

# OBLATE CONNECTIONS

May 2024 | Nº60



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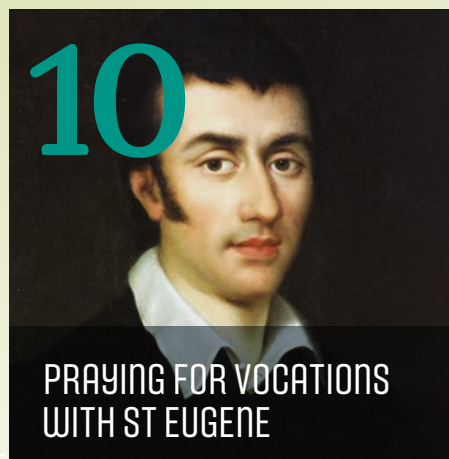
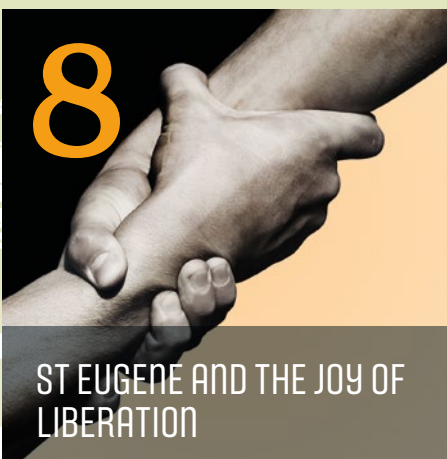
# CONNECTIONS

In many ways, our society is experiencing both crisis and uncertainty. In recent years experiences such as the Covid pandemic highlighted the cracks and fragilities already existing in society. We are also faced with a long list of crises including climate devastation, war and conflict on so many different fronts, the uneven distribution of essential goods and services, uncertainty about democracy, and the volatility of our societies.

Reflecting on the challenges and uncertainties of the present moment Jorge Albergati OMI writes, "The only certainty, perhaps, is that God is with us and will not abandon us. This is God's covenant with us. ...Death is never the final outcome; it is always a new beginning. This is God's promise: "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26).

In this year's message on Vocation Sunday, Pope Francis reminds us, "Our pilgrimage on this earth is far from a pointless journey or aimless wandering; on the contrary, each day, by responding to God's call, we try to take every step needed to advance towards a new world where people can live in peace, justice and love. We are pilgrims of hope because we are pressing forward towards a better future, committed at every step to bringing it about." The goal of every Christian vocation, added the Pope, is to become "men and women of hope," bearing the Gospel message of hope and peace amid countless crises and "the baneful spectre of a third world war fought piecemeal." Christ's Resurrection, is the force that drives our Christian hope and allows us to face the challenges our world present us. Therefore despite the uncertainties of the present moment let us set out as pilgrims of hope, so that, we too can be messengers of the Good News of the Gospel.

- Fr. Lorcán O'Reilly OMI



## A word from Fr. Oliver Barry, OMI

We celebrate the Feast of St. Eugene on the 21st of May. St. Pope John Paul II told us in his homily during St. Eugene's Canonisation that "his influence is not limited to the age in which he lived, but continues its effect on our time." This fact was very obvious when a meeting took place during March in Aix, the home city of Eugene. Lay people from different parts of Europe including the Anglo-Irish Province gathered together to reflect, share and celebrate their association with the Mission and Charism of St. Eugene. Together with the professed Oblates who shared in this meeting they focussed on the Mandates of the last General Chapter of the congregation which includes "the development at the Congregational level, of an official network of laity sharing in the Oblate Charism". This development is a moment of real Hope in the life of the Church and its Mission.



In the same place where the Congregation was founded the Charism of St. Eugene was finding new expression in the desire of those present to continue his Mission. St. Pope Paul VI in his homily for the beatification of St. Eugene said "in the aftermath of the French Revolution Providence wished to make him a pioneer of Pastoral Renewal... to achieve his goal, he gathered some companions, it was the beginning of a little family... who would become the Oblate of Mary Immaculate". May our Oblate family continue to grow through the Association of lay people in the Mission of the Congregation and together let us embrace the theme of the recent General Chapter to be "Pilgrims of Hope in Communion"

- Fr. Oliver Barry OMI  
Province Leader

**"Our Creator gave us  
stewardship over the  
Earth, not to dominate  
it but to care, protect,  
and enrich it."**



UKRAINE SNAPSHOTS



LOURDES

# GOD'S SILENCE IN THE FACE OF EVIL

– Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI

**T**heologians sometimes try to express the meaning of Jesus' resurrection in one sentence: In the resurrection, God vindicated Jesus, his life, his message, and his fidelity. What does that mean?

Jesus entered our world preaching faith, love, and forgiveness, but the world didn't accept that. Instead, it crucified him and by that seemingly shamed his message. We see this most clearly on the cross when Jesus is taunted, mocked, and challenged: If you are the son of God, come down from there! If your message is true, let God verify that right now! If your fidelity is more than plain stubbornness and human ignorance, then why are you dying in shame?

What was God's response to those taunts? Seemingly nothing, no commentary, no defense, no apologia, no counter challenge, just silence. Jesus dies in silence. Neither he nor the God he believed in tried to fill that excruciating void with any consoling words or explanations challenging people to look at the bigger picture or to look at the brighter side of things. None of that. Just silence.

