



Similarly, in Eymard's teaching on holy communion, the language of Christ forming himself within us is not about the imposition of an alien template that would replace our own identity. Eymard's metaphor of "education" makes that clear. Christ is like the mother drawing out, evoking the child's capacities, in dialogue with her own modelling. What is also remarkable about Eymard's teaching is how profoundly Trinitarian it is. Acting in the power of the Spirit, Christ calls our true self into being, not just as individuals relating to him in love, but also as beloved sons and daughters of his Father!

Recalling, some fifty year later, the decision of the Pope of the Second Vatican Council, John XXIII, to enrol Peter-Julian Eymard amongst the saints, we are invited to ponder their (and now with them Eymard's) place in our lives. The saints were always important for him; the ones he named most often in the spiritual jottings of his later years were, not surprisingly, great Founders such as Benedict, Francis, Dominic, Ignatius of Loyola, and Alphonsus Ligouri, models in whom he could descry the lineaments of his own calling and destiny.

But even more frequently he turned to the scriptural figures, especially those closest to the Lord – Mary and Elizabeth, Joseph and Zechariah and John the Baptist, not to forget the beloved disciple.

Finally, the context in which the canonization took place is also full of meaning; for it coincided with the promulgation of the first major document of the Council, the one that dealt with the reform and renewal of the liturgy, and above all the Eucharist – the mystery to which Eymard's life had been peerlessly dedicated. Does this not stir us, who seek in these opening decades of the third millennium to draw life from the bread of life and the cup of salvation, to open our hearts unreservedly, as Eymard did, to Christ's transforming action in the mystery of his love?

<sup>1</sup> Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The Adventures of Don Quixote*, Translated by J. M. Cohen. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1950, p. 935.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Chilton Pearce, *The Biology of Transcendence. A Blueprint of the Human Spirit*. Rochester, Vermont: Park Street Press, 2004, pp. 47-48, 100.

<sup>3</sup> See Vatican II, Document on the Church, N° 50.

<sup>4</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci. A Psychosexual Study of an Infantile Reminiscence*, quoted in William W. Meissner, SJ, MD. *Ignatius of Loyola: The Psychology of a Saint*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992, p. xviii.

## SPREADING THE FIRE OF THE EUCHARIST

Ben Ho, N.S.S.S.

### Introduction



"I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" (Luke 12:49). In his Advent weblog reflection, 'Seed of Fire'<sup>1</sup>, Fr Joseph Homick explained this imagery as God casting His own words as seeds of fire into the hearts of anyone who would receive them – "the implanted word that has the power to save your souls" (James 1:21). We see this affirmed in our ROL #22:

"...This Word,  
which the Spirit causes to resonate in our innermost being,  
challenges us in ever new ways.  
When shared fraternally,  
and according to our capacity to receive it,  
the Word enlightens us and incorporates us into the mystery of Christ."

Expanding on St John Damascene's proclamation "the Eucharist which is the fire that inflames us", St Peter Julian Eymard ['Eymard'] writes "the incendiaries of this Eucharistic fire are all those who love Jesus"<sup>2</sup>. In this section of Guitton's book, he cites that Eymard's metaphoric use of fire is the best expression for the saint's apostolic zeal<sup>3</sup> which ultimately influenced the structure of the religious order which Eymard set up. This was evidently so as Eymard inferred at the end of his Great Retreat of Rome in 1865 ['Great Retreat'], that the religious of the Blessed Sacrament, a society of both "adorer and firebrands" can and should "set the world ablaze" with the Eucharistic fire as the Lord wanted<sup>4</sup>.

From the major themes that were highlighted by Guitton stemming from Eymard's teaching post the Great Retreat, I have picked on a common premise that resonates through each of them, Love. Exploring three of the seven themes mentioned by Guitton, we see how love, especially the love of God, is an important foundation in Eymard's life.

