EUGENE DE MAZENOD 101-presentation 13

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 13: LIKE GOLD IN THE FURNACE - THE YEARS OF PURIFICATION 1826-1836

"Let me show you who you are in God's eyes"

The crucible of suffering

We have seen how Eugene suffered some very difficult years. The sickness and death of people he was close to, his own illness and depression, his slow recovery, and the major conflict with the government over the Icosia affair all weighed heavily on him. It was a crucible of suffering that purified him,

⇒ **As we look at the experience of Eugene, we are invited to reflect on our own sufferings in the light of the Word of God.**

Sirach 2:4-6:

> Accept whatever happens to you;
> in periods of humiliation be patient.
> For in fire gold is tested,
> and the chosen, in the crucible of humiliation.
> Trust in God, and he will help you;
> make your ways straight and hope in him.

First Letter of Peter 1:6-8

> In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Although you have not seen him you love

him; even though you do not see him now yet believe in him, you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy

A life-giving focus

In these years we become aware that Eugene was not perfect - he certainly was not a plaster statue of a saint - so we see his humanity and weakness. Yet, at no stage did he despair or lose courage. He was always focused on the presence of the crucified and risen Savior in his crucible.

> Every day is good for sharing in the shame of the Cross we must carry daily as we follow in the Savior's footsteps.
>
> Eugene de Mazenod's Diary, 31 March 1839, EO XX

Eugene teaches us the necessity of a faith focus in difficult times. The Gospel of the Transfiguration shows us how Peter, James and John received a focus in their experience of Jesus, which gave them strength in the dark days of the passion and death of Jesus. Pope Francis helps us in this process:

> No one can reach eternal life if not by following Jesus, carrying their own cross in their earthly life. Each of us has his or her own cross. The Lord reveals to us the end of this journey which is the Resurrection, beauty: by carrying one's own cross.
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> Therefore, the Transfiguration of Christ shows us the Christian perspective of suffering. Suffering is not sadomasochism: it is a necessary but transitory passage. The point of arrival to which we are called is luminous like the face of Christ Transfigured: in him is salvation, beatitude, light and the boundless love of God. By revealing his glory in this way, Jesus ensures that the cross, the trials, the difficulties with which we struggle, are resolved and overcome in Easter. (Pope Francis, Angelus, March 17, 2019)

⇒ **As we live through the covid pandemic what is your focus?**

We need other people

Apart from his trust in Christ crucified, S. Eugene needed the support and guidance of others. Sometimes, in the midst of life's sorrows, it is difficult for us to see God's presence. Those close to Eugene used challenging voices that helped him to see how God was leading him to a solution.

We have seen Eugene's struggle with the situation of being reconciled with the King and the government, and how he had many objections to what was being asked of him in order to

achieve this. Henri Tempier was justifiably frustrated with Eugene for not cooperating with those who were trying to help to extract him from his situation as an exile from Marseilles, to restore his French citizenship, and to have official recognition that he was in fact a Bishop. Tempier sent him a direct letter and an ultimatum to stop making conditions and to make up his mind one way or the other.

> Do you or do you not want to extract yourself from the grim situation in which you are placed? If not, well and good! But in that case you really shouldn't let us incur all the expenses of the proceedings, you ought to forbid Guibert categorically to speak a word about you; you will have to put up with all the injuries they heap on you; you must say amen to all the harassment, past, present and future, whether coming from ill-disposed members of the Society or from the Government. If that is what you want, I have nothing to say.

Eugene needed to listen to his friends who had his welfare at heart and who spared no effort to redeem him from his wretched situation.

> But if, on the contrary, you do wish to extract yourself from this situation, that I am justified in describing as wretched, you will have to submit to some extent and yield to the opinion of your friends, who also have some concern for your honor. They have done nothing unworthy of you up to now and would never ever suggest that you take a debasing and improper step. It is absolutely necessary that you co-operate with the measures we are taking on your behalf. We consider this indispensable

⇒ **Sometimes we need to hear harsher voices to help us to focus. Who are your personal and group support figures in your difficulties**

We are members of the Church, the Body of Christ.

Faced with the situation in Icosia, Eugene found himself abandoned by the Pope. When summoned to Rome he says, "The Pope has just put my obedience to the test." When the Pope prevented Eugene from legally defending himself from the government, Eugene, for the first time expressed a deep disappointment with the Church. Still, he remained obedient to the Supreme Pastor, whom he recognized as having been chosen by God to guide the Church, the Body of Christ.

⇒ **Today we hear many loud criticisms of the Church and of some elements in the hierarchy. Have you had any experience of disillusionment with the hierarchy of the Church? In what way can we help each other in community to dialogue in situations like these?**

Emerging like purified shining gold

At the end of this period of anguish, St. Eugene emerges like shining gold. He has been purified by the difficulties and gives himself to the mission that was granted to him. When he was appointed as Bishop of Marseille he wrote:

> Since the die is cast and in spite of all my efforts up to the present to avoid the burden of the responsibility of a diocese, my calculations and hopes have come to nothing in face of all the various skillful and certainly well-intentioned schemes of my uncle, I must resign myself to it and make the most I can of my new and in my eyes rather sad position.
>
> I must attach myself to this people as a father to his children. My existence, my life, all my being must be consecrated to it, I must have no thought but for its good, no fears other than I have not done enough for its welfare and sanctification, no other concern than that which must include all its spiritual interests and even in a certain way its temporal welfare.
>
> I must in a word consume myself for it, be ready to sacrifice my leisure, my desire, rest, life itself for it.

For the next 24 years he was full of energy and positive good health as he gave himself fully to the service of the diocese and of the Missionary Oblates. The gold had been purified.

⇒ **How has God led you to purification leading to a much more mature faith and spirituality.**

Concluding Prayer:

Radiant God, source of light,

as you surrounded Jesus with your glory,

so you come to us in penetrating brightness.

You catch us off guard and expose our weakness.

We choose the limelight while you call us to explore the shadows

and brighten the darkness.

We seek the spectacular while you bind up the broken in

countless acts of mercy.

We seek to stay on the mountain or in a comfortable pew while

you walk to the valleys of need.

Radiant God,

fill us with light and courage to carry good news into all the

corners of the world and to bring back the joy of your presence.

Amen (downloaded at ManyVoices.org)