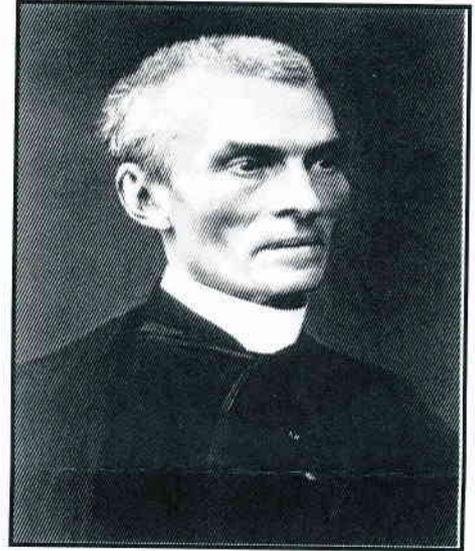


FEAST OF ST PETER JULIAN – 2008

Homily delivered at St. Francis', Melbourne by Graeme Duro SSS

With World Youth Day still fresh in our minds we are very conscious of all the pilgrims that came to Australia from many parts of the globe. They were young and brought with them a zest for life and an enthusiasm for their faith. Today we celebrate the feast of a nineteenth century pilgrim, a man also of great faith: **Saint Peter Julian Eymard**. Although he never travelled the kilometres of the WYD pilgrims, he did journey an extraordinary distance in his spiritual pilgrimage.

Pilgrims necessarily must face the good and not so good influences of their time. Today's pilgrims live in the post-modern world which is both exciting on the one hand because of the advances in science, technology, cosmology and all the other disciplines of knowledge; and disappointing on the other hand because we seem to have lost focus of the Christian values that provided us with a belief system and sense of purpose in life. Father Eymard lived in a time that was informed by the period of The Enlightenment and saw the New World open up as a result of the great voyages across the waters. And yet it was a time, especially in France, of having to grapple with the upheaval of the French Revolution and a Church still influenced by Jansenism.



The spirituality of the day meant that instead of trusting the sacraments, the reception of them was made very difficult through fear of sacrilege. A spirit of penance was encouraged, which turned one's life into making amends, reparation and expiation.

St Peter Julian was an amazing man whose pilgrimage saw him endure many hardships and set-backs throughout life. His journey led him to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, to being a parish priest, then a Marist and finally the founder of a new Congregation, The Society of the Blessed Sacrament, both men and women. During his search he developed an inner conviction that the essential sign of the Church's renewal must be the presence and love of the Lord in the Eucharist. This placed him as a man ahead of his time. Fr Eymard was able to make a quantum leap from a life of awe and fear to a life of love and trust.

In today's Gospel passage Jesus declares that his flesh is food and his blood is drink. The phrase "flesh and blood" is rich in meaning. On a literal level, it is a common way of characterizing a human being. We speak of a family member as my own flesh and blood. When applied to Jesus, it is a proclamation of faith in the incarnation. He was indeed "flesh and blood", which as we know became the complete selfless offering to his Father; at the same time he became for us our Eucharistic food and drink.

Father Eymard's insights into this mystery gave him a freedom that enabled him to realise that all is a gift from God. He believed that to eat the Lord's flesh and to drink his blood was to commit oneself to a life of love and a mission of service. In the celebration of Eucharist we feed on the very life of Jesus, and in our prayer before the Blessed Sacrament we are invited to adore the presence of Christ in the gift of his body given up for us and his blood poured out for a New Covenant.

This evening as we celebrate this mystery we give thanks for the life, example and inspiration Saint Peter Julian has been and is for all of us.