Jesus died in silence, inside God's silence and inside the world's incomprehension. And we can let ourselves be scandalized by that silence, just as we can let ourselves be scandalized by the seeming triumph of evil, pain, and suffering in our world. God's seeming silence in the face of evil and death can forever scandalize us: in the Jewish holocaust, in ethnic genocides, in brutal and senseless wars, in the earthquakes and tsunamis which kill thousands of people and devastate whole countries, in the deaths of countless people taken out of this life by cancer and by violence, in how unfair life can be sometimes, and in the casual manner that those without conscience can rape whole areas of life seemingly without consequence. Where is God in all of this? What's God's answer?

God's answer is the resurrection, the resurrection of Jesus and the perennial resurrection of goodness within life itself. But resurrection is not necessarily rescue. God doesn't necessarily rescue us from the effects of evil, nor even from death. Evil does what it does, natural disasters are what they are, and those without conscience can rape even as they are feeding off life's sacred fire. Normally, God doesn't intervene. The parting of the Red Sea isn't a weekly occurrence. God lets his loved ones suffer and die, just as Jesus let his dear friend Lazarus die, and God let Jesus die. God redeems, raises us up afterwards, in a deeper, more lasting vindication. Moreover, the truth of that statement can even be tested empirically.

Despite every appearance to the contrary at times, in the end, love does triumph over hatred. Peace does triumph over chaos. Forgiveness does triumph over bitterness. Hope does triumph over cynicism. Fidelity does triumph over despair. Virtue does triumph over sin. Conscience does triumph over callousness. Life does triumph over death, and good does triumph over evil, always. Mohandas K. Gandhi once wrote: "When I despair, I remember that all through history, the way of truth and love has always won. There have been murderers and tyrants, and for a time they seem invincible. But in the end they always fall. Think of it, always."

**“The resurrection ask us to believe what Gandhi affirmed, namely, that in the end evil will not have the last word. It will fail. Good will eventually triumph.”**

The resurrection, most forcibly, makes that point. In the end, God has the last word. The resurrection of Jesus is that last word. From the ashes of shame, of seeming defeat, failure, and death, a new, deeper, and eternal life perennially bursts forth. Our faith begins at the very point where it seems it should end, in God's seeming silence in the face of evil.

And what does this ask of us?

First, simply that we trust in the truth of the resurrection. The resurrection asks us to believe what Gandhi affirmed, namely, that in the end evil will not have the last word. It will fail. Good will eventually triumph.

More concretely, it asks us to roll the dice on trust and truth, namely, trusting that what Jesus taught is true. Virtue is not naïve, even when it is shamed. Sin and cynicism are naïve, even when they appear to triumph.

Those who genuflect before God and others in conscience will find meaning and joy, even when they are deprived of some of the world's pleasures. Those who drink in and manipulate sacred energy without conscience will not find meaning in life, even when they taste pleasure. Those who live in honesty, no matter the cost, will find freedom. Those who lie and rationalize will find themselves imprisoned in self-hate. Those who live in trust will find love. God's silence can be trusted, even when we die inside of it. We need to remain faithful in love, forgiveness, and conscience, despite everything that suggests they are naïve. They will bring us to what is deepest inside of life. Ultimately, God vindicates virtue. God vindicates love. God vindicates conscience. God vindicates forgiveness. God vindicates fidelity. Ultimately, God vindicated Jesus and will vindicate us too if we remain faithful.

## RETREAT OPPORTUNITIES IN CREWE

### **Celtic Spirituality**

**21st – 23rd June Suggested donation £175.00**

Reflecting together on the Celtic Tradition, Scripture and Pope Francis teaching on the care of creation in *Laudato Si*, we will hopefully grow in appreciation that we are a part of creation and not a part from it.

### **Conflict Resolution**

**2nd – 4th August Suggested donation - £175**

During our time together, we will see how we can develop our own skills by looking at the themes of communication, active listening, and negotiation. We will also spend time to look at what our Christian tradition teaches us about conflict.



### **For Information or Booking**

Contact Rachel: +44 01270 568653 or email: [rachel.challoner@oblateretreatcentre.org.uk](mailto:rachel.challoner@oblateretreatcentre.org.uk)  
[www.orc-crewe.org](http://www.orc-crewe.org) Download a booking form or book online.

### **Dreams – God's forgotten language**

**11th – 13th October Suggested donation £175.00**

God speaks to humanity, making dreams -- in Sanford's words -- "God's forgotten language." The weekend will present a succinct interpretation of dreams that takes into account both spiritual and scientific views.





# Celebrating Easter on Camino de Santiago

“This pilgrimage was not simply a tourist journey, it was above all an interior pilgrimage and an encounter with the Risen Lord.”

The Camino de Santiago is certainly special, it somehow reconnects us with the deepest part of ourselves, the silence, the nature and the company of many other pilgrims opens us to a spiritual dimension and makes us look at heaven and makes us look inside ourselves.

This year we decided to do the Portuguese coastal route. The nature and the landscapes are like a fairy tale, the sea, the breeze. A route that invites you to immerse yourself immediately in the spirituality of the Camino. Somehow the beauty of creation connects you to the Creator. We started the Camino in Vigo Spain, walking a little more than 100km to Santiago de Compostela. I must say that the Camino does not start when we start walking, the Camino starts from the moment we have the intention to participate in the experience. Something pushes us to get out of ourselves and start the journey. The way starts from our personal reality, from our history, from what we are living concretely, from there, we believe with faith that the Spirit of Jesus has called us to meet Him, in the journey and in the sharing.