*"Love is not an act of zeal, an isolated act of virtue; love is a life – just as it was the human and divine life of Jesus Christ<sup>5</sup>".*

### **The Primacy of Love**

In an article, written by John Mallon on the 'issue of Catholicism', he argues that it is "far from being a mere moral system or philosophy by a teacher from the past, [it] is a relationship with a person—a love affair, a romance, a marriage, a friendship, with the Man, Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. Some may say this downplays Christ's role as Lord, but I disagree—it enhances it. True reverence flows from intimacy. The better we truly know and love someone the more we will reverence them.<sup>6</sup>"

One can only guess that this is a similar thought process that went on in Eymard's mind when during the Great Retreat he acquired a new conviction<sup>7</sup> – the love of God contemplated in the life of Christ or in the mystery of the Eucharist<sup>8</sup>. This conviction, acquired on February 1, 1865, became the centre of Eymard's life from then on and it was so significant that it became a legacy of his apostolate, as seen in Number 3 of the Constitutions of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament.

We know that anyone truly in love speaks of their beloved with reverence. Love is a mode of knowing and this knowledge attained through love creates admiration, affection, respect, wonder, and yes, reverence<sup>9</sup>. During His ministerial life, Jesus demonstrated this primacy of love constantly. One good example that comes to my mind is when Jesus intentionally defied man-made practices and/or laws and healed the man with a withered hand on a Sabbath (Mark 3:1-6).

This demonstration continued till His death on the cross, "He loved them to the end" (John 13:1) – God's primacy of inexhaustible love for us. Eymard's familiarity with St John and St Paul's writings was instrumental in his new conviction<sup>10</sup>. Themes like the indwelling of the Lord in the disciples "Abide in me as I abide in you" (John 15:4), the mystery of the love of Christ is expressed by St Paul "The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20), and other Pauline thoughts of total emersion of self into the dynamism of growth, of perfection, of holiness within the Church.

### **Become Persons of Communion**

"The secret of being human, is hidden with God, and only in communion with him, can we be human, together, with other humans<sup>11</sup>" writes Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas, most often associated with the Christian doctrine of the person. He asserts that according to Christian doctrine, "Christ is the person in whom we may all be persons. Christ comes to individuals without relation to anyone else, and brings them into communion so that they become persons, related to all others, indeed related to everything that is not themselves.<sup>12</sup>"

In his thoroughly integrated account, Zizioulas shows that the Christian doctrine of God is intimately linked to the Church. "Human being is raised to participate in the life of God and sustained by the friendship that is shared by the triune persons of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Within this communion man is made free, so he can willingly receive and give the love of God, and the Church is the form in which he participates in this communion.<sup>13</sup>" These thoughts are echoed by Guitton in his observation on Eymard's theme of "community love"<sup>14</sup>.

Eymard laid down a very important principle in his Eucharistic Handbook – "Man is love like his divine Model. As he loves, so he lives." In this handbook he devotes an entire chapter to Eucharistic love and explains that every love has a beginning (the first principle – the law of duty), a centre (the centre of life – a place of comfort and happiness, direction, affection and ambition), a goal (the end of adorer – life purpose).

Jesus' words in the upper room anticipated his death and manifested the consciousness with which he faced it, transforming it into a gift of himself, in the act of love that gives itself totally. In the Eucharist, the Lord gives himself to us with his body, with his soul and with his divinity, and we become one with him and among ourselves. Our response to his love therefore must be concrete, and must be expressed in a genuine conversion to love, in forgiveness, in reciprocal acceptance and in attention for the needs of all. The Eucharist becomes in this way the primary source of the spiritual energy that renews our life every day and, in this way, renews the love of Christ to the world.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Gift of Self**

*"If human is the only creature on earth that God has wanted for its own sake, it can fully discover its true self only in a sincere giving of itself." – Gaudium et Spes (#24)*

After He gave us the new commandment at the Last Supper to love one another as He has loved us, Jesus explained clearly what He meant by the word love – "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). Self-giving is another way to say "laying down one's life" for another. And so, when Jesus taught that the whole Law can be summarised in the double commandment of loving God and loving our neighbour, He was referring to the gift of self, and thereby giving ourselves, to God and to others.

