



VIGIL

CENTENARY OF THE DEATH
OF OUR FOUNDER,
THE VENERABLE FATHER
JOHN LEO DEHON, SCJ

“For Him I lived,
for Him I die.
He is my everything,
my life,
my death,
my eternity”

Dehon



AUGUST | 12
1925 - 2025



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August 12, 1925 - 2025

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[Words of Fr. Leo Dehon on his deathbed]

Cover illustration by Marie Louise op het Veld, laywoman from the Netherlands

OPENING ¹

(P) Usually in our vigils we listen to the Word of God and the voice of our Founder. Today, we also want to hear the voice of his spiritual sons, our Dehonian brothers spread across the four continents. We would like this vigil to be marked by a tone of recognition and thanksgiving, acknowledging the wonders which Christ worked in the life of our Founder and in us, who are the continuators of his work. Thanksgiving because we are grateful for the inheritance we received from our Founder, giving meaning and direction to our lives.

The testimonies in this vigil help us see that through us Fr. Dehon still lives on. Listening to the voices of his spiritual sons today is the best tribute we can pay to our very Good Father (Trè Bon Père). To do so in the Presence of the Eucharistic Jesus is to recognize his gifts and the wonders he worked in our religious family. We hope that the Word of God and the testimonies will leave a mark of encouragement and grace on each one of us.

SONG FOR THE EXPOSITION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

(moment of silence)

¹ Note: For the dynamic of this vigil, we propose that the readings (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5) be previously assigned among the members of the community. The letter “P” refers to the presider of the celebration.

I. "HE IS MY EVERYTHING"

(R1) "For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me".

(Gal 2: 19-20)

(R2) "He loved me and gave himself for me." As we know, this experience of Saint Paul, found in the letter to the Galatians, is one of the most inspiring texts for Father Dehon, and has been cited by him countless times. We can see how early Father Dehon was touched by God's grace and how sensitive he was in responding to these divine calls. In his diary, we can see how sensitive he was to discovering God's will for his life. From an early age, he felt embraced by a special grace. His response could not be otherwise: "He is my everything." This love is manifested in a profoundly Eucharistic life, which we have received as a charismatic heritage.

(R3) "The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is, for all Priests of the Sacred Heart Jesus, the great act of the day..." (Spiritual Directory V, 4). "The Mass is the crowning act of the day, a divine act; it is the act that characterizes us, and it is the reason for the existence of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. One could express everything we ought to be in this way: the priests of the Sacred Heart celebrate and participate in the Mass with holiness" (Cahiers Falleur, III, 5).

(moment of silence)

Testimony of an SCJ committed to educational work

(R4) By Fr. Joseph Mukuna, SCJ from the United States

(Director of the Dehonian Study Center in the United States and Professor of Biblical Studies at Sacred Heart School of Theology in Hales Corners)

“For me, Father Dehon is more than a historical figure. He is a spiritual guide whose life and teachings inspire me daily to act with compassion and to promote peace and justice through love – reflecting the Heart of Jesus. [...] Father Dehon believed that education is essentially a formation of the heart. It must go beyond the simple transmission of knowledge; it must shape character, cultivate virtues, and nurture a deep love for God and humanity. He emphasized that true Christian education respects the dignity of each person and helps individuals develop their talents to achieve both personal fulfillment and union with God. Furthermore, he taught that educators must be attentive to the spiritual and intellectual needs of their students. This holistic vision of education is expressed in the more than 50 Dehonian educational institutions around the world, including the Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology and the Dehonian Study Center. This principle also guides my work [...].”

Testimony of a Dehonian Laywoman

(R5) By Carmen Portals from Spain

(Coordinator of the Lay Dehonians in Spain)

“I am very happy to be part of the Dehonian family and to keep it alive and active with all my dedication and affection. The charism which Father Dehon left us becomes visible in Spain through, among other activities, school education, something basic and necessary. If the concept of family seems to have disintegrated in many aspects, at least education should be a space of social and human spirit, of knowledge and human dignity. Father Dehon was a special actor in the social and educational field, a revolutionary man. And today, when we live in a world where technology seems to want to destroy the human being, social efforts are necessary, not only in countries where freedom is lacking, where there is war or extreme poverty, but also in our rich Western Europe, where the witness of a healthy and balanced evangelization for social justice is becoming increasingly necessary.”

