

**Starting from the Cenacle  
to enkindle the passion  
for our Eucharistic Mission**



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(La Mure, summer 1865 and 2014)

*The summer at La Mure always has surprises for us. An unexpected, but longed for surprise is the arrival of Father Eymard, “lou paourou de Dieu” (“the poor man of God”), as the people call him here in their dialect. His word attracts, the whole world loves to listen to and meet him because he remained simple and close to all.*

*This year he seems to me more tired than usual. This is why at first I didn’t dare approach him. But a particular light, which was shining in his eyes, overcame the fear to disturb him.*

*I suggested to him to go for a little stroll. We remained silent for a long time. Finally a word escaped from his lips and that started a dialogue.*

**Peter Julian :** Oh, the Cenacle!

**Manuel Barbiero :** The Cenacle?

**P.J. :** Yes, the Cenacle... this is a word that always makes me dream, full of emotion; it suggests to me a loved and desired place.

**M.B. :** Everyone knows that last year in November you left for Rome to deal with the important business of the Cenacle of Jerusalem, and that regrettably the matter wasn’t very successful.

**P.J. :** In fact, I hoped to found a community at Jerusalem, in the Cenacle itself, if it were possible. But for me the Cenacle wasn’t only that of Jerusalem.

**M.B. :** Your idea has survived for more than a century. Today our Congregation had adopted the slogan: “Starting from the Cenacle”.

**P.J. :** I have heard that. But I don’t want the notion of the Cenacle to be misunderstood. For me the Cenacle, my “dear Cenacle”, refers to a real call, a vocation.

The Cenacle is the place where Jesus instituted the Eucharist and revealed the riches of his love for us; it is the place of faith and love.

It is also the place where the disciples, gathered with Mary, were praying as they waited for the Holy Spirit, who came upon them with power. It is the place where after Pentecost the first disciples gathered, attentive to the apostles’ teaching and to fraternal communion, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

From the Cenacle the apostles, who had been fearful and withdrawn, emerged with new courage to convert the world. From that moment the fire of Pentecost hasn’t been ever extinguished. It gave the apostles the power of their mission.

**M.B. :** What you are saying reminds me of what our Pope Francis spoke of during his pilgrimage to the Holy Land last May (2014), when he celebrated Mass in the room of the Cenacle at Jerusalem.

He also spoke of the Cenacle as the place of the Last Supper and the descent of the Holy Spirit over Mary and the disciples.

The Cenacle, the Pope said, reminds us of service, the washing of feet that Jesus carried out, as an example for his disciples; he reminds us through the Eucharist of sacrifice. In every Eucharistic celebration Jesus offers himself for us to the Father in order that we also might be able to unite ourselves to him in offering God our life, our work, our joys and sufferings.

The Cenacle reminds us of friendship, sharing, brotherhood, harmony, peace among ourselves. The Cenacle finally reminds us of the birth of the new family, the Church. To this great family are invited all the children of God from every people and every language, because all are brothers and children of the one Father in heaven.

**P.J. :** I very much like what the Pope said about the Cenacle. But there is an aspect that I hold dear. I hoped to be able to celebrate Mass in the Cenacle, to expose the Blessed Sacrament there, but God had other designs for me. At Rome, when the great business, as you were just saying, didn't turn out, I made a great discovery.

**M.B. :** Can you describe what you experienced in Rome?

**P.J. :** I didn't think that my business in Rome would have dragged on so long. I decided to make a retreat. It lasted 65 days. During this retreat I had the grace of understanding what God was really wanting from me: the gift of my personality.

I understood, and this was thanks to a gift of God and the action of the Holy Spirit, that you can give God all the hearts of all the people of the earth, that you can do great things, but if you keep for yourself your own heart, if you don't give it totally to God, then you have done nothing.

God revealed to me another cenacle, the interior Cenacle. Do you understand that?

**M.B. :** What exactly is this interior Cenacle?

**P.J. :** It is Christ who has entirely invaded my life; he wanted to live in me, form himself in me, grow in me, in order to make me share thoroughly his paschal mystery, a mystery of self-emptying and infinite glory.

He wanted to make me share his love for his Father and for all people.

