

EUGENE DE MAZENOD 101-presentation 4



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.

CLASS 4: THE DISCOVERY BY A DIRECTIONLESS YOUNG MAN OF THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST AS HIS SAVIOR

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

1. Reflecting on these texts below, what do they say to you about the directions to which God’s compass has been leading you?

Philippians 3:7-11

But whatever gains I had, these I have come to consider a loss because of Christ. More than that, I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having any righteousness of my own based on the law but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God, depending on faith to know him and the power of his resurrection and (the) sharing of his sufferings by being conformed to his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Eugene’s 1814 Retreat (*refer to the full text in the “Further Reading” document below*):

I looked for happiness outside of God and for too long with resulting unhappiness...So I had looked for happiness outside of God, and outside him I found but affliction and chagrin.

Eugene’s 1811 Retreat (*refer to the full text in the “Further Reading” document below*). During this retreat, Eugene applied the parable of the prodigal son to himself:

No, he had to come to me himself, thus crowning his gifts, to lift me up, and rescue me all heedless as I was, or rather he had to come and get me out of the mire in which I was immersed and from which I could not extract myself unaided. I hardly ever even conceived the wish to leave aside my rags and put on again my nuptial robe. O blindness! Forever blessed, O my God, be the sweet violence that in the end you did to me! Without this master-stroke, I would still be wallowing in my sewer or perhaps have perished there; and in that case, what would have become of my soul? O my God, don’t I have every reason to devote myself entirely to your service, to offer you my life and all

that I am, so that all that is in me may be employed and spent for your glory? For by how many titles do I belong to you? Not only are you my Creator and Redeemer, as you are all men's, but you are my special benefactor and applied your merits in an altogether special way to me; my generous friend, you forgot all my acts of ingratitude to help me as powerfully as if I had been always faithful to you; my tender father, who carried this rebel on your shoulders, warmed him against your heart, washed his wounds, etc. Good God, merciful Saviour, a thousand lives employed in your service, sacrificed to your glory, would be the least compensation your justice would be entitled to demand of me.

2. In 1805, while traveling to Paris, he had met a young military surgeon, Emmanuel Gaultier de Claubry, and became friends until Emmanuel's death in 1855. They shared with each other what God had been doing in their lives.

Letter to Emmanuel Gaultier de Claubry, December 23, 1807 (*refer to the full text in the "Further Reading" document below*):

Next, I want to know everything about your combat, I mean the life you lead surrounded by the enemies of your salvation, what you are doing for God, but especially what God is doing for you...

A sharing of our experiences of God brings Christians to a deeper communion of life in Christ.

Sweet effects of charity amongst Christians, which brings it about that all the members of the mystical body of which Jesus Christ is head, caput, feel and participate in the sufferings as well as the victory that each member suffers or wins.

How does the sharing of experiences with the community of which I am a part, bring about a deeper understanding of our common journey and of what God is doing?

3. 1 John 1:1-3:

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched with our hands concerns the Word of life - for the life was made visible; we have seen it and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was made visible to us - what we have seen and heard we proclaim now to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; for our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

Conversion is a gradual process which sheds a new light and understanding on our actions. Eugene was involved in many actions to help others. His Good Friday experience gave him a new perspective to continue what he was doing, but with a different viewpoint. What he was doing became mission when he saw it through the eyes of the crucified Christ.

How does looking through the eyes of the Crucified Savior help us, as community, to focus more on the mission of Jesus Christ?

Concluding Prayer: (By Thomas Merton)

My Lord God,
I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think I am following your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you
does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore will I trust you always though
I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

TEXTS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

“Eugene 101” aims at a wide audience. The video is an overall introduction and the reflection sheet is a possible aid to applying the material as an opportunity to pray. For those who find it useful, the questions can be used at the meetings of various groups.

These books can be consulted online.

Hubenig, A. and Motte, R., *Living in the Spirit's Fire*, pages 25 - 35
(<https://www.omiworld.org/wp-content/uploads/Living-in-the-Spirits-Fire.pdf>)

Leflon, J., *Eugene de Mazenod. Bishop of Marseilles, Founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. 1782-1861. Volume I, 1782 - 1814*, pages 236 - 286 (A lot of pages but they make for easy reading.) <https://www.omiworld.org/wp-content/uploads/book21.pdf>

SOME TEXTS REFERRED TO IN THE PRESENTATION

CONVERSION:

"By conversion I mean the discovery, made gradually or suddenly, that God is real. It is the perception that this real God loves us personally and acts mercifully and justly towards each of us.