(moment of silence)

II. "DEHON'S LIFE"

(R1) "Now since it was preparation day, in order that the bodies might not remain on the cross on the sabbath, for the sabbath day of that week was a solemn one, the Jews asked Pilate that their legs be broken and they be taken down. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and then of the other one who was crucified with Jesus. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs, but one soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out. An eyewitness has testified, and his testimony is true; he knows that he is speaking the truth, so that you also may come to believe. For this happened so that the scripture passage might be fulfilled: 'Not a bone of it will be broken.' And again another passage says: 'They will look upon him whom they have pierced.'"

(Jo 19:31-37)

(R2) "The kingdom of the Sacred Heart in society is the kingdom of justice, charity, mercy, and compassion for the lowly, the humble, and those who suffer. I ask you to dedicate yourselves to all these works, to encourage them, to help them. Support all institutions that contribute to the kingdom of social justice and prevent the oppression of the weak by the powerful".

(OSoc. I, 233)

(moment of silence)

Testimony of an SCJ dedicated to the missions

(R3) By Fr. Michael Benedict, SCJ from India

(Parish priest and formator)

“Father Dehon says that the simplest way to serve God is to do it out of love. Father Dehon shared the love of the Sacred Heart with all those around him. As a Dehonian, Father Dehon's spirituality has challenged me every day to be a prophet of love wherever I serve. I see so much struggle, poverty, division, and hopelessness. It is a challenge to live in true solidarity with people. When I travel alongside the people entrusted to me with love, I try to actively listen and dialogue with them, helping them through their difficulties and, above all, being with them through my prayers and physical presence”.

Testimony of an SCJ dedicated to social work

(R4) Fr. Jean Paul Bungamane, SCJ from Congo

(Vice-Coordinator of the Saint Lawrence Social Center in Kisangani)

“I carry out my apostolate at the Saint Lawrence Center, a work of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (RDC), which welcomes children experiencing family breakdown. For me, Father Dehon, our Founder, lives on in my ministry through the way I act and treat these children. I do everything with love and dignity, as our Founder invites us to help those most in need to find relief in the Heart of Jesus, full of love for all people, without discrimination. My apostolate consists of leading children to Jesus, following in the footsteps of Father Dehon”.

(moment of silence)

III. “DEHON’S DEATH”

(R1) At that time Jesus said:

“Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies,
it remains just a grain of wheat;
but if it dies, it produces much fruit.

Whoever loves his life loses it,
and whoever hates his life in this world
will preserve it for eternal life.

Whoever serves me must follow me,
and where I am, there also will my servant be.

The Father will honor whoever serves me.”

(Jo 12, 24-26)

(R2) Father Dehon’s life was permeated by moments of mortification and suffering. We can recall some of them: his parents’ lack of understanding of his vocation; constant headaches and fragile health for most of his life; difficulties in obtaining approval to found a new institute; realizing that some of his spiritual sons were fighting for power in the early days of the congregation; the terrible suffering of the First World War. But we can particularly remember the *Consummatum est*, which perhaps was the hardest trial in Father Dehon’s life.

(R3) “The period between 1883-1884. It was the year of the *‘Consummatum est’*, a terrible year. What an anguish! What a heartbreak! I had left everything, broken with everything, sacrificed everything to found the work of reparation to the Sacred Heart; everything: my worldly career, my success, my many friends, the hopes and peace of my family. After months of anxious waiting, the death decree arrived. (...) I cannot say how much I suffered that year, especially during the winter, until to the humble resurrection of March 26, 1884. Without a doubt, I greatly needed supernatural help to keep me from becoming discouraged and dying”. (NHV, VIII, 66)

(R4) Life demands harsh trials, and it is often difficult to understand God’s will amidst fragility, incomprehension, loneliness, and our own powerlessness. Faith is our last resort, knowing that the work of redemption is established not only in preaching to the crowds and in the success of our activities, but also in the silence and apparent failure of the cross, just as it was with the Lord. But we must remember: if in the life of Jesus, of Father Dehon, and in our own lives, a *Consummatum est* is present, the power of the Resurrection is also at work.