To the extent that Christ was gradually taking shape in me, I began to realize that it was no longer I who was living, but he, Christ living in me. He had become my counsellor, my strength, my consolation, my centre of love.

**M.B. :** While Father Eymard was speaking, I held my breath, so powerful and beautiful was what he was saying. At length, I dared a word: How to reach that point?

**P.J. :** It takes a noble passion of love that all of a sudden removes, that gives in a gulp, a love as strong as death.

I discovered afresh and in a deeper way that God loves me, me, personally, with a love of benevolence, with an infinite and eternal love. And this love desires union, it doesn't want

to be happy alone, it is a love bringing about identity of life. Love, indeed, desires to become a single thing with the person loved, without separation or distinction, without losing at all his own identity. I accepted to remain in this love in all simplicity, like a child.

The interior Cenacle is also the fact of remaining in Jesus Christ, in his love, in intimacy of heart to heart with him. The interior Cenacle is the Kingdom of God in us.

I placed and gave myself over to be entirely under the action of the Holy Spirit so as to allow myself to be led by him, shaped by him. It is the Holy Spirit who led me to make this gift. The same Spirit who brought about the incarnation of Jesus Christ in Mary, who makes present Christ on the altar and who makes him live in each of us. It is the Spirit who makes us become "He whom we have received".

**M.B. :** You seem to be tired, but I see a great light shining in your eyes and an extraordinary power in your words.

**P.J. :** My dear friend, I realize very well today that by giving all you find everything. You give to the point of dying for the glory of Christ. A sentence of the martyr St Ignatius struck me: I am the grain of Christ; and I added: May I be grounded by mortification, may I be baked in the fire of love, so that I may become pure bread.

**M.B. :** But, ultimately can you tell me how your life changed? What happened to it?

**P.J. :** Externally nothing extraordinary, if you wish; but from the moment that I made the vow of my personality, I felt that my whole personality became like a fresh piece of bread for my confreres. What Jesus had said in the gospel of St John was truly being realized: whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I in him, and he will live for me.

**M.B. :** Can you explain to me a little better what that means for you?

**P.J. :** I don't know if I can make myself understood, but I found myself as established in a new relationship with Jesus Christ, in a stable relationship, a union of love and friendship so strong that through this union my actions became in some way those of Jesus Christ. The life of Jesus, his thoughts, his attitudes, his desires, his manner of acting penetrated me and became my thoughts, my attitudes, my desires.

At Rome, during thanksgiving for the graces of this blessed day (21 March), I have as it were heard Jesus telling me: "You will be the body of my heart; your soul, the active faculties of my soul; your heart, the receptacle, the movement of my heart". Thus, Jesus Christ was living and acting in me entirely for the glory of his Father.

**M.B. :** Jesus lives and acts in you! Can he live in each of us?

**P.J. :** Have you understood the fact that Christ is in us, living in us; that we become another Jesus Christ? That by our actions, our words, our behaviour, it is Christ who appears and communicates himself?

**M.B. :** What I understand is that Jesus Christ for you became truly the centre of your life, the whole of your existence.

**P.J. :** Yes, you have grasped the essential.

Jesus Christ draws me ceaselessly towards this life of union. He wants to be my whole life. He wants to sanctify me and make me live from his life.

It is for that that I took the decision to hand over to him the government of my existence, to place myself under his way of acting, to live by his spirit.

In him I found all: life, movement and being; Jesus Christ is my interior Master, the guest of my soul and my body, my guide, my model. In a word: the God of my heart. I love him and I want to resemble him in everything, to have the same attitudes as him, to identify myself with him.

**M.B. :** Peter-Julian, what about our personality, what is it to become?

**P.J. :** This vow of personality for me is the greatest, the holiest of all the others. It is the vow of myself, and of my freedom to give myself again for always. There must not be fear to give oneself. You have indeed what you are giving, this is a law of the Gospel, it is the paschal mystery, the transit of death and resurrection that is being realized in us.

I don't lose anything, but all pertaining to my humanity – thoughts and attitudes, words and actions – all becomes nobler, more beautiful, more divine.

Union with our Lord constitutes our dignity; we become something sacred, holy. Jesus gives worth to our humanity, he divinizes it.

