

ONE MAN'S JOURNEY

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The challenge to tell of how St. Peter Julian influenced or touched my life came across the table on a Sunday noon. No, there was no coercion, just an invitation to consider writing a few words on my personal encounter with our Founder. It certainly seemed at that point to be quite a challenge as it is a question I have never pondered. So, where does one begin?

Years prior to my entry into the Congregation I frequented St. Francis' whenever I was in the city. I became aware of a group of men whose lives were focused on the Eucharist. This was evident from the celebration of the Eucharist, the silent witness of personal prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament and the quite haunting chanting of what I eventually learnt was the Prayer of the Church. Peter Julian, through his followers, had touched my life long before I ever knew his name. If there had been no Blessed Sacrament Congregation in Melbourne then life may have taken quite a different direction. As it was the focus on the Eucharist and the communal life offered the possibility of service that would end my restlessness and searching, and so it did. One can reflect that Eymard, through the religious of his Congregation, influenced my eventual choice of life.

This contact with the Congregation became a reality some time later and I became an aspirant, postulant and novice at Bowral. In this environment I began to be more aware of Peter Julian from various talks and reading of the available material. This latter was not too plentiful and little more than a short life of the Founder by Albert Tesnière. The old "Series" were not too helpful for one reason or another. All in all these writings did not bring one closer to the Founder. Still, all was not lost, since the *Constitutions* and the example of Eymard did enrich my time at Bowral. The numbers 15 and 17 of the *Constitutions* spoke of a pattern for prayer. In no. 15 the four ends of sacrifice were recommended and, without doubt, I found this pattern for prayer most useful and enlightening and to this day it remains a precious gift even if I now tend to follow what the Founder wisely said in no.17 namely, to follow the inspiration that the Holy Spirit fosters in a person's heart. To be attentive to this special movement of grace is to advance in love of the Lord. In these numbers Fr. Eymard did influence my life and, I think, continues to do so.

Somewhere along the line we were told that our Founder used to carry a copy of Chapter 6 of John's Gospel at all times. This excited my curiosity since I was not overly attentive to the Scriptures at that time. I read and re-read and reflected much on this part of John's Gospel and learnt much about the Eucharist in this endeavour. I sometimes wonder to myself in these days if this was the beginning of a life-long attraction to the Sacred Writings, at the very least it was a grace granted from the told example of Peter Julian. Both the mentioned *Constitutions* and John 6 were, I believe, a manner in which I was touched by our Founder yet led more to the Eucharist than to a devotion to him.

Scholastic life was more devoted to the study of philosophy and theology than to a study of Eymard and even my sojourn in Rome brought little new about Peter Julian. One thing does stand out is that from a reading of the Great Retreat in Rome and other materials, I was asked by Fr Dugré to visit and photograph all the churches mentioned by Eymard. This was a long task and I have no idea what Fr Dugré eventually did with all those photos. On the other hand it gave me a kind of companionship with Peter Julian as it was like walking in his footsteps. This was also the time when the Generalate published the work of Fr. E. Nunez and Fr. J. Berube entitled *The Spirituality of Peter Julian Eymard*. This we have in English today and it has brought the reader closer in spirit to Eymard. In due time the Vatican Council II took place and that occasioned a great return to the original charism of our Founder and resulted in many writings on the Congregation.

We know well the work of Don Cave in these years and have profited from his work. Don Cave and others have enlightened us about the Congregation and our Founder and their work continues to inspire members of the Congregation. Of special note on my side has been Don's work on the Vow of Personality. It is not too easy to follow the Founder's path which is, in a sense, the total gift of self. This self-giving remains a call to us all. Maybe the words of John the Baptist will be our inspiration as we live out our lives, "He must increase, I must decrease."