



St Peter Julian's Newsletter

August 2013

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Fire on Earth

Mass Times

Saturday Vigil:

5.30pm

Sunday:

9.30, 11.00am (Chinese),
12.30, 3.30, 5.00pm (Korean)

1st Sunday:

1.30pm (Filipino)

1st & 3rd Saturday:

2.15pm (Indonesian)

Monday to Friday:

7.30am, 12.10, 5.30pm

Saturday:

12.10pm & Vigil at 5.30pm

Public Holidays:

12.10pm



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"I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" This cry of Jesus will ring out again soon in churches around the globe. It's the opening phrase of the gospel for the 20th Sunday of Ordinary Time (Luke 12:49-53). Jesus continues with an equally passionate outburst: "I have a baptism with which to be baptised, and what stress I am under until it is completed!" There's no mistaking the urgency and intensity in Jesus' words. He's on his way to Jerusalem, acutely aware of the crisis he must face there. He knows he will be plunged into the waters of suffering and death; what the world will have to face is the fire of judgement and purification, as the Old Testament prophets often warned. That's not all. In words that still shock, Jesus declares it's not peace that he's come to bring but division. Having to choose for or against him will pit family members against each other.

It's all about decision – Jesus' and ours. Jesus has made his. He came down from the mount of transfiguration determined to see his mission through to the end, come what may. There'll be no turning back, no compromise. It's this same resolve that he demands of his would-be disciples, then and now.

The question echoes down through the centuries and confronts us today: are you with me or against me? In this age of multiple and ever-expanding options, being confronted with such a clear-cut choice is disconcerting. We want to keep options open, bide our time, wait and see. Daring to make an unconditional and irrevocable commitment to following Jesus is definitely counter-cultural. Especially if it threatens to disturb relationships on which we depend for security, acceptance and a feeling of self-worth.

This isn't a new dilemma for followers of Jesus. It's confronted every generation since Jesus first asked his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" On that occasion Peter impetuously replied "the Messiah", but was quickly rebuked by Jesus for rejecting what this meant – taking up the cross (Mark 8:27-35). The advantage we have in this 21st century is the witness of all those who have chosen to put their faith in Jesus and follow him, though often after first saying "no" or "maybe". St Augustine for one is famous for his "not yet, O Lord!" The church remembers him and a rich variety of other men and women in the month of August.

First among them of course is Mary, the mother of Jesus, whose "yes" to becoming the mother of Jesus led ultimately to her Assumption into heaven (celebrated on the 15th). There are gospel characters such as John the Baptist and the apostle Bartholomew; heroes of the early church like the deacon and martyr Lawrence; women of extraordinary faith, ranging from the 4th century African, Monica, to the 18-19th century Australian Mary MacKillop (St Mary of the Cross); doctors of the church like Augustine and Bernard; founders of religious communities such as Dominic, Alphonsus and Clare; some less well-known saints as well the popular Curé of Ars (St John Vianney); and last but not least, the Curé's good friend, Peter-Julian Eymard, who is remembered and honoured on 2 August. He's the patron saint of this church and the founder of the community that lives and serves here. Let's take a closer look at him.

Eymard loved to quote that cry of Jesus: "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" It's fair to say, however, that Eymard took Jesus' exclamation out of context and misinterpreted it. The fire for which Jesus longed was the prophetic fire of judgement and

purification, the fire of the end times. The fire for which Eymard longed was the fire of love that would be rekindled in the hearts of the men and women of France after the devastation of the Revolution. It is the fire that burned in his own heart and that in the end consumed him all too soon, worn out at the age of 57.

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For most of the one hundred years after his death Peter-Julian Eymard was seen as a rather "other-worldly" figure. He was understood and revered as an apostle of eucharistic devotion, a promoter of the prayer of adoration honouring Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament, an advocate of frequent communion, and a holy priest and preacher – and he was all of these things. But they seem to suggest that he was solely preoccupied with the interior life of faith and prayer and had no interest in what was happening in the world around him. As if to confirm this, the Constitutions that he laboured over for his companions for more than a decade decreed: "Let them avoid meddling in politics or even discussing political matters among themselves. They shall keep entirely aloof from all political parties." (261)

Compare this with what is contained in the contemporary Rule governing the life of Eymard's community, the Blessed Sacrament Congregation: "Attentive to the cry of the poor and their distress, we discover in every instance of injustice a call of Christ to share in his mission of announcing good news to the poor and proclaiming liberty to captives. Every community that celebrates the Eucharist is called, through a radical conversion, to challenge sin and its structures and proclaim the hope of a new world." (37)

At first this appears to be a radical reversal. The Rule forges a direct link between celebrating the eucharist and contesting injustice in the world. This seems completely at odds with Eymard's advice to his community that they steer clear of politics altogether. A closer look reveals that the contradiction is only apparent. It's true that Eymard didn't want his religious to get

caught up in the maelstrom of political cross-currents that afflicted France after the turmoil of the 1789 Revolution, but he was no "sacristy priest". Not only was he well aware of the plight of workers and their families who were displaced and disadvantaged by the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution, but he personally ministered among the poorest of them in Paris. It's fair to say that Eymard was going to the poor 150 years ahead of Pope Francis' recent challenge to the church to do just that. Sadly his work among the young rag-pickers of the Paris slums was quickly forgotten by his community and not continued.

But just as his courageous ministry has been brought to light again in recent decades, so has the link between eucharist and justice been rediscovered by the whole church. This is captured in one of the Eucharistic Prayers for Use in Masses for Various Needs. It's worth quoting the whole passage. This is what we pray:

Open our eyes
to the needs of our brothers and sisters;
Inspire in us words and actions
to comfort those who labour and are burdened.
Make us serve them truly,
after the example of Christ and at his command.
And may your Church stand as a living witness to truth and freedom,
to peace and justice,
that all people may be raised up to a new hope.

In his own quiet but remarkable way Eymard lived this prayer with all his heart and mind and soul and strength. His courageous and creative ministry in some of the worst slums of Paris flowed out of his daring "yes" to the call of Jesus. This "yes" of his came from a heart that was set on fire by the word of God, especially the gospel of John, and by the bread of life given in Holy Communion. These are gifts with which we too are blessed. But they are dangerous - they might just inspire us to follow Jesus, come what may. We might just find ourselves daring to say "yes!"

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