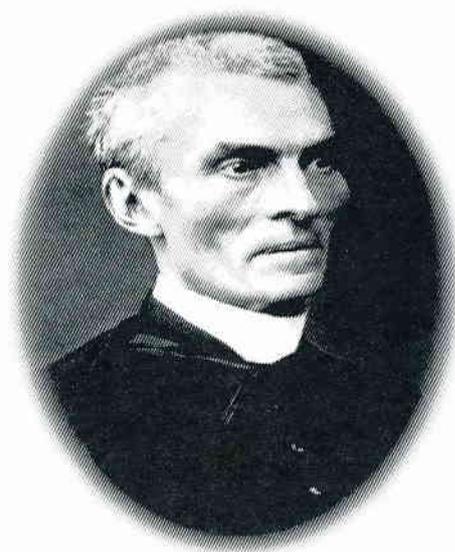


Pat Negri, S.S.S.



I had difficulty remembering where I was when the Founder was canonized. It was fifty years ago! On reflection, it must have been Sydney, for I have no recollection of clergy celebrations such as were held at St Francis'. In Sydney a new church was being built ready to receive the title *St Peter Julian's* once the canonization took place. What I remember most vividly was the fact that the canonization ceremony had been deferred due to the fact that news of the papal approval of the Australian miracle had leaked prior to the Holy See's proclamation. Nobody knew who had told a journalist in Sydney about it, but a headline announced that the cure of Dora Bartels had been approved as a true miracle by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. We were forced to wait twelve months. I was involved with the artists commissioned to produce a suitable image of the new saint for the new church at the Haymarket. Mr and Mrs Kalmar invited me to their home to discuss the issue. They were charming hosts and served what I then thought to be quite strange: roasted fruit as part of the main course. What perhaps was stranger was the fact that they used the death mask of the Founder as the basis for their image. I looked again at that death mask just a couple months ago in our Provincial Archives. It's true what they say. After his death St Peter Julian looked wonderfully peaceful.



THE USES OF SAINTS

Tony McSweeney, S.S.S.

Not long after his hapless adventure with the windmills, which he took for giants, the intrepid Don Quixote de La Mancha espied in the clouds of dust rising from the road in the distance the approach of a mighty army. His fertile imagination, nourished by the innumerable romances of knightly adventure he had for so long devoured, pictured one by one the stalwart heroes and mighty warriors against whom he would shortly be called to do battle.

Heedless of the alarmed cries of his faithful squire, Sancho Panza, he quickly lowered his lance and galloped stoutly into the fray. Alas for those of them who would shortly lie bleeding on the ground, his formidable adversaries turned out to be a tranquil flock of sheep partly hidden by the clouds of dust.

If Miguel de Cervantes' marvellous spoofing of the passion of his contemporaries for fantastic tales of knightly chivalry remains a classic study of imagination run wild, it witnesses no less forcefully to the enduring human need for models. The real question is about the choice of model.

At the approach of death the mind of the Knight of the Sad Countenance finally cleared and he saw through the "extravagance and trickery" he had succumbed to for so long from his "constant reading of detestable books of chivalry." Too late he regretted his failure to have chosen "other books which would help to enlighten my soul."¹

Recent neurological discoveries, especially in relation to the brain, have given new force to the same truth that Aristotle too had seen so long ago, namely, that we humans are imitative animals. Great excitement was generated in 1996 by the discovery of what quickly came to be known as the "mirror

neurons" by three researchers from the University of Parma in Italy. Their work with apes was soon applied to humans with astonishing results. Even tiny babies, it was found, respond not just to the stimuli of others, such as a smile, but above all to their intentions, long before they have any ability to reason about such intentions!

A second discovery concerns the five surges of brain growth that occur from birth to adolescence. At each stage billions of brain cells are created in order to make possible the next stage of development. Although that stage is minutely programmed, its realization depends upon the presence of a model, that is, of some other human being (in the first stages, normally the mother, at adolescence a mentor figure) "who is fully able to do something or behave in a certain way."²

These stages concern our fundamental operations like learning a language, interacting with others, or developing our intelligence. The model "brings about a like response in the child, building a structure of knowledge, or imprint, within him." Without that figure, the child's brain will not form the neural imprints needed to develop the programmed ability. There are no exceptions here; there simply must be someone to embody the form of functioning or skill called for.