Thomas Merton, who derived his philosophy from both Western and Eastern sources, called the self we think ourselves to be our 'false self'. As in Zen, the spiritual journey, for Merton, is the quest for the Original Nature, or as Merton calls it, the True Self. For Merton, 'the self that begins the journey is not the self that arrives'.<sup>16</sup> When one is ruled by the 'false self', one's thoughts and feelings, desires and plans, words and actions arise from this selfish "me"; they are centred upon it, and they tend to promote all that it wants. One seeks one's own advantage regardless of the rights or needs of others, to be the centre of the world. One is supremely concerned to promote what one perceives to be of benefit to oneself. "The only way out of this closed world is in the experience of love that opens us to the other"<sup>17</sup> – gives us the ability to let go of the need for the approval of others.

St Augustine of Hippo states "Love and do what thou wilt" – from his interpretation of 1 John 4:7-8, "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love." Once love has truly taken over our hearts we begin to desire what God wants for us. Eymard often regretted that his meditation had been too cerebral, too occupied with considerations and reflections, and not enough with sentiments and affection during the Great Retreat.<sup>18</sup> Thibault cites retreat notes of February 27, 1865 "Why have I not loved sufficiently and well? Because I did not know how to make a real adoration of love or was unwilling to do so; I was too speculative in my contemplation; I meditated too much and did not love enough, did not love in our Lord, did not offer Him personal love."<sup>19</sup>

McSweeney remarks how Eymard tends to oscillate between two ways of responding to insights; negatively, how to destroy the self or dethrone the self; positively (the other voice), how Christ is to become the effective centre of his existence.<sup>20</sup> While battling with his own ego during the Great Retreat, Eymard had to challenge himself as "how to make God, and Christ in the Eucharist, rather than self, the real and effective centre of his mind and imagination, of his choices, feelings and projects".

It was not till March 23, 1865, "a grace of enlightenment made me understand that the best and only means is to nurture and fortify within me the interior man that is Jesus Christ, to conceive Him, to bring Him forth and make Him grow by all my actions, readings, prayers and adorations, and in all the relationships of my life. But to do that, I must renounce constantly the personality of Adam and live a life of dependence on Jesus in me; the frequency of ejaculatory prayers with that idea in mind will end by making the thought and sentiment of it natural to me".<sup>21</sup>



*Sister Servants of the Blessed Sacrament at the canonization.*



*Members of the Congregation processing the banner into the Basilica.*

## **Conclusion**

In summing up my reflections on the "Spreading the Fire of the Eucharist", I would like to re-read our ROL #4, which in my humble opinion is a succinct depiction of this theme.

### ***The spirit of the Congregation:***

*We cannot live the Eucharist  
unless we are animated by the spirit  
which led Christ to give his life for the world.*

*When he proclaimed the New Covenant  
by the gift of his Body and Blood to his disciples,  
it was out of love that the Lord gave himself up.*

*Sharing in this gift of himself to us,  
we place ourselves  
at the service of the Kingdom,  
fulfilling the words of the Apostles:  
"It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."*

The common thread here is love; the Primacy of Love, the Persons of Communion (Community Love) and, most importantly, the Gift of Self (Love for God). And we should not forget God's love. Though I have delved only into three of the seven themes mentioned by Guitton, this common premise of love can be used to discover and explore the other themes. "Love is the ultimate motive of the gift of one's personality. To give oneself is an act of love."<sup>22</sup> We remember this today as we celebrate the Feast of Most Sacred Heart of Jesus – a devotion to Jesus' physical heart as the representation of his divine love for humanity.