Testemunho de um SCJ que trabalha em uma comunidade de religiosos dehonianos idosos e enfermos

(R5) By Fr. Wim Halters, SCJ from the Netherlands

(Director of the “Catherine Hof” Community)

“My life consists of giving myself and being ready for my brothers and sisters and for the people around me. Just as our Founder, Father Dehon, did. I am here to do God’s will. Being fully available to others, as our Founder intended, is a call to a life of service, understanding, and connection. It is an invitation to embrace the eternal value of human relationships and to build together a world in which everyone is seen, heard, and valued. This is what I try to live daily in my life. This is my life.”

(moment of silence)

IV. “DEHON’S ETERNITY”

(R1) “We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now; and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.” (Rm 8:22-23)

“When everything is subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all”. (1 Cor 15:28)

Testimony of an SCJ working in formation

(R2) By Fr. Flávio Passos, SCJ from Brazil

(Director of the Dehonian Seminary and Professor at the Dehonian Faculty in Taubaté)

“In our Seminary, we see that Father Dehon remains alive in the hearts of the 25 young seminarians who one day decided to leave everything behind to follow Jesus, walking in the footsteps of our Founder. Contemplation of the open side of Christ on the Cross, Holy Eucharist, and Reparatory Adoration sustain the academic study of Philosophy, as well as our community and pastoral challenges. But, above all, they also sustain the daily renewal of our yes, given individually and lived every day in the fraternal community”.

(moment of silence)

INTERCESSIONS

(P) Lord Jesus Christ, in this Jubilee Year, as we gather in prayer on the occasion of the death of our founder, Father Dehon, let us confidently come to you:

1. We thank you for your servant, Father Leo John Dehon. May his life and work inspire and strengthen us in our spiritual identity and personal vocation. Christ, hear us....

R: Christ, graciously hear us.

2. We thank you for our Congregation and for the entire Dehonian Family. May your prayer to the Father, that we may be one, make us grow and mature ever more in our love and communion with you and with one another. Christ, hear us...

R: Christ, graciously hear us.

3. We thank you for the mission you have entrusted to us. We ask you to never cease guiding us to what you want us to do. Make us prophets of love, servants of reconciliation, and pilgrims of hope in this world. Christ, hear us...

R: Christ, graciously hear us.

4. We thank you for the world in which we live, for all our brothers and sisters, and for your entire beloved creation. Make us attentive to the promotion of a new communion, characterized by justice and peace, concerned with the care for our common home and bearing witness to the fraternity for which people thirst and is possible in you (Cst 65). Christ, hear us...

R: Christ, graciously hear us.

5. We thank you for the lives and witness of our brothers and sisters who have gone before us and who have always sought your will. Grant them rest in your heart and give them the fullness of your love. Christ, hear us...

R: Christ, graciously hear us.

(moment of silence)

CONCLUSION

- (P)** “For Him I have lived, for Him I die. He is my all, my life, my death, my eternity.” During this vigil, in the Presence of the Lord, we revisited some aspects of our Founder’s life. We saw how Father Dehon continues to live through us. Listening to these testimonies, we understand that fundamental affirmation indicated in our Rule of Life:

“As disciples of Father Dehon,
we want to make union with Christ
in His love for the Father and for all
the principle and center of our life.” (Cst 17)

Whether in mission in distant lands, in the work of education, formation of new religious for the Congregation, parishes, social works, through the service of leadership and administration, in various places and apostolates, or as Lay Dehonians, Father Dehon continues to live through us, for we share in the very oblation of Christ to the Father. On this special day, we recognize the greatness of our vocation and the charism we have received. We are filled with gratitude and our hearts imbued with renewed strength and enthusiasm

to serve the Sacred Heart of Jesus “who loved us and gave himself for us” (Cf. Gal 2:20)

And if you may, ask yourself this question: what does the Sacred Heart of Jesus expect of you today, or what grace would you, as a spiritual son of Father Dehon, ask of the Lord to better live your vocation and election (Cf. 2Pt 1,10), according to the charism you have received?

(moment of silence)

HYMN: TANTUM ERGO

BENEDICTION WITH THE
BLESSED SACRAMENT