Conversion is the direct experience of the saving power of God. As such it is not an event, not an action, not an occurrence. Instead it is a continuing revelation and a transforming force.

This encounter with the Lord is not one of visions, necessarily, though some converts have experienced God in a mystical way. It is not a matter of sudden changes in the mode of one's life, though some converts do choose new life-styles.

Conversion is simply a matter of becoming open to God's overflowing and powerful love. To be filled with that love is to change, to be changed, to act lovingly towards others."

Emilie Griffin, *Turning: Reflections on the Experience of Conversion*, Galilee Trade; 1st Paperback Edition, 1982, p 17 -18.

THE AFFECTIVE PRINCIPLE AND FOUNDATION

The first real step towards a closer relationship comes with the experience that the other person really cares for me which elicits from me the response of gratitude to and trust in that person.

When this attitude is relatively firmly established in me, I have what might be called the affective foundation for the positive development of the relationship. In the case of the relationship with God what needs to be established is what I have called the affective Principle and Foundation... (p. 63)

This affective principle and foundation can be called the experience of having a spiritual identity, a real relationship to God. It is the experience of wholeness that allows one to know brokenness, the experience of being loved and lovely that precedes the experience of sinfulness, the experience of enjoyment and oneness with God that enables a person to see the present state of self and world as a fall from grace. Without such an experience of God's primordial love and care a person remains rooted in a distant, perhaps scrupulous, perhaps resentful relationship with God" (p. 64).

William Barry, *The Development of the relationship with God from Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God*, Paulist Press, 1992

Retreat of 1814, looking back on his Good Friday experience some 7 years earlier

I looked for happiness outside of God and for too long with resulting unhappiness. How many times in my past life had my torn, tormented heart taken wings for God from whom it had turned away!

Can I forget the bitter tears that the sight of the cross brought streaming from my eyes one Good Friday? Indeed they welled up from the heart, there was no checking them, they were too abundant for me to be able to hide them from those who like myself were assisting at that moving ceremony.

I was in a state of mortal sin and it was precisely this that caused my sorrow. I could tell the difference from what I had experienced in certain other circumstances.

Never was my soul more satisfied, never did it feel such happiness; for in the midst of this flood of tears, despite my grief, or rather because of my grief, my soul took wings towards its final end, towards God its only good whose loss it felt so keenly. Why say more? Could I ever express what I experienced then? Just the memory of it fills my heart with a sweet consolation.

Thus I had looked for happiness outside of God, and outside of him I found only affliction and vexation. Blessed, a thousand times blessed, that he, this good Father who, notwithstanding my unworthiness, lavished on me all the richness of his mercy. Let me at least make up for lost time by redoubling my love for him. May all my actions, thoughts, etc., be directed towards that end. What more glorious occupation than to act in everything and for everything only for God, to love him above all else, to love him all the more as one who has loved him too late. Ah! The happiness of heaven begins here below.

Retreat Journal, December 1814, EO XV n.130

Retreat of 1811, in preparation for his ordination to the priesthood. He meditates on himself as the prodigal son of the Gospel of Luke.

Meditation on the prodigal son. To my shame, this parable never applied to anyone better than it does me.

I left the house of my father, after having, even while I still lived there, heaped up every sort of bitterness on my father. I wasted my patrimony, if not with the daughters of Babylon, as the Lord, with inconceivable goodness, has always preserved me from that kind of stain, at least it was in the tents of sinners that I made my dwelling on my exit from the house of my father.

I wandered eventually through arid deserts; and, reduced to beggary, I ate and fed myself on the food destined for the pigs, whose company I had freely chosen. Did the thought even occur to me of going back to my father, this good father whose excessive tenderness I had so often put to the test? No, he had to come to me himself, thus crowning his gifts, to lift me up, and rescue me all heedless as I was, or rather he had to come and get me out of the mire in which I was immersed and from which I could not extract myself unaided. I hardly ever even conceived the wish to leave aside my rags and put on again my nuptial robe.

Retreat notes before his ordination, December 1811, EO XIV n.95

Letter to Emmanuel Gaultier de Claubry. Eugene had met this young military surgeon in September 1805. Their friendship lasted until Emmanuel's death in 1855

My dear Emmanuel, ... This is the only way open to me to try and get my news through to you, for as none of your letters are making their appearance, I assume that you are not receiving mine; and if my own reaction is anything to go by, I have to conclude that you are not indifferent to this deprivation.