The gift of self, is consenting to the transformation that God desires to realise in us; cease to identify with the false self and allow Christ to act in a way that is true to one's deepest nature. He will 'rule' in me in the place of the self-centred 'I'. It is not some heroic victory of the will, i.e. a final handing over of the self to God – this is only possible at our deathbed. It is the constant practise of attempting to let go of the false self and open oneself to God and God's purposes. It is "the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy, and good fruits, without trace of partiality or hypocrisy"(James 3:13-18).

We have to continually ask ourselves "In community life, by extending the 'Communion' concept, are we in communion with others?" We are also reminded of this 'community' in our ROL #24 "The celebration of Eucharist... in community if possible..." The humility of love is the virtue of the Eucharist. If this were lacking in a religious, he would lack everything; without humility the religious profession, adoration, the cult, the liturgy, the piety, the apostolate, would pass for nothing, because one needs to honour and glorify Jesus Christ as he wishes to be honoured, one needs to imitate him as he himself is present.<sup>23</sup>

By giving our love to God, we are ultimately returning and/or reciprocating the unconditional and unrelenting love from God. Our founder gave himself entirely to Christ, making Christ the principle and end of his activity.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Homick, J. 'Making All Things New – Seed of Fire'. <http://wordincarnate.wordpress.com/2011/12/18/seed-of-fire>

<sup>2</sup> Eymard, P J. 'The Divine Eucharist, retreat at the feet of Jesus Eucharist' (French). p230.

<sup>3</sup> Guitton, A. 'Peter Julian Eymard – Apostle of the Eucharist'. p254.

<sup>4</sup> LaVerdiere, W. 'Retreat notes – St Peter Julian Eymard'. p268.

<sup>5</sup> LaVerdiere. p268.

<sup>6</sup> Mallon, J. 'Inside the Vatican – The Primacy of Jesus, The Primacy of Love'. April 2006.

<sup>7</sup> LaVerdiere. p83-84.

<sup>8</sup> Guitton. p254.

<sup>9</sup> Mallon.

<sup>10</sup> Guitton. p255.

<sup>11</sup> Zizioulas, J. "The Son and the Spirit in the Providence of God – Zizioulas on time and communion". January 2008.

<http://www.resourcesforchristiantheology.org/?p=254#more-254>

<sup>12</sup> Zizioulas, J. "Zizioulas on eschatology". June 2008. <http://www.resourcesforchristiantheology.org/?p=268#more-268>

<sup>13</sup> Zizioulas, J. "Zizioulas Lectures on Christians Dogmatics". February 2008,

<http://www.resourcesforchristiantheology.org/?p=258#more-258>

<sup>14</sup> Guitton. p260.

<sup>15</sup> Welborn, A. 'The Eucharist and Love'. [http://amywelborn.typepad.com/openbook/2005/09/the\\_eucharist\\_a.html](http://amywelborn.typepad.com/openbook/2005/09/the_eucharist_a.html)

<sup>16</sup> Mabry, J. 'False Self and Original Nature: Reflections from Suzuki and Merton'. 1994.

<http://apocryphile.org/jrm/articles/merton.html>

<sup>17</sup> McSweeney, A. 'Eymard and the Gift of Self' – Retreat notes. August 2011. p9.

<sup>18</sup> Thibault, H. 'Father Eymard's Way of Praying' – Recollection notes to the SSS community in Cleveland. September 1990.

<sup>19</sup> LaVerdiere. p167.

<sup>20</sup> McSweeney. p5.

<sup>21</sup> LaVerdiere. p262.

<sup>22</sup> Nunez, E C. 'The Spirituality of Blessed Peter Julian Eymard'. p163.

<sup>23</sup> Barbiero, M. 'Gift of Self - Vita Eucaristica e Vita Religiosa in Saint Pierre-Julien Eymard'. 1999.

<sup>24</sup> Perez, M A. 'St Peter Julian Eymard'. February 2002.

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