



# St Peter Julian's Newsletter

August 2014

Volume 7 Issue 8

## Family Business

### 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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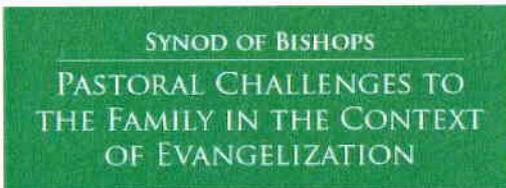
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For the middle two weeks of October this year, about 150 members of the Synod of Bishops will meet in Rome to discuss the "pastoral challenges of the family in the context of evangelization." This Synod is extraordinary in two senses. First, it has been called specially by Pope Francis a year ahead of the usual assembly. And second, because it has been preceded by a world-wide consultation of the church – imperfect, certainly, in method and extent but still exceptional.



Following on from this consultation a working document has been published which makes clear what a demanding agenda awaits the Synod participants. There is a litany of difficult and contested issues confronting families and the Church. Some are new, the product of modern scientific advances and cultural change, others are age-old.

One person who was no stranger to the destructive force of social and economic change on marriage and family life was the man after whom this church is named and whose feast-day we celebrate on 2 August: 19<sup>th</sup> century French priest and saint, Peter Julian Eymard. In a pioneering study back in the 1980s, one of his modern-day followers, Fr Ephrem Chagnat, wrote about the Paris Eymard knew: "When, on April 30th 1856 Father Eymard arrived in Paris he found a city in full industrial evolution . . . The influx of workers from rural areas to the capital effected a drastic change in social relations and political forces."



The population of Paris almost doubled between 1851 and 1866. Financial pressures grew extreme. The cost of food rose by 45% while salaries increased only by 20 to 25%. Workers spent an average of 35% of their income just for food. Women were forced to work to make ends meet but were paid far less than men. Living conditions worsened drastically. Slums increased. Sewage systems were inadequate. Morals deteriorated.

A contemporary writer observed: "A city of immigrants . . . Paris naturally foments tensions which are not only social or political, but often-times sexual. Prostitution is everywhere. The marriage institution is pulverized; concubinage among workers is spreading. Under the July Monarchy, more than 30% of the children are illegitimate."

Child labour was common, with new machinery making hiring them easier and very profitable. Only 1% could pay for any professional schooling. Those who did find work were lucky. "If there is no place in the mills," Eymard himself wrote, "the child starts out in the morning or evening with his little basket slung on his back and goes rag-picking in town. How many hundreds of children are at that stage in Paris!" Some of them had been abandoned by broken families or by alcoholic parents.

In brief, Eymard had first-hand knowledge on a daily basis of the great moral and material misery of the Parisian suburbs: appalling living conditions, promiscuity, alcoholism, violence, unemployment. None of this daunted him; rather it provoked him to embark on a difficult and dangerous mission. He ventured into these neighbourhoods of squalor, sought out the young vagabonds, and won them over with a combination of tough love, disciplined catechesis, and material assistance. His aim may have been spiritual – to prepare these unschooled urchins for First Holy Communion – but his methods were down-to-earth and his approach to the children and their families holistic.

Dislocation, poverty, unemployment, alcoholism, violence, promiscuity, exploitation, homelessness – these were some of the anarchic forces shaking the foundations of marriage and family life in the Paris of Eymard's day. Like our culture today, that of post-revolutionary France was fractured; the old truths and norms no longer held sway; conflicting world-views competed for allegiance. But in our time there are new challenges for couples and families, at least in the Western world: a culture of narcissism, short-term-ism and multiple options, a culture of dazzling technological breakthroughs, a culture that offers unprecedented biological possibilities.

What does the upcoming synod's working document have to say about all this? Only a few points can be made here about a fifty page essay.<sup>1</sup> The first of its three parts offers a resume of the Church's teaching about marriage and family, drawing on the scriptures and on subsequent tradition. What may surprise readers is that this teaching is summarised quite briefly, while much greater attention is given to the question of why it has not been successfully communicated to Catholics generally. The document's strong defence of natural law is quite a striking feature. Part one concludes with a

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more extended account of the church's appreciation of family life.

Part two is pastorally focussed. It begins with various proposals for better pastoral support for the family, then names a litany of challenges facing families: crises of faith, breakdowns in communication, violence, the influence of social media, work, migration, poverty, consumerism and church sex scandals. Some may be struck by the fact that the impact of war is sandwiched between the problems of social expectations and differences in faith traditions. The last section is another litany, in this case of pastoral difficulties such as living together, divorce and remarriage, admission to Communion, teenage mothers, annulment procedures, and last but not least same-sex unions.

Part three has two chapters. One deals with the problematic issue of contraception, the other with the challenge of raising children and educating them in the Christian faith, especially in what are termed "irregular" situations.

This working document has already generated quite a lot of comment in the Catholic media, some of it quite critical. Those who find it disappointing might take heart at what happened fifty years ago at the Second Vatican Council. Once the bishops assembled for their deliberations they saw serious deficiencies in some of the most important preparatory documents. What they ended up producing was radically different from what they started with. It could well be the same at this Synod.

There's no doubt that the synod members have a daunting task. What the document exposes is the huge gap between official Church teaching and what Catholics actually believe and observe in the area of sexuality, marriage and family life. The fundamental dilemma, put very bluntly, is whether to modify Church teaching in the light of actual practice or to hold fast to Church teaching and find "pastoral solutions" that allow non-conforming Catholics to still participate in the life of the Church. The fact is that very many Catholics do not assent to the Church's prohibitions of living together, artificial contraception, the admission of divorced and remarried Catholics to Communion, and same-sex relationships.



Are these Catholics misguided, poorly catechised or carried away by the dominant forces of contemporary Western culture, as the document suggests? Or, as other writers would argue, actually bearing witness to the guidance of the Spirit in the way they live out their sexuality and intimacy in a complex world? Is this a clash between the Magisterium (the teaching authority of the Church) and what is called the *sensus fidelium* (the Spirit-guided sense of what is true and right shared by ordinary believers)?

The document laments the fact that the notion of "natural law" is not well understood today. While not defining the term, it argues that traditional Church teaching on sexuality, marriage and family life is rightly based on who and what we are as human beings, ie on our human nature. This is a crucial claim, and one that is increasingly contested today. In any case, some critics would argue that the official Church appeals to natural law in one way in the field of sexual ethics and in another way in the field of social justice.

There will be no easy answers to any of the difficult issues identified in the church-wide survey and acknowledged in the working document. The challenges are not distant and merely theoretical; they are real and personal. Every one of us has the task of living out our sexuality and our relationships in light of the gospel injunction to love with all our heart and mind and soul and strength. Peter Julian Eymard was a tireless apostle of love in the slums of Paris. If we all loved with his passion and generosity, with his blend of idealism and pragmatism, we would have much wisdom to offer the members of the upcoming synod. And we would pray mightily for the gift of the Spirit upon them all.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_20140626\\_instrumentum-laboris-familia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20140626_instrumentum-laboris-familia_en.html)

### **St Peter Julian Eymard Feast Day—2nd August**

Gracious God of our ancestors, you led Peter Julian Eymard, like Jacob in times past, on a journey of faith. Under the guidance of your gentle Spirit, Peter Julian discovered the gift of love in the Eucharist which your son Jesus offered for the hungers of humanity. Grant that we may celebrate this mystery worthily, adore it profoundly, and proclaim it prophetically for your greater glory. Amen.

**St Peter Julian Eymard, Apostle of the Eucharist  
Pray for us!**