



15 Days of Prayer with Saint Eugene de Mazenod

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Foreword by Ronald Rolheiser

A Brief Chronology

A Saint for Dysfunctional Families

Saints tend to have a certain folklore surrounding their lives. Their virtues are lauded and put into the spotlight, giving the impression that they were less like the rest of us, with our flaws and weaknesses.

The reading of Eugene de Mazenod's correspondence would lead one to conclude that he was not a plaster saint! His was not the perfect family or problem-free life. Eugene's family divorced, he struggled with his ego and anger, and suffered through stressful personal situations. Each experience shaped him into a man that people remembered as inspiring dignity, building community, and changing lives by responding to the needs of those most abandoned.

1781:

Charles Joseph Eugene de Mazenod was born to parents who had an arranged marriage. His father, Charles-Antoine de Mazenod, a highly educated and high ranking official, was President of the Court of Accounts. He lived wildly beyond his means, and married a wealthy, but middle-class, younger woman: Marie-Rose Joannis. They had three children: Charlotte-Elizabeth, who died at age five, Charles-Joseph Eugene, the only boy, and Charlotte-Eugenie Antoinette, born three years after Eugene. The family lived a happy and privileged life, surrounded by a dozen servants.

1788 – 1795:

The French Revolution forced the de Mazenods to flee France, first travelling to Turin, Italy, then pooling their money with other refugees to charter a boat to Venice.

In Venice, unable to afford to send Eugene to school, a neighbour, Fr. Bartolo Zinelli, tutored him at no charge.

The stress of exile, difference in their education, opposite ideas about money, meddling in-laws and a 15-year age difference contributed to the divorce of his parents. Marie-Rose and Eugene's sister returned to France in 1795.

1796 – 1802:

From Venice, Eugene, his father and uncle travelled to Naples, in an effort to stay ahead of the French armies and bad business deals. In 1799, they arrived in Palermo, Italy, where due to the friendship of the Duke and Duchess of Cannizzaro, Eugene lived a life of luxury. The Duchess put Eugene in charge of distributing her money to the poor. She was a good influence on his life. At her death in 1802, he mourned her as a "second mother." Shortly after, his own mother had him return to France.

1803 – 1806:

In France, Eugene began searching for a direction for his life. He considered marriage, but only as a business deal. His mother found two possible marriage partners: one succumbed to tuberculosis, and the dowry of the other woman was too small. Amid all the shallowness, he had an urge to live a deeper Christian life. He joined an association at the service of prisoners and organised collections to aid the poor.

1807 – 1815:

Eugene had a profound experience of God's love for him during a Good Friday service. After a period of discernment, he entered the seminary of San-Sulpice in Paris. In 1811, he was ordained a priest and began to minister to those on the fringes of society. In Lent of 1813, he had services at an early hour so that the poor could attend. Unlike the clergy of that time, who preached "fire and brimstone," Eugene told them how cherished they were in God's eyes. Exhausted by overwork, he invited other priests to join him in helping to rebuild the Church that had been devastated by corruption and politics.

1816 – 1825:

Fr Eugene de Mazenod and a handful of priests began preaching missions in the countryside of Provence, France.

In 1820, having returned from exile, practically penniless, Charles Antoine died at the age of 75, cared for by his brother and Eugene.

As more priests join the small group, Eugene saw the need to get formal approval from Rome and to expand beyond France. This approval would keep bishops from taking back the priest they had "loaned" to Fr. de Mazenod's work.

1826 – 1836:

Pope Leo XII formally approved the Constitutions and Rules of the Missionary Oblates of the most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary because of its witness as missionaries to the poor. Fr. de Mazenod and Fr. Tempier went to serve as Vicars-General to the Bishop of Marseille,

Canon Fortune' de Mazenod, Eugene's uncle. However, their absence left a leadership vacuum resulting in dissension in the Congregation. From 1826 to 1831, 21 men remained; 24 left.

In 1832, Fr. de Mazenod was called to Rome and ordained Bishop of Icosia *in partibus infidelium* (Icosia was a defunct Church See in Algeria). The French government, angered because the Pope had not consulted with them, stripped de Mazenod of his French citizenship and twice he found himself in disfavour with the pope.

Amid this controversy, Bishop de Mazenod worked tirelessly to give comfort to the sick and dying during the cholera epidemic of 1835.

1837 – 1853:

59 year old Bishop de Mazenod takes over the Diocese of Marseille on Christmas Eve of 1837. His residence was open daily from 10am to 2pm to welcome the poor or wealthy, all were treated with the same dignity and affection. He encouraged the laity to believe in their own dignity and to help reach out to the needy in their neighbourhoods.

In 1840, during Ireland's famine and plague, he asked the people of his diocese to help. Wherever there was a need, he responded with spiritual or financial support, or personnel.

From 1841 – 1851:

Bishops throughout the world ask for Oblates for their diocese and so he sends them to Canada, England, Oregon, Sri Lanka, Texas, New York.

1854 – 1861:

When Pope Pius IX defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, Bishop de Mazenod was present in Rome.

Eugene continues to send Oblates throughout the world – Ireland, Mexico

On May 21, 1861, Bishop de Mazenod dies at the age of 78, with Oblates praying the Salve Regina by his bedside. Of the 414 Oblates living in 1861, about 100 worked in the United States.

1975

Beatification on October 19 by Pope Paul VI.

1995

Canonization on December 3 by Pope John Paul II.