To be aware of what is involved in doing the Camino the group had some preparation meetings to get to know each other, to pray together, and to get to know the logistics of the experience. Doing the Camino involves spiritual, physical and logistical preparation. Having understood the implications of such an experience we ventured out to live what was perhaps going to be the experience of a lifetime.



I would like to remind anyone reading this article a little of the history of the Camino that thousands of people have walked. The Apostle Saint James the Elder is one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. Brother of John, the Evangelist, he is the son of Zebedee and Mary Salome. Along with Peter and John he belongs to the group of three privileged disciples who were admitted by Jesus into the important moments of his life, such as his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and during his Transfiguration. According to the Acts of the Apostles, Saint James was the first Apostle to become a martyr by being beheaded by Herod Agrippa in the year 43 in Jerusalem. The tradition narrates how his body was taken by sea to Galicia, and was buried in a forest, today the site of the Cathedral.



As we see, we must not lose sight of the fact that the Camino de Santiago is a pilgrimage, following in the footsteps of St. James the Apostle we meet the Lord Jesus. Every aspect of the Camino speaks of the apostolic experience and the following of the Lord. This pilgrimage was not simply a tourist journey, it was above all an interior pilgrimage and an encounter with the Risen Lord.

The inspiration for why we do the Camino de Santiago at Easter time has to do with the desire that every pilgrim meets the Risen Lord, and that we can recognise Him in our life and in our personal history.

This was the inspiration that accompanied our journey: to encounter the Risen Lord in our personal life story, and to let the renewing power of the resurrection animate our life. And like the disciples of Emmaus, after encountering him their lives took a new direction, their eyes were opened, their hearts burned as he explained the scriptures to them, they recognised him in the breaking of the bread.

The group of pilgrims this year were very diverse and international, different stages of life, different ages and different spiritual searches that led us to Someone, that Someone we were sure would show us and give us the grace to meet Him and to return to our personal realities with a heart set on fire.

Each day's itinerary was marked by walking, personal and group prayer and sharing our personal stories, also at the end of the day we celebrated the Eucharist, a privileged moment of the day. At the end of the day we took the opportunity to have a celebration meal and share the experience of the day.

### Here I share the beatitudes of the pilgrim.

1. Blessed are you pilgrim, if you discover that the "Camino" opens your eyes to what is not seen.
2. Blessed are you pilgrim, if what concerns you most is not to arrive, as to arrive with others.
3. Blessed are you pilgrim, when you contemplate the "Camino" and you discover it is full of names and dawns.
4. Blessed are you pilgrim, because you have discovered that the authentic "Camino" begins when it is completed.
5. Blessed are you pilgrim, if your knapsack is emptying of things and your heart does not know where to hang up so many feelings and emotions.
6. Blessed are you pilgrim, if you discover that one step back to help another is more valuable than a hundred forward without seeing what is at your side.
7. Blessed are you pilgrim, when you don't have words to give thanks for everything that surprises you at every twist and turn of the way.
8. Blessed are you pilgrim, if you search for the truth and make of the "Camino" a life, and of your life a "way", in search of the one who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.
9. Blessed are you pilgrim, if on the way you meet yourself and gift yourself with time, without rushing, so as not to disregard the image in your heart.
10. Blessed are you pilgrim, if you discover that the "Camino" holds a lot of silence; and the silence of prayer; and the prayer of meeting with God who is waiting for you.

- Fr. Eduardo Núñez-Yepes , OMI



# ST EUGENE AND THE JOY OF LIBERATION

We move forward to about the year 30 in the Christian era. In the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus takes the scroll of Isaiah and reads the same passage to the worshippers.

Today, he said, this prophecy is being fulfilled [Luke 4:21]. The same passage of scripture - but a deeper prophecy, a profounder fulfilment, a jubilee of jubilees. For three years Jesus went about doing good. Then he mounted the cross, died and rose again, and ascended into heaven. He overthrew the evil empire of Satan and called the new Israel home. The alleluia joy of the resurrection knows no bounds. But many would again choose to 'stay put'.

The human race inches towards the Kingdom of Heaven with all the speed of a tectonic plate. The newly-retold story of creation is making us accustomed to the difference between God's idea of time and ours, the infinite patience with which God moves to achieve his plan.

Time and again Jesus sends his prophets to renew his invitation. St. Eugene is one of them. As a young, newly-ordained priest he saw about him a Catholic Church in France that had been brought to its knees by civil strife and the despotism of Napoleon. The joy felt at the fall of Napoleon in 1815 must have been very like that of God's people when Babylon fell. Liberation! But everywhere there were Christians who had abandoned their faith and priests who were failing in their duties. It sounds very familiar. It would be a struggle to bring the people back to a level of faith and the clergy to a sense of their calling.

But St Eugene's gaze does not stop there. How vast the field that lies before us, he exclaims. It is nothing less than the 'vast expanse of the whole earth'.

**S**t Eugene, a prophet sent to us by the Lord Jesus, died and went to heaven May 21st 1861. His prophetic message is captured in the Oblate motto: 'He sent me to preach the good news to the poor'.

It takes us back thousands of years to the banks of the River Euphrates outside the city of Babylon, near modern Bagdad in Iraq. There for nearly fifty years the people of Israel had been prisoners. The prophet - known to us as Isaiah - gazes into the night. He foresees that the Lord God is about to end their trial and proclaim a jubilee - they were going home! He breaks into the poetry of prophecy

*The spirit of the Lord has been given to me,  
for the Lord has anointed me.  
He has sent me to bring good news to the poor,  
to bind up hearts that are broken;  
to proclaim liberty to captives,  
freedom to those in prison;  
to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord,  
a day of vengeance for our God.  
to comfort all those who mourn...*  
[Is 61:1-2 - first reading in the Mass of St Eugene]

Promptly in the year 539 BC Cyrus the Persian overthrew the Babylonian empire and sent the people of Israel home. What joy! But many chose to 'stay put' and the homecoming was not so joyful as Isaiah had hoped.