While the fact that we human beings need models is evident today as never before, Cervantes' great work points to the importance of an appropriate model. For the Christian *the* model is, of course, Jesus Christ, just as Gotama of the Sakyamuni clan, who came to be known as the "Enlightened One" (or "Buddha"), has served for centuries as a model for his followers. Yet, as Paul tells us, others too can serve as models, provided that their modelling reveals to us how they sought to imitate Christ. "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ," he wrote to the Christian community of Corinth (1 Cor 11,1). This is precisely the role of the Christian saints.

According to the Vatican II document on the Church, this role has no less than seven aspects. The Christian saints are 1) a source of inspiration for us; 2) they serve as guides; 3) they manifest God's presence in history; 4) God speaks to us through them; 5) they are signs of God's kingdom; 6) they are our friends, our brothers and sisters who await us in heavenly glory; and 7) they are intercessors on our behalf before the throne of God.³

The effectiveness of the saints as models depends, of course, on the image we form of them, an image we receive either from their own writings or from the biographers who have portrayed them. Though the lives of saints have been popular reading for centuries, this practice is not without its potential for distortion, due to a deeply ingrained human tendency to idealize.



Sculpture of the Founder by Rodin, which St Peter Julian did not like.

We tend to exalt our heroes and heroines, as Freud saw in speaking of the perils that lie in wait for the psychobiographer. "To gratify this wish they obliterate the individual features of their subject's physiognomy; they smooth over the traces of his life's struggles with internal and external resistances, and they tolerate in him no vestige of human weakness and imperfection."⁴ The result is too often a reflection of the author's fancy, an abstract figure rather than the real person.

Where Freud saw infantile fantasy at work, the hagiographers are frequently moved by another motive: the desire to edify. In the case of saints from religious congregations, and especially founders, a further factor is sometimes at work as well, namely, an ardent desire to present the congregation's hero or heroine in the best possible light and as worthy of canonization by the Church, both for imitation by its members and to promote the prestige of the institute.

In their eagerness to present an admirable model, the hagiographers accentuate the praiseworthy qualities of their subject and suppress anything that might tarnish the picture. As a result, the real-life saint with his or her complex human personality tends to fade from sight, to be replaced by an idealized figure with few, if any, contradictions, imperfections or faults.

The idealizing tendency reached its zenith in nineteenth century hagiography, and is well exemplified in the first biographies of Saint Peter Julian Eymard. To our dismay, many of us who joined the congregation half a century ago did not find him an especially attractive figure; in my own case, I can still vividly remember feeling somewhat ashamed and not a little guilty because I could not bring myself to like the Founder.

Little did we suspect at the time that the portrait given us by his biographers bore about as much resemblance to the historical subject as the saccharine, vapid and characterless images on the popular "holy cards" did to their flesh-and-blood originals. Happily, all of that changed in the late sixties, thanks to new studies (notably by our own Father Donald Cave) that have helped for the first time to bring the real man to life for us.

According to an early legend, enshrined in the first biography of Eymard, the Founder had been the recipient, in the year 1851 – some five years before the actual date of foundation – of a vision of the Blessed Virgin communicating to him the divine command to found his congregations. On the day of his canonization this "event" emblazoned on a banner ruffled by the early winter winds was displayed triumphantly from the façade of St Peter's basilica in Rome.

If at first it came as a shock to us to learn that there was no reliable historical basis for belief in such a vision, the immensely positive consequence was the discovery of a man who for five long years struggled with doubts and hesitations to discern what God's will for him might be, unaided by any kind of exceptional or visionary experience that might have put his doubts to rest – in fact, he formally and explicitly denied ever having had any such experience.

Though we always knew of the zig-zag pattern of his vocational choices – first, a novice with the Oblates, then a diocesan priest and, after just five years of ministry, entering the Society of Mary where he was to remain for some seventeen years prior to founding his own congregations – we were now able to appreciate better how difficult such decisions must have been for a man of his make-up. His last choice called for a truly sublime act of trust in God: to begin a new institute dedicated to the Eucharist without resources of any kind – living in a borrowed house with one companion and no money!

"I have been a bit like Jacob," he once wrote, "always on the move." That catches something altogether central to his religious personality. It was true not only of the exterior journey we have just evoked, but just as much of his interior pilgrimage. He sought God ceaselessly, passionately, eager to give himself entirely over to God's service. This trait is represented emblematically in the event that marked a major spiritual breakthrough – the two and a half month retreat he made in 1865, while awaiting an important decision from the Holy See, at the house of the Redemptorists on the then outskirts of Rome.

Day after day he sought to lay bare his soul, to discover and get free of the impediments that were holding him back on the spiritual journey. His one aim was as to open his mind and heart unreservedly to God. Those long days of prayer and reflection culminated in an act of dedication he called "the vow of the personality" in which he sought to attain the condition of Saint Paul's "I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2,20). He vowed to do everything possible to free himself of "every personal desire, of every interest" of his own, so as to have "only those of Jesus Christ who is in me so as to live there for his Father."