In Jesus Christ I feel at ease, as at home. In him I find the grace, freedom, peace, life, union with God. He who entrusts himself freely to Christ doesn't lose his identity, but becomes a person in the full sense of the word.

**M.B. :** What you are living seems to be what was stated by the Second Vatican Council: whoever follows Christ becomes more human; a person cannot discover himself fully without the unselfish gift of himself.

**P.J. :** That's it indeed. It is the Eucharist that makes this possible day after day; in our gradual transfiguration we are called by grace to be in the image of Jesus Christ. Our entire life becomes an extension of the life of Christ; and my life, thanks to the Eucharist, takes on the appropriate form to be a life lived fully.

Through the gift of ourselves Christ is glorified in us; we become the true glory that the Father desires, the new human being recreated in Christ.

**M.B. :** What you are saying stirs up in me a stream of thoughts. I understand that when I receive or I contemplate Jesus the Bread of Life I'm facing the font of bounty, humility, and that thanks to the love that yearns to be reflected in the person loved, this same goodness and humility enters into me. Pope Benedict XVI once told young people: "By regularly and devoutly taking part in the Mass, by spending a long time of adoration in the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, it is easier to understand the breath, width, height and depth of his love, which surpasses all understanding. In sharing the Eucharistic bread with our brothers of the ecclesial community we are impelled to concretise quickly Christ's love in generous service towards them".

I have a question. What you have experienced, can I also live this? Is your experience reserved for a privileged category of persons, or can others live it?

**P.J. :** The vow of personality, the gift of self, for me represented the grace of holiness through the Eucharist, the key of our life, a new way, the characteristic virtue that I wish to propose to all those who share my ideal of life.

I share with you confidentially, that when I returned to France I shared with the Jordan family what I had experienced in Rome. Madame Nathalie and her daughter Mathilde grasped well and received the grace that God had given me; they embraced it with all their heart.

**M.B. :** What is it that they understood? This interests me.

**P.J. :** Firstly, two sentences from the Scriptures resonated in them: “It is not I who live, but Jesus Christ who lives in me” [Gal 2:20]; and, “Jesus Christ must increase in us up to the state of perfect humankind” [cf. Eph 4:13]. They grasped this life of union with Jesus Christ, the fact that Christ dwells in us, that he is born in each one and grows spiritually, because he wants to glorify his Father in each one of us.

To live this life of union everything must be given: heart, mind, intelligence, judgment, thought; to work in communion with God, to become interior, to dwell in him, as he dwells in us, to live in thanksgiving, to be happy in him.

**M.B. :** “To give”, “giving oneself”, “gift”. How often I have heard these words repeated? They are very important for you, like a constant theme.

**P.J. :** The Eucharist, my friend! For me the Eucharist is the gift par excellence, since it is the gift of Jesus Christ himself.

The Eucharist is a gratuitous gift, without bounds, without strings attached. Jesus doesn't look to see if persons, those to whom he gives himself, are worthy or not, what is their moral state or their intellectual capacity and understanding.

The Eucharist is a concrete gift, incarnate. Jesus gives his being, his life, himself, his concrete existence. The gift of his body and his blood expresses the depth of his love, which doesn't keep back anything for himself and accepts everything for the beloved.

The Eucharist is a total and eternal gift, complete and permanent. It is a gift always available.

The Eucharist is a gift that gives us life, that takes us over totally and fully, that enables us to enter into a new life beyond death.

The Eucharist is a gift that is offered as nourishment that builds up relationships everyone can learn to give and to receive. The Eucharist, making us become “one sole body”, contains as a deep dynamism of reciprocal love intimate and profound communion.

Quite simply I responded to “the Gift of God” by the gift of myself. Love is in the exchange.

We remained silent. Then Father Eymard resumed speaking.

**P.J. :** I have a dream!

**M.B. :** Still another dream?

**P.J. :** In looking at society I notice that it is dying because it no longer has a centre of truth and charity, no longer family life. Each one is isolated, self-centred, wanting to be self-sufficient. I have the impression of an impending breakup.

It is because of this that I would like to see my religious, the Sister servants also, take the fire of the Eucharist to the four corners of the world. As I told the Archbishop of Paris, I didn't want to restrict myself to Paris, but desired to spread the fire to the four corners of the world. I would like to see lay persons, who share our charism, to be like cenacles of Eucharistic life in the whole world.

