

St Eugene's invitation to be Oblate.

Fr Eugene de Mazenod, realising that he needed a community to do his work invited Fr Henri Tempier to join him. Read this letter as though it were addressed to you and feel its power. Allow your heart to respond to St Eugene's appeal with generosity.

Here is the full text of Eugene's letter. One can immediately feel the passion of the man writing it:

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 and on the apostasy that daily spreads wider with dreadfully ravaging effects. Look at how feeble are the means employed up to now to oppose this flood of evil; ask your heart what it would do to counter such disasters and then reply to my letter.

Well, dear man, without going into details, I want to tell you that you are necessary for the work that the Lord inspires us to undertake. The head of the Church is convinced that, given the wretched state in which France finds herself, only missions can bring people back to the Faith they have practically abandoned. Hence, good men of the Church from different dioceses are banding together in response to the views of our Supreme Pastor. We also feel that it is utterly necessary to employ the same remedy here in our region and, full of confidence in the goodness of Providence, we have laid down the foundations of an establishment that will steadily furnish our countryside with fervent missionaries.

They will ceaselessly engage in destroying the demon's empire, at the same time providing the example of a life worthy of the Church in the community they will form. Indeed, we will live together in one house the one I bought - under a Rule we shall adopt with common accord and for which we will draw the elements from the statutes of St Ignatius, of St Charles for his Oblates, of St Philip Neri, of St Vincent de Paul, and of Blessed Liguori.

Happiness awaits us in the holy society that will have but one heart and one soul. One part of the year will be devoted to the conversion of souls, the other to seclusion, study and our individual sanctification. I will say no more for the moment; suffice it to give you some intimation of the spiritual delights we will taste together.

Should you wish, as I hope, to be one of us, you will not find yourself in unknown terrain; you will have four companions. If presently we are not more numerous, it means we wish to choose men with the will and the courage to walk in the footsteps of the apostles. It is important to lay solid foundations. The greatest regularity must be planned and introduced in the house the very moment we enter it. And it is precisely for that reason that you are necessary to me because I know you to be capable of embracing an exemplary rule and persevering in it.

Once I have your reply, I will give you all the details you could wish for. But, dear friend, I conjure you, do not allow yourself say no to the greatest good that may possibly be done to the Church. Assistant Parish Priests can be found easily to replace you, but it would not be as easy to come across dedicated men who wish to devote themselves to the glory of God and the salvation of souls with no more reward on earth than much sorrow and all else that the Saviour announced to his true disciples. The harm your refusal would do to our newborn enterprise is incalculable. I speak sincerely and with reflection. Your modesty may suffer, but no matter. I do not hesitate to add that if I believed it necessary to make the journey to Aries to convince you, I would wing my way there. Everything depends on how we begin. We need perfect unanimity of sentiments, the same good will, the same disinterestedness, the same devotion. That sums it up.

Caught up in the emotion of the moment Father de Mazenod quickly sealed the letter and sent it off by the post. But he forgot to sign his name to it! One can imagine Father Tempier's consternation upon receiving it. Is it some sort of practical joke? Who would send him a letter like this? It was only some time later, thanks to the Parish Priest Gaudin, a friend of both Tempier and de Mazenod that he discovered the letter's author. When he did, and when he realized 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. True, I can make no claim to any talent for preaching, which is so essential in a missionary, but alius sic, alius autem sic.

What I cannot do in eloquent sermons, I shall do in catechism classes and instructions. I find nothing lowly or inferior in that. Besides, what you want most in someone you choose as your collaborator is a priest who will not get into a rut, and, as Father Charles' predecessor used to say, plod along day after day without accomplishing anything; you want priests who will be ready to follow in the footsteps of the apostles and work for the salvation of souls with no other reward here on earth but hardship and fatigue. I think that God's grace has given me that desire. If not, then with all my heart I want it, and working with you will make it all the easier to attain. You can, therefore, count entirely on me.

Francois de Paule-Henri Tempier

With Tempier's entry, the nascent community counted five members: Eugene de Mazenod, aged 33, Henri Tempier, 26, Jean-Francois Deblieu, 26, Auguste Icard, 25, and Pierre Nolasque Mie, 47.