**“Time and again Jesus sends his prophets to renew his invitation.”**



The Spirit of Jesus moved St Eugene to ignore his own comfort and ‘follow in the footsteps of Jesus and the apostles’. With a group of like-minded priests he began to travel the countryside and preach the gospel to the poor. The group became a congregation – the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Soon in his lifetime they spread beyond the shores of France to Canada, England, Scotland, Ireland, Ceylon, the United States, South Africa, and Morocco. Now they are found spread out in the five continents and number some 3,700 members of many different nationalities.

Eugene’s prophetic message reached out to his priest companions and later to the Oblate Brothers. It reaches out today to all the people who share in his Spirit. We - the readers of Oblate Connections - are among them, the brothers and sisters of St Eugene, a small part of the flock of the Lord. In 2011 it is we who gaze into the night. What does the passage from Isaiah call us to today?

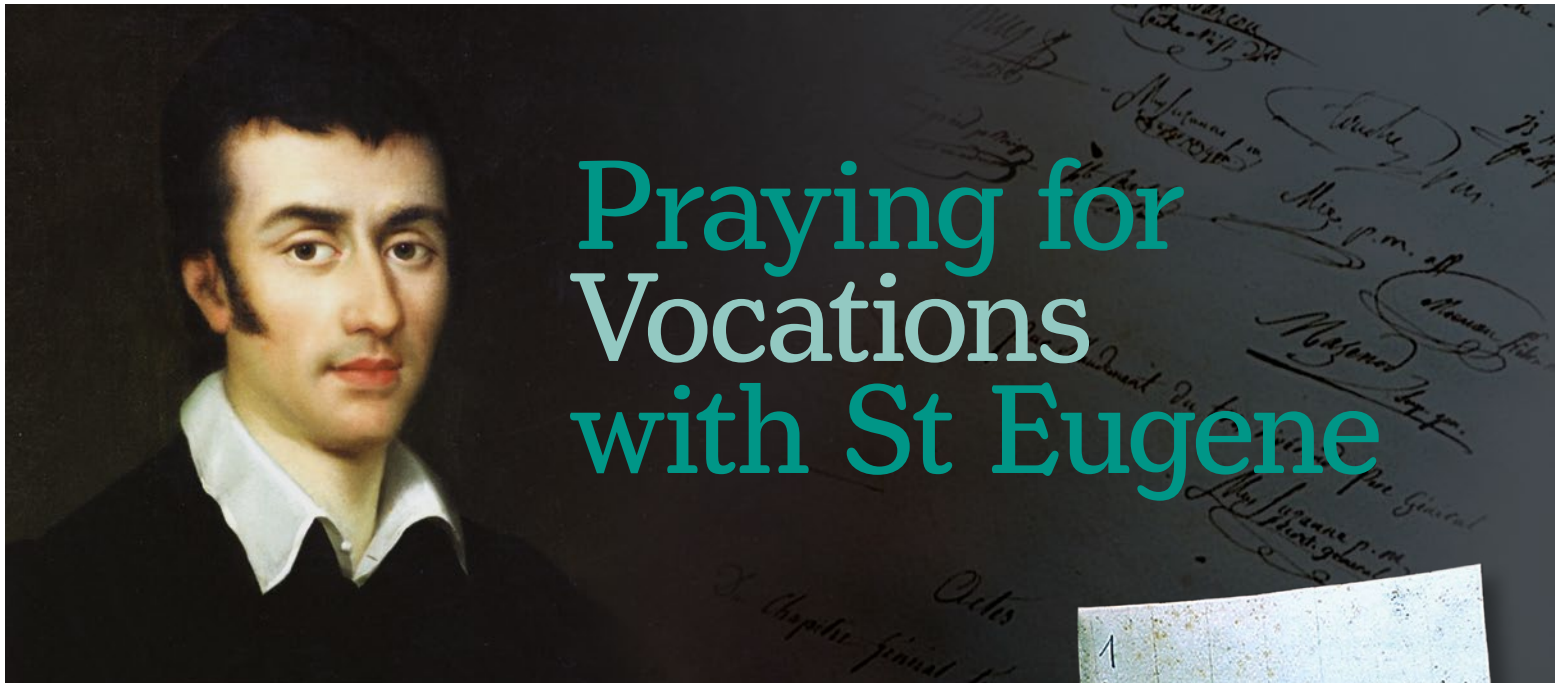
The Spirit of the Lord is being given to us to proclaim Christ’s jubilee. He is sending us to preach the good news to the poor. We will have to make choices. In fidelity to our motto, our first choice must be - to be among ‘the poor’. Jesus did not interpret this motto - which after all was his own motto too - in a pedantic way. It did not stop him going to deliver his message among people like the tax-collectors who were among the wealthiest in society, or responding to invitations to dine at the tables of the rich. But for the most part he lived and moved among the poor and ‘had no place to lay his head’. In the Oblate tradition we see ‘the poor’ as naming all those who are in danger of being overlooked in the announcement of the Gospel. Most often, these are the materially poor. But the poor ‘have many faces’ [Oblate Constitutions].

