satisfy the hunger of the poor, I used to bring firewood to people who complained of the cold and of not being able to afford to buy it, on one occasion I went as far as to give away the clothes off my back to clothe a poor person, and many, many other stories in the same vein.

When I had offended someone, even if it was a servant, I never had a moment's peace until I had been able to make reparation for what I had done, with some gifts, or gesture of friendship, or even a hug for the one who had reason to complain about me. (St. Eugene's Self-Portrait for his spiritual director, 1808)

⇒ **3/ In each of us there is a sense of caring for the stranger, the most abandoned, the needy that has been influenced by our culture, background, family life and many other factors. Eugene came from a socially and materially privileged class, and God gave him the ability to empathize with the situation of the underprivileged. Later, God led him to recognize the spiritual poverty of those who were privileged, and to preach the Gospel to all who were in need.**

3.1 Like Eugene everyone has a story. Reflecting on my own story helps me to be open to the story of the other and to empathize so that I can be challenged in how I respond to another's need.

3.2 The community's story shapes my personal story. How does the community I am a part of recognize and respond to the most abandoned? The "community" could be family members or work or study associates, or a group within the Mazenodian Family or parish.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING USED BY ST. EUGENE EVERY MORNING:

Eternal Father, I thank you for creating me with so much love, and for your great fidelity and forgiveness in caring for me in the midst of my sins. I thank you for protecting me during the past night and giving me another day in which to serve and honor you. Son of God, I thank you for having saved me by the toils of your life and your sufferings unto death, and for having earned for me all the blessings that are found in your Church. Holy Spirit of God, I thank you for offering me so many graces and for having, notwithstanding my disregard of them, so frequently renewed your life in me.