I would like to see all go out, to go without any fear – to leave, like Abraham left his country... having in the heart only one great unique love: the Eucharistic Christ.

**M.B. :** Pope Francis speaks to us today of an outgoing Church. In Jerusalem he said that the Church was born in the Cenacle and it arose in going forth. From the Cenacle it starts with the Bread broken in its hands, the wounds of Jesus before its eyes, and the Spirit of love in its heart to renew the earth.

**P.J. :** I think that Pope Francis and I are made to understand one another.

Jesus said that he had come to set the earth aflame. He had desired ardently for it to be kindled everywhere. This fire is the divine love, because God is love. The hearth of love is the Eucharist; it is there that the love of Jesus Christ penetrates us and inflames us.

**M.B. :** You speak of fire... this fire I perceive burning in you. There is a passion that dwells in you and that I would love to share with you.

**P.J. :** The Eucharist is Pentecost continued, in the Cenacle, with the languages of fire. It is Jesus who through the Eucharist places in our bodies a grace of love. He comes there himself, he puts into us the hearth of fire: he lights it, he maintains it through his frequent coming, he sees to the expansion of this consuming flame. It is indeed a burning coal that inflames us. This is an ardent fire that will not be extinguished even if we want to put it out, because his hearth is not of our making, but of Jesus Christ's, and it is he who gives it its strength and its action.

**M.B. :** The family inspired by you, which is called the “eymardian family”, present in the five continents, is facing new challenges. What is its mission?

**P.J. :** I think of our mission open to the world. But, sometimes one is afraid... one is afraid even to change community. I just wrote to a religious, whom I sent from Paris to Marseilles; a religious of the Blessed Sacrament belongs to no country, no house, he is part of the court of the great King and follows him everywhere.

I see the earth itself as an enormous cenacle, and in whatever place of the planet where we find ourselves, we are in this cenacle, we can always be in this cenacle, in desiring, in adoring with our heart.

**M.B. :** But what should be done?

**P.J. :** Our individuality, our small person, must be forgotten to bring God to the world and the world to God. I throw out an invitation to everyone: “Be ardent adorers of the Holy Eucharist. A catholic heart must be great like God! Avoid thus a narrow piety, a small-

mindful virtue that shrivels up the soul; piety, on the contrary, is a fecundating sun that expands the heart that it set alight! Be great in your outlook, great in your desires, great in your love!”

I wrote to Father Leroyer: “May the Eucharistic kingdom of Our Lord come and may we be the first disciples and ardent apostles. No more personal issues, no more works outside our great mission”. We must be centred uniquely on the Eucharist.

**M.B. :** How do you imagine this World-Cenacle that you speak about?

**P.J. :** The Eucharist is the reign of Jesus Christ in the world and especially in the hearts of his children. This is our beautiful and lovely mission. We must bring the world to the knowledge of God’s love.

It is through the divine love that people must be led to virtue, to religion, to faith. There is no means more effective. It is perhaps even the only one that we have to combat the indifference ruling the world and taking over even the heart of the faithful.

The Eucharist is the fraternal bond between people. There are only brothers at the sacred banquet, at the foot of the altar.

This is the message that must be passed on. Jesus came to make all people into one family. The Eucharist is the Bread, the common food, the uniting principle of all children. It does away with all jealousy and distinction among those sharing at the same table and drinking from the same cup, having the same Father who is in heaven. The same spirit of charity unites all those who eat the same Eucharistic Bread. Jesus Christ is thus all in all, and the Eucharist is the joyous feast of true brotherhood that we can experience as lasting forever.

We must collaborate with all those who are committed to constructing and realizing this brotherhood springing from the Eucharist.

It is only then that society will be reborn fully vigorous when all its members will be reunited around our Emmanuel. Agreement of minds will be established quite naturally under a common truth; the bonds of true and real friendship will be renewed under the action of the same love; this will be the return of the beautiful days of the Cenacle.

*Conclusion: We stayed in silence just as we began. I closed my eyes to savour everything I had heard and to be impregnated by Father Eymard’s dream. With feet firmly on the ground, “starting from the Cenacle” the heart full of a great passion for the Eucharist.*

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