When they came to England, the Oblates went first to the Catholics of the countryside who had been deprived of priests in penal times. Very soon they diverted their attention to the even more deprived urban poor whose ranks were swollen during the famine in Ireland: Liverpool, Leith, Leeds, London, Birmingham, Bristol. However the Oblates kept a presence to the rural population in Yorkshire, North Wales and the Forest of Dean

We also in the 21st century have to make a choice of where to work. Where among all needs of today can we make a difference? Choices like these are not made in the abstract but in the light of our charism and resources. Often too they are elicited by specific invitations. A small group of people we may be, but so were the apostles. Whatever choices we make, we have much to do. We will not ‘stay put’. We will follow in the footsteps of the apostles.

– Michael Hughes OMI

This is an extract from an earlier article, published in May 2011.



# Praying for Vocations with St Eugene

This May 21, Feast of St Eugene de Mazenod until May 29, Feast of Blessed Joseph Gerard, we will have our annual Novena of Prayer for Oblate Vocations all across the Oblate world. Reflecting about this forthcoming event made me ponder about what Eugene was like as a Vocations Director. My reflections led me back to the very historical foundation of our religious missionary congregation.

Alfred Hubenig, OMI wrote: "To begin something really worthwhile, good is not good enough. And that was Fr de Mazenod's problem. He had three priests ready to join him who were no better than good. To Forbin-Janson he wrote, 'Prospective subjects are not very encouraging, and they are few in number.' He knew that to get his society off the ground, he needed prospects who were more than just good. He needed excellence." (Saint Eugene de Mazenod. Living in the Spirit's Fire, Alfred Hubenig OMI, 2004).



And so he wrote to a humble young country curate in Arles, Fr Henri Tempier, urgently inviting him to join in the project of evangelizing the Provençal countryside: "My dear friend, read this letter at the foot of your crucifix with a mind to heed only God and what is demanded of a priest like yourself in the interests of God's glory and the salvation of souls. Stifle any voice of avidity or love of comfort and convenience; dwell deeply on the plight of our country people, on their religious situation... I want to tell you that you are necessary for the work that the Lord inspires us to undertake..."

Overwhelmed by the emotion of the moment Fr de Mazenod quickly sealed the letter and sent it off by the post. But he forgot to sign his name on it! Imagine Fr Tempier's consternation upon receiving it. It was only some time later, thanks to Abbé Gaudin, a friend of both Tempier and de Mazenod that he discovered the letter's author. When he did, and when he realised the seriousness of the request, he replied simply: "I share your views completely, my dear confrere, and far from needing your urging to enter this holy Society which satisfies my own desires so completely, I assure you that had I known of your plans before you mentioned them to me, I would have been the first to speak of my joining your Society. Thus, I feel that I owe you a debt of gratitude for judging me worthy to work with you for the glory of God and the salvation of souls..."



Fr, Henri Tempier

With Henri Tempier's heartfelt reply to Eugene and the latter's letter of invitation, we are reminded of two essential elements of Vocations Ministry.

Firstly, it is always God's initiative and grace to plant the seed of vocation in one person. Tempier expressed this rightly when he wrote: "far from needing your urging to enter this holy Society... I assure you that had I known of your plans before you mentioned them to me, I would have been the first to speak of my joining your Society."

Second, those who are called need a spiritual guide to help them purify their desire and facilitate their deeper quest for discernment. Eugene's letter of invitation for Tempier to join the then Missionaries of Provence (which later became Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate) paved the way to confirm Tempier's initial longing and desire.

This is where our role becomes equally important. As Oblates and as members of our Oblate family, like Eugene, we can be that important instrument of God to inspire, encourage, invite or even fan the flame of that great desire for holiness deep within our young people who may like then Fr Tempier have their inner longings for something great but lack the understanding of knowing what are they meant for. They just need our help to direct them in order to bring that desire into a known reality.



Fr Irvin and students from St Mary's University

**"We can be that important instrument of God to inspire, encourage, invite or even fan the flame of that great desire for holiness deep within our young people."**

If you or you know of any young person discerning their vocation in life, please encourage them to make contact and we will be happy to journey with them as they seek to explore how the Lord is calling them to live their faith today. Finally we invite you to share in the annual novena by saying the prayer for vocations each day from the 21st-29th of May.

- Fr. Irvin Morastil OMI (i.morastil@oblates.co.uk)

# Summer Camp 2024

July 29th - August 2nd



Bookings now being taken for Summer 2024

Young aged people 12-14, will come together for outdoor activities and team building, with time for reflection and prayer each evening. The camp will take place in Lilliput OEC, near Mullingar Ireland.

#### Activities include:

Assault Course, Aeroball, Abseiling, Canoeing, Orienteering, Bog Hopping.

Centre staff are fully trained, and all staff and volunteers will be Garda Vetting/DBS certified. The subsidised cost of the camp includes all meals, accommodation and equipment hire. For more information about the camp, contact:

#### Padraig Corcoran

St Michael's Inchicore, 52A Bulfin Rd, Inchicore, Dublin 8  
Mobile: +353 (0)877723255  
Email: padraig.oblate.partners@gmail.com

“Earth has been given to us to cultivate, care for, protect, and preserve.”

# APPRECIATION FOR PLANET EARTH

**O**n international Mother Earth Day, we reflect on humanity’s important relationship, not only among human beings, but with the whole natural world. The UN Secretary General has reminded us that from the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the soil that grows our food- humanity’s health depends on the health of Mother Earth. He cautions us that sadly, many times, we seem hellbent on its destruction.

