



Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate United States Province

February 7, 2017

Dear Brother Oblates and Friends of the Oblates:

I hope this finds each of you well.

There are many contrasting voices in our nation these days. I have spoken with Fr. Antonio Ponce, director of the province office of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, and asked him and the JPIC office to assist us, as appropriate, with some resources, reflections and suggestions for action. It is important that we, as heirs to the charism of St. Eugene, continue to be engaged as missionaries and pastors in the struggle to uphold the dignity and defend the lives of our brothers and sisters who are the poor with their many faces. Among these faces, in my own heart, I often see the faces of immigrants and refugees.

How can we be engaged? I believe we can begin with personal reflection and study, and by respectfully listening to one another and to those to and with whom we minister.

We are also invited to a renewed listening to the word of God in both Testaments. This Old Testament passage is timely:

“For the Lord your God is the God of gods and Lord of lords...you too must also befriend the alien because you yourselves were once aliens in the land of Egypt” (cf. Deuteronomy 10:17-19) “You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.” (Leviticus 19:33-34)

These times call us to reflect deeply on how our Catholic faith and principles can shed light upon a myriad of questions we face concerning immigrants, ecology, economy, trade, human rights, race, patriotism, church unity, world order, checks and balances, war and peace, and so on. We have to go deeper than the next “breaking news” on these subjects.

Perhaps the deeper questions we face have to do with the meaning we attach to being an “American” and how that meaning has to do, or not to do, with the Gospel. Deeper still, perhaps, are personal and spiritual questions around *whether or not I am living primarily out of hope or fear, trust or distrust, love or its opposite, truth and facticity or falsehood.*

As Oblates we must defend the right to life of the unborn. We must defend the human dignity and rights of infants and children, youth, parents, women, men and the elderly. We must defend and love the “stranger who sojourns” among us and those who are the “least of our brothers and sisters.” We must love and defend our country as well as all of humanity. We must love and care for the planet Earth, our home.

At the recent General Chapter, we capitulars wrote the following to the members of the Congregation:

In this world that God loves, with all its richness and beauty, and looking upon it as Saint Eugene did through the eyes of Christ crucified:

- *We observe new forms of poverty, especially among young people: fundamentalism, individualism, materialism, consumerism, addiction to the digital world. But, we also see the suffering of families, youth, the lonely, and the elderly.*
- *We recognize urgent issues which strongly speak to us such as: the situation of refugees, the homeless, and migrants who are forced to leave their countries, as well as the devastation of the environment.*
- *We perceive victims of injustice and violence, especially the indigenous peoples and minorities, the victims of human trafficking, of abuse and exploitation, who cry out loudly for support and a response from us.*

Many aspects of the purpose and mission of the Oblates stand in sharp contrast to the purported aims of the new administration of our nation's president. This is nothing new, and can be said in the context of previous administrations. Many Oblates on a daily basis quietly live lives of faith, hope and charity, lives which prophetically denounce such immoral and anti-Gospel values and proclaim God's Kingdom. As people of the Gospel, followers of Christ, neither fear, nor anger, nor hatred can be our starting, middle or ending point. To the contrary, through our ministry we are called to reach out with love and compassion to all, no exceptions.

Pope Francis frequently reminds us of practical truths based on the teachings of the Church and the principles of Catholic Social Doctrine. He has been equally as prophetic in his teaching as the Holy Fathers who have preceded him. What a blessing they all have been! Among the words of Pope Francis applicable to our times:

"A person who thinks only about building walls, wherever they may be, and not building bridges, is not Christian. This is not the gospel," (Feb. 18, 2016)
"Walls that enclose some and banish others. Walled citizens, terrified on one side, excluded, exiled, and still more terrified of the other....Is that the life that our Father God wants for his children? Dear brothers and sisters—all walls fall. All of them. Do not be fooled." (Nov. 6, 2016)

We welcome and are grateful for the reflections, resources and suggestions for action the province JPIC office provides for us. May the voices and actions of Oblates continue to be prophetic, and may St. Eugene who himself experienced exile bless our efforts!

Faternally in Jesus and Mary Immaculate,



Bill Antone, OMI, Provincial