If such uncompromising ardour is likely to strike most of us as rather daunting, Eymard nonetheless began, in a number of ways, to seem much closer to us. The surprising range of his friendships with men and women of different social strata, and particularly their warmth, tended to soften the severe

image most of us had formed of a remote ascetic ruthlessly bent on extinguishing every human affection.

The publication of his private journals too enabled us to see a man who reproached himself for real and not imaginary failings – like over-work, hurrying through his spiritual exercises or even putting them off till the end of the day, talking too much, inconsistency, giving way to impatience and anger, struggling with his own perfectionistic personality, and especially with his need to stand out and be admired.

Far from being immured, as we had believed, within the narrow confines of an outdated nineteenth century devotionalism, we discovered instead a man of vision, possessed by a restless quest for a truer and more comprehensive grasp of the Eucharist, one rooted ever more firmly in the ancient sources of scripture and tradition. This unremitting drive placed him on the crest of the slowly swelling wave of new thinking that would one day break in its full splendour at the Second Vatican Council.

As he scrutinized the sources tirelessly and in prayerful spirit, his mental world broadened and deepened in a way that his companions and early followers seem to have been incapable of grasping. No longer did he look at the mystery, as he had done for so long, simply from the standpoint of the sacramental presence after Mass; no longer did he envisage the goal of the Eucharist in terms of gathering adorers about the Lord hidden in the sacramental bread (though he still considered this a valuable practice). No, what now gripped his attention, what fascinated him was the mysterious action of Christ in the person who receives communion with faith.

At a time when Eucharistic devotion was identified largely with adoration of the presence of Christ in the reserved sacrament, he overturned this priority, declaring that sacramental communion brought about an extension of the incarnation through the transforming action of the risen Christ forming himself in the responsive communicant. This became the central concern of his ministry. He grasped as never before that "in the Eucharist we receive the fruits of all his mysteries... We are forced to recognize God's love in the perfect and complete gift of himself. [...] That intimate manifestation is obtained only in holy communion."

Drawing upon the statement in 2 Peter to the effect that we are called "to share in the divine nature" (2 Peter 1,4) he exploited the riches of this theology, beloved of the Eastern Church but no longer familiar in the West, applying it to Christ's action in holy communion:

"In holy communion, we receive Jesus Christ... He comes in us to form his virtues in us, to fashion us to his own likeness, to change us into his own image. He accomplishes this education to his resemblance in us, so that he grows in us as well as we grow in his likeness 'until we reach the state of the perfect man.'"

In the final years of his life he returned again and again to this insight, leaving us a rich inheritance of texts, of which we can give here only the briefest sample.

"The Eucharist is the bread of the spirit. It is also the bread of life, the bread of the heart, the bread of love

"Taste and see, Scripture says. The taste for God is the family feeling; it brings us close to his heart. It is knowledge by feeling and not by reasoning. In holy communion, we experience love, we know the heart of Jesus, we penetrate his secret.

"Communion," he recalls to us, "is the heavenly banquet, the marriage feast of the Lamb."

This brings me to my final point which concerns the notion of the model with which I began. In what way are the saints, in what way is Eymard (now amongst them), a model for us? Clearly, it is not a matter of trying to make (were we able to do so!) our own lives a facsimile, a slavish copy of theirs, but rather of drawing inspiration from them and of gaining insight from the way they lived their existence – in all the diversity of their personalities and situations – into the underlying dynamics of holiness.

In no way a systematic thinker, Eymard possessed an intuitive intelligence. He had remarkable insight into the deep structures of personal existence. He saw, for example, that the various forms of self-seeking he detected in himself were not simply a congeries of vices and bad habits to be corrected, so much as something unified, a whole or system, that he usually called *le moi* (the self); this notion corresponds, I believe, to what, nearer to our own day, Thomas Merton was wont to call "the false self."

That is why he sounds so radical (and, if you like, inimitable): no personal desires at all, no interests of his own! Superficially, that sounds alarmingly like the portrait of a zombie. Yet precisely here is the paradox. It is only when this false self is dissolved that our true identity – what in Paul is called the "hidden self" (Eph 3,16) and in the book of Revelation "the new name" (Rev 2,17) – is able to appear.



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?

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

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

³ See Vatican II, Document on the Church, N° 50.

⁴ 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'¹, 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"². 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 zeal³ 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 wanted⁴.