Our actions are laying waste to forests, jungles, farmland, wetlands, oceans, coral reefs, rivers, seas, and lakes. Biodiversity is collapsing as one million species teeters on the brink of extinction. We must end these relentless and senseless wars on nature. We have the tools, the knowledge, and the solutions, but we must pick up the pace.

The annual celebration of Earth Day indeed calls us to pick up the pace of not only caring for our fellow human beings, but we must also care for the entire Earth and all creation. Our Creator gave us stewardship over the Earth, not to dominate it but to care, protect, and enrich it. As Pope Francis has said many times, Earth is our Common Home, the only home we have, the only one we will pass on to the next generations. Thus World Day leads us to have a new appreciation and respect for the beauty and goodness of the natural world that surrounds us, nothing more and nothing less, than God’s work of art, his own beautiful gallery. Through the beauty, variety, harmony, and truly wonder-filled marvels of creation, our Creator has something very important to say to us.

Today all humanity should lift up prayers of thanksgiving to our loving God for the wonderful gift of Mother Earth, which provides us with the means we need to stay alive. And then, humbly pray that we will be better stewards to better care for this magnificent gift.



## Care for the Earth

Humanity’s unique role within nature is illustrated by the fact that the Earth has been given to us to cultivate, care for, protect, and preserve. Our responsibility for God’s Earth means we must respect natural laws with the delicate equilibria, the biodiversity, existing between all creatures of this world. In this way, we come to see that nature has intrinsic value and that each creature possesses its own particular goodness. Again, the UN General reminds us of those healthy ecosystems- from Oceans and rivers to forests and prairies- that are also critical in our fight against climate change. So, let’s get to work to implement the historic UN biodiversity agreement to ensure that the Earth’s land and water are protected. This Earth Day, all people everywhere on the globe should raise their voices- in our Homes, schools, workplaces, cities, civic and faith communities, and on social media platforms- and demand leaders to make peace with nature. We must learn from the time-won wisdom, knowledge, and leadership of indigenous peoples, whose environmental stewardship stretches back millennia, and who hold many of the world’s solutions to the world’s climate and biodiversity crisis.

## Appreciation for Mother Earth

World Earth Day is indeed an important time to focus our attention and appreciation on the wonderful God-given gift of Mother Earth and how we can be better stewards for our planet and the surrounding universe. The creation that surrounds us is indeed “a chalice of grace.” It is gracious because it reveals God’s abundant goodness. This grace, this goodness is found everywhere and to treat it with disrespect and abuse is blasphemy. The imprint of the Creator as the patron of the environment, Saint Francis teaches us, is found in all creation, especially in humans. The environment is sacred as it comes from the Holy Hands of our Creator and to ruthlessly destroy it is a sacrilege. This is why Pope Francis, in his many statements on environmental issues, emphasizes the moral imperative to care for our Common Home.

## A call to universal action

Mother Earth is clearly urging a call to action as nature is suffering more and more. As the climate emergency intensifies, the transition to our climate’s stability becomes increasingly critical. Progress will depend on how countries and their ability to cover ground on their commitments on recent international agreements and eventually their collective contribution to keep the global average temperature well below 2°C.

Earth Day reminds us that the engagement of the world must transcend politics, personal policy, agendas, and focus on human ecology which calls for a conversion of political, economic, cultural, and social systems as well as individual lifestyles, and sharing all of Earth’s goods with all inhabitants. We are living in a time of crisis, fracturing the environment in countless ways including global climate change. We see damage in the nature that surrounds us, but we also see it in men and women.

Science and technology have contributed much to progress and enrichment of the gifts of creation. However, there are moral limits of their use and application which sometimes have deleterious effects on the environment. The proper ecological balance depends on international cooperation, inter-generational solidarity and addressing the roots of poverty. Earth Day needs to promote a holistic ecology which is sustainable and integral. At its core, the environmental crisis is a moral challenge, it calls us to examine how we live, use, and share the goods of the Earth, what we pass on to future generations, and how we live in harmony with all of God’s creation on our Common Home.

*The above is an abbreviated version of the message of Bishop Michael Pfeifer, OMI to mark World Earth Day 2024.*



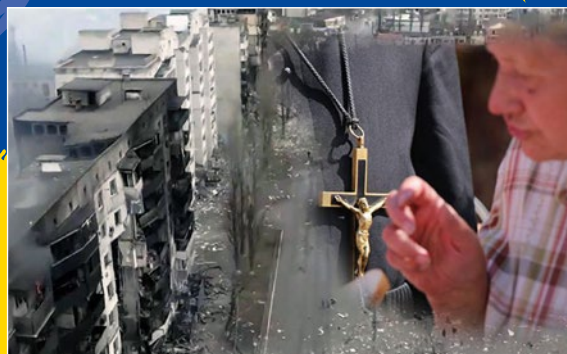
## Planet Vs. Plastics, working together

While there might be several overlapping themes assigned to Earth Day, EarthDay.Org proposed Planet Vs. Plastics, as the global theme for Earth Day 2024. This theme is a call to unite students, parents, businesses, governments, church’s, unions, individuals, and NGOs in an unwavering commitment to call for the end of plastics for the sake of human and planetary health, demanding a 60% reduction in the production of plastics by 2040 and an ultimate goal of building a plastic-free future for generations to come.

