



FROM THE EDITOR

The priest and founder Peter Julian Eymard was a dynamic witness to the presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. Naturally inclined toward contemplation, he was nonetheless a man of action. In May 1856, when Archbishop Dominique Sibour of Paris expressed reluctance to approve his new eucharistic order, Eymard quickly explained the work of the First Communion of adults and youth, a ministry desperately needed in a city teeming with masses of unchurched adults and youth. The archbishop was won over.

Understandably, Father Eymard's first efforts focused on stabilizing the life of the new institute and attracting followers. By the spring of 1858, he was ready to launch the First Communion project. Archival material of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament narrates what happened: "With the help of laypeople, and members of the Saint Vincent de Paul conference, he gathers young workers in the district who had not been catechized. With great patience, he prepares them for their First Communion. On August 15, 1858, he finds joy in giving Communion to twelve young people; the following day they receive confirmation. Thus, the work of the First Communion of adults is born and grows in one of the poorest areas of Paris, the *barrière d'Arcueil*."

Eymard later described these first catechism classes: "Those involved are children workers, vagabonds, or those placed in apprenticeship early and who have let the age of instruction for First Communion slip by . . . there are thousands of them in Paris. Rag pickers, rope and match makers constituted the recruits from the workers' ranks, the rest were drawn from the ranks of the idlers, the indigent, and beggars."

Historian Damien Cash casts further light on the work, writing: "Baptism, Communion, and confirmation were the first spiritual fruits of this mission. For the participants, there were also material benefits as the experience became an upward step, signified by the new set of clothes that every child received for his or her First Communion. To provide ongoing

material assistance, Eymard established a workers' club which offered food, drink, and fellowship. He provided additional spiritual assistance through regular retreats. To obtain funds for these activities, Eymard became a beggar himself by preaching and pleading for aid from the richer parishes in Paris."

What is clear from these sources is that Father Eymard was concerned about both the spiritual welfare of the poor and the forgotten in the *barrière d'Arcueil* and their material well-being. Like Jesus who preached the word of God to the multitudes (see Mk 6:34) and later fed them, Eymard ministered to the spiritual hungers and the material and social needs of those he met.

In missiology, there is an accepted maxim that you first have to feed a hungry person before you can preach the Gospel to him or her. Empty stomachs make for closed ears! But this is more than a pragmatic means to a noble end. It reflects the profound soteriological truth that the Good News touches every dimension of our humanity. And, therefore, because God is interested in the whole person, those who speak and act in his name must be similarly disposed and attend to the demands of justice and compassion.

Saint Peter Julian Eymard moved comfortably between the sanctuary and the streets, where he acquired the reputation of being a friend of the poor. The love of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist moved him to seek out and to serve the suffering members of the body of Christ. He delighted in initiating them into the Christian faith and the sacraments of the church, particularly the Eucharist, and he cared for their bodies as well, helping them to live dignified lives worthy of God's children.

This issue of *Emmanuel*, continuing a longstanding tradition of a summer social justice focus, offers reflections on "concurrent themes" in the eucharistic thought of Father Pedro Arrupe and Pope Francis and on social responsibility as an extension of the solidarity experienced around God's Table. There is Father Dennis Billy's incisive analysis of the Scripture-based morality of Father Bernard Häring; and lastly, the moving story of how one parish reaches out in friendship to people living on the streets of a large American city.



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