

The Eucharist and Saint Peter Julian Eymard Apostle of the Eucharist

by Bernard Camiré SSS

This is the final article in a series of ten on The Eucharist and Saint Peter Julian Eymard by Father Bernard Camiré SSS of our parish of Saint Jean Baptiste in New York City. These special articles are in celebration of the 200th anniversary of the birth and baptism of Saint Peter Julian Eymard (1811-1868). They are now available in a little booklet for \$5.00 - see back cover (page 16) for information.

It was in the town of La Mure d'Isère, in the very house where he was born, that St. Peter Julian Eymard died on the 1st of August, 1868. He was only 57 years of age; a priest for only 34 years; and the leader of the Congregation he founded for only twelve years. The final years of his life had been difficult: there were major financial difficulties, departures from the Congregation, and negative rumors concerning his administrative abilities. Overwork and worry sapped his energy, so that by late July,

Stained glass window of Father Eymard at Monteynard, the parish in the Diocese of Grenoble, France where he was assigned as pastor



1868, he was worn out physically and psychically. Suffering from rheumatic gout and sciatica, he thought a treatment at a spa would provide relief; and so, on July 17th he left for Vichy. But several days later, something impelled him to return to the family home in La Mure d'Isère.

After arriving at La Mure in a generally weakened condition, he suffered a stroke that left him barely able to speak. On the morning of August 1st he realized that he was dying, and he bid "adieu" to his sisters. Towards noon, after he lost consciousness, the prayers for the dying were recited along with the Litany of the Sacred Heart. At 2:30 pm, as his head was being lifted slightly to adjust his pillow and he attempted a blessing with his hand, his breathing stopped and he fell back lifeless.

In retrospect we can say that Eymard's cause for canonization moved rather rapidly. Forty years after his death, in 1908, his cause was introduced in Rome; his beatification took place in 1925; and his canonization was celebrated on the 9th of December, 1962, the day after the closing of the first session of the Second Vatican Council.

When we look at all the phases of St. Peter Julian's life, we can say that in many respects he was a driven man. Despite great difficulties and sacrifices, he

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steadfastly pursued a Eucharistic vision, a vision that he believed would greatly benefit the spiritual life of the Church and give glory to its Lord. In a letter to a friend, he wrote: "The goal which we give ourselves in our little community is to honor our Lord Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament . . . to offer to God . . . a perpetual mission of prayer – We consider the Sacrament in its fullness. We not only want to adore, serve and love Jesus in the Eucharist, but especially to make him known, served and loved by every heart." St. Eymard's vision of the Eucharist was remarkably comprehensive for his times. Some would even maintain that, in some respects, he was ahead of his times; that he anticipated the Eucharistic vision of the Second Vatican Council. What does such a vision of the Eucharist encompass? Attempting to put it all in a nutshell, we can say that for St. Peter Julian the Eucharist is a sacrament to be celebrated and received frequently to bring to realization one's Christian vocation of love; a sacrament to be contemplated for the deepening of that vocation; and a sacrament to enliven and sustain the Christian's call to mission to and service of the neighbor.

And so, Father Eymard's vision of the Eucharist saw the Catholic Christian celebrating Liturgy, the Mass, in church; lingering in prayer with the Sacramental Christ, Eucharistic Adoration; and then, moving out into the home, the workplace, the public square to communicate the fruit of a Christ-centered life. These aspects of Eucharistic living come through beautifully in a quote from Eymard's writings, when he says: "The Eucharist is the life of the people . . . It gives them a law of life, that of charity, of which it is the source; it forges among them a common bond, a Christian kinship . . . At the holy table we are all children who receive the same nourishment; we form one family, one same body. The Eucharist gives Christian society the strength . . . to practice charity towards one's neighbor. Jesus Christ wants everyone to love his brothers and sisters."

I believe St. Peter Julian Eymard's life and teaching have much to say to us in our present-day efforts to live a Christian life nourished on and inspired by the Eucharist. And that can be said, even as we recognize the very different historical, cultural and ecclesial context in which we live, compared to Peter Julian's. His was a life shaped and energized by the transforming power of Christ's passion, death and resurrection communicated through the Eucharist – and such should be our life. His was a life that was rich in the fruit of generous and selfless service to the neighbor – and such should be our life. The Eucharist is meant to impact powerfully on a Christian life, whether that life is lived in the mid-nineteenth century or the early twenty-first century.

If our Catholic Christian faith is taken seriously, we must surely regard as a great blessing the desire and resolve to grow progressively in an appreciation and living of that faith. Also, to be regarded as a great blessing is the conviction that we can do that best by putting our life in frequent contact with the Eucharistic Christ in the celebration of Mass and in times of extended prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. In our journey of living a deeply Christian and Eucharistic life we shall always find in St. Peter Julian Eymard an excellent and inspiring traveling companion – someone to instruct us, guide us and encourage us every step of the way. St. Peter Julian Eymard, Apostle of the Eucharist, pray for us!

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