EarthDay.Org promotes widespread public awareness of the damage done by plastic to humans, animals, and all biodiversity’s health and demanding more research to be conducted. It calls for the rapid phasing out of all single use plastics by 2030 with a commitment in the United Nations treaty on plastic pollution, and to invest in innovative technology and materials to build a plastic-free world. Kathleen Rogers, President of EarthDay.Org, reminds us that “The planet Vs. Plastics campaign is a call to arms, a demand that we act now to end the scourge of plastics and safeguard the health of every living being upon our planet.”



# UKRAINE SNAPSHOTS



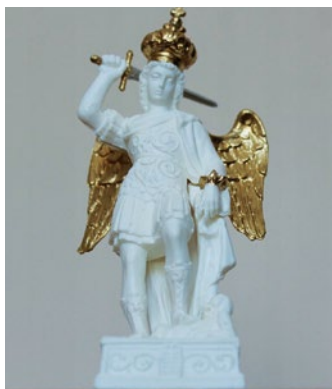
The first Oblate missionaries arrived in Ukraine at the very end of the Soviet Union. Now in Ukraine there are nine Oblate communities mostly engaged in parishes, also operating in the Chernobyl area and in Crimea. The following are some snapshots of the current mission in St Nicholas parish in Kyiv.”

## Defender Remembered at Oblate Parish

At the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate Parish of St. Nicholas in Kyiv, a funeral Mass was held for Oleksandr Gidzil. Oleksandr died as a soldier of the Ukrainian army, defending his country against Russian aggression.

For the Missionary Oblates and the parishioners at St. Nicholas, Oleksandr was more than just a soldier. He was an active member in the life of the parish community. His father served as the chairman of the parish council. “It is very difficult to find words of comfort at such times in our lives, but it is a time when we can be grateful and reflect on whether we are living our lives worthy of those who gave them to us,” said Fr. Pavlo Vyshkovskyy, OMI, parish priest at St. Nicholas.

“We are filled with gratitude and respect for the fact that we can live, pray and love because Oleksandr and many of our other defenders offered the most precious gift of God—their lives—for us.”

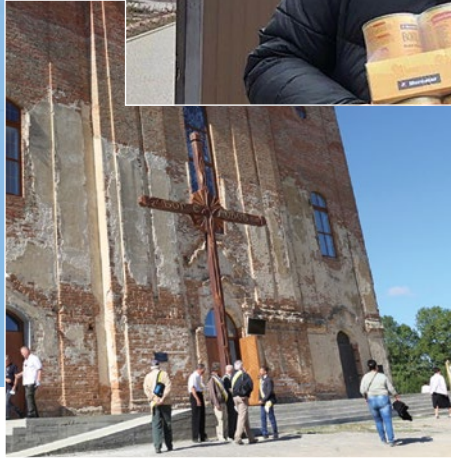
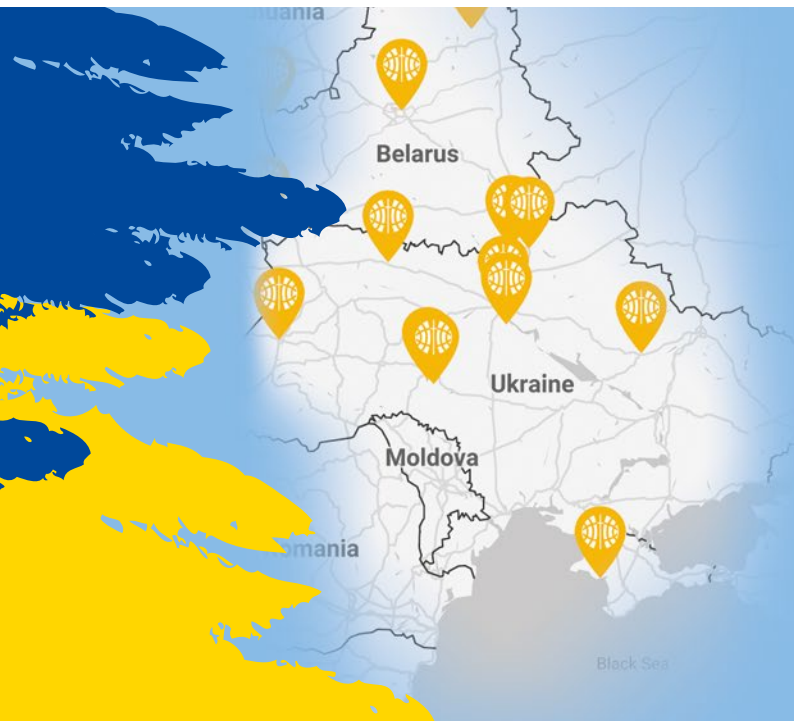


## Special Statue Watches Over St. Nicholas Parish

In 2022, during an audience with the Missionaries of Charity at the Vatican, Pope Francis blessed a statue of St. Michael the Archangel for the Missionary Oblate parish of St. Nicholas in Kyiv. Pope Francis prayed before the statue and blessed it before it was taken to Kyiv and installed in a place of honour at the parish church. Since the war with Russia, parishioners have found strength praying before the statue.

“The statue symbolizes self-confidence and courage because St. Michael confidently suppressed evil and courageously took up the sword, not to attack, but to defend,” said parishioner Maria Teresa. “Today, he says to us, I do not want war, but I will fight and defend what I believe in. For me, it’s like Ukrainians who don’t attack, but confidently defend their homeland.”