But where does one begin when one has so many things to say? I must know above all if you still remember me, if you have not forgotten those happy circumstances that Providence seemed to have arranged so that we might come to know each other and I might be able to appreciate you, that journey that seemed so short to me and which, as it brought us both to our destinations, was also going to part us from each other perhaps for ever, from that Eugene in a word whom you found to be in sympathy with your heart while he loved you and still loves you.

I have too high an opinion of you to fear that all these things have vanished from your mind or to be more exact from your heart where they are surely deeply engraved, if appearances do not deceive, and they ought not among children of the light, sincere worshippers of truth.

Next, I want to know everything about your combat, I mean the life you lead surrounded by the enemies of your salvation, what you are doing for God, but especially what God is doing for you; for I will not conceal from you that for lack of any others I often read over for my edification the letters you wrote me on your arrival at the army, in which you recount the miracles that the grace of Almighty God worked in you and the victories you won over the world and pleasure-seekers, the noble courage with which you carried the standard of the Cross rising above all human respect, braving the sarcasm and slights that your fidelity to this God, unknown today even amongst Christians, drew down on you. Dear friend, I say again what I said in one of my previous letters that you do not seem to have received, I shed tears when I read the account of that wretched meal when you were so basely ridiculed. From where I am I saw you among those men St. Peter speaks of: "But these people speak evil of what they do not understand; they are like brute beasts, born only to be caught and killed, and like beasts they will be destroyed, being injured in return for the injuries they have inflicted. Debauchery even by day they make their pleasure; they are unsightly blots, and amuse themselves by their trickery even when they are sharing your table... [2 Peter 2, 12- 13] But these tears of compassion and grief were soon changed into transports of joy when I saw that, as you recalled to mind who he was, this Lord you serve, you behaved in a way worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and remained fearless in face of your enemies' every stratagem, which was for them a subject of their damnation and for you of your salvation, and this victory comes to you from God, for it is a grace that he worked for you, not only because of your faith in Jesus Christ but also because you suffer on his account. Sweet effects of charity amongst Christians, which brings it about that all the members of the mystical body of which Jesus Christ is head, caput, feel and participate

in the sufferings as well as the victory that each member suffers or wins. If this marvellous communion is not sufficiently felt, it is because one does not reflect on its excellence, for it takes its origin in the very bosom of the divinity.

Thus I share in your sufferings, my dear friend, but I also bless God for your victory, as I beg him that he will sustain you in those sentiments which work for your glory, and mine and that of the whole Church. So do not be at all shaken by the persecutions that come your way, for you know that that is our destiny, the Master having told us that “we will be hated universally on account of his name.” [Luke 21:17] That is why we must look for our joy solely in the various afflictions that befall us and the persecutions to which we are exposed, knowing that the testing of our faith produces patience. Let us turn to God with fervour and we shall not be deceived, for the Lord’s eyes are on the just and his ears hearken to their prayers.

And now, shall I speak of myself? Yes, but only to ask for your prayers, to give you the charge expressly to persevere in asking God to accomplish in my regard the adorable designs whose outcome I impede by my infidelities; that he might knock, prune, reduce me to desiring only what He wills, that He might overturn all the obstacles standing in the way of my arriving at a more perfect state to which I strongly believe I am called. May he give me the grace of recognizing ever more clearly the vanities of this miserable earth, so that I see only those heavenly goods that the moth cannot corrupt. In a word may he make me worthy of the communion of saints and have me assume the place among them that he seems to have destined me for, but which it seems to me I am still far from deserving.

How I wish I were in a position to talk more clearly with you! You would be a help to me not only by your prayers, but also by your example, and at your side I would be more courageous in the battle and more assured of victory. But since such a union is unfortunately impossible, let us make this separation more endurable by a more frequent correspondence: let us fix a spiritual rendezvous in the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ every Sunday at 10:30 a.m., an hour at which the holy sacrifice is solemnly celebrated in every Church. There we will pray at the same hour for our mutual needs, and through our union, we will so to speak compel the tender heart of our Redeemer to apply in our regard in a special way the merits of his Passion and Death.

Goodbye, my dear friend, please send me a reply without delay and go on loving me as much as I love you.