Saint Nicholas Church, which has been in the care of the Missionary Oblates for more than 20 years, is one of only two Roman Catholic churches built in the Ukrainian capital before 1917. In Soviet times, the church was taken away from the Catholics and turned into a concert hall. Missionary Oblates from Poland were some of the first priests allowed to enter Ukraine after the fall of communism and St. Nicholas Church became a focal point of their efforts to restore the faith in the country.



**Oblates Assist Victims of War**

Because of donations from friends around the world, the Missionary Oblates continue to provide assistance to victims of the war with Russia. Just 30 miles south of Kyiv, the Oblate central house of the Ukrainian Delegation in Obukhiv is one main place where the homeless can turn to for help. Many people have migrated to the area to escape parts of the country where the fighting is more intense.

The local Missionary Oblate community organizes a variety of assistance programs for the homeless. In their kitchen they bake bread and make sandwiches which are then distributed to people living on the streets or at community meals at the parish. There is also a free medical clinic for people provided by the parish to the homeless.

A recent shipment of food and wheelchairs arrived in Zahutyn, Poland, from an Oblate parish in Belgium. The shipment had to travel more than 3,000 miles to get the items across the border into Ukraine. "We have our eyes open and our hearts directed to the poorest people in our community," said Fr. Karol Bucholc, OMI, coordinator of the Missionary Oblates' relief efforts in Zahutyn. "We are very grateful and humbled by this generosity."



**"It is a time when we can be grateful and reflect on whether we are living our lives worthy of those who gave them to us."**

# Sunday Reflections

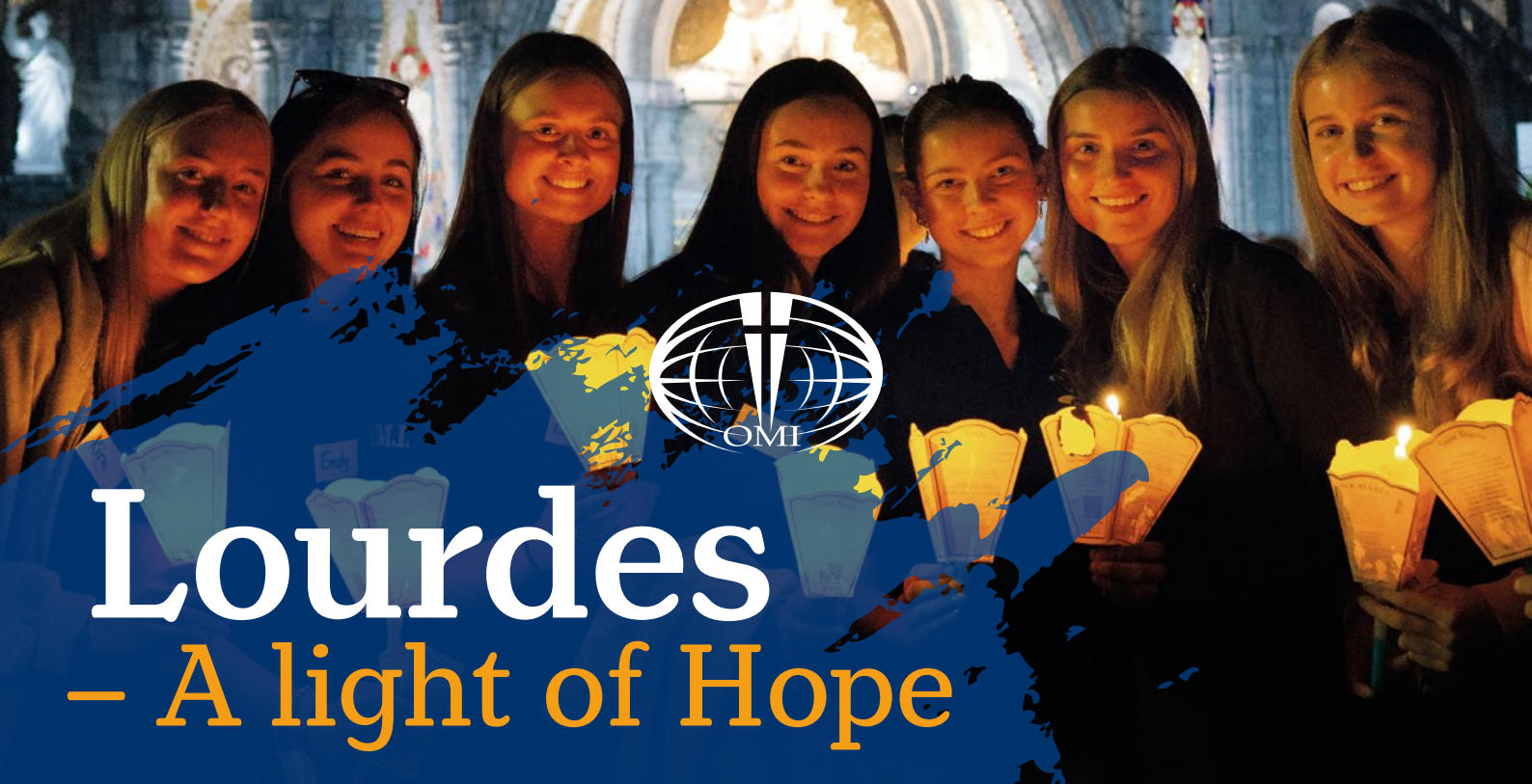
Each week a reflection on the Sunday Readings is published on our website [oblates.ie](http://oblates.ie)

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 in our daily lives."

If you would like to receive the reflection please sign up online or email [communications@oblates.ie](mailto: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](mailto:b.maher@oblates.ie)



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