

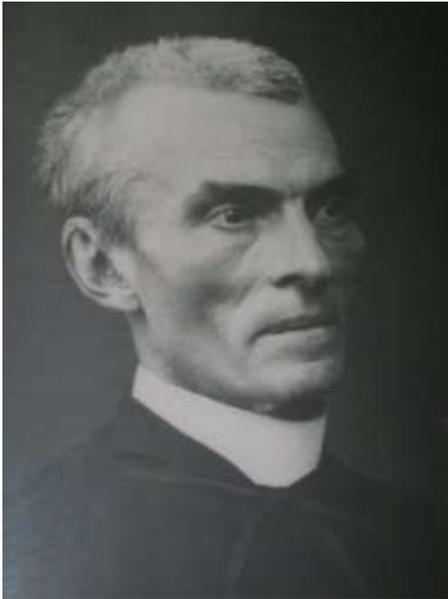
[Saint Peter Julian Eymard](#)

[Saint Edith Stein](#)

ST PETER JULIAN EYMARD

(1811-1868)

www.eynard.org



Born in 1811 in La Mure d'Isère, in the mountain country above Grenoble, Pierre-Julien Eymard, after several years as a diocesan priest, joined the newly-founded Society of Mary (Marists) where he remained for seventeen years. In 1856 he founded at Paris the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament for the purpose of making the sacrament of the Eucharist better known, especially through the practice of Eucharistic adoration; he subsequently founded a religious congregation for women as well, the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament. He died in La Mure in 1868 and was canonized by Pope John XXIII in 1963. His liturgical commemoration is on August 2nd.

His early religious development was deeply marked by the harsh pessimism of the Jansenistic spirit that still reigned in the mountain regions of his childhood, where the triple crosses of the numerous calvaries erected on the lower peaks stood out against the skyline as abiding reminders of a grim theology of a God angered by human sin and demanding satisfaction. For this religious spirit dominated by fear, the major concerns were penance, renunciation, death and judgment; typically, one of the books Eymard was exhorted to read frequently as a young religious bore the forbidding title *Treatise on the Love of Self-despising!* The Eucharist was seen above all in

relation to Calvary, as sacrament of the cross, and when the sacrament was exposed for worship it was in a setting that recalled Christ's tomb and catafalque rather than his resurrection from the dead. The prevailing sense of awe and sinfulness likewise deterred people from approaching the communion table.

Eymard's spiritual pilgrimage away from such gloom and negativity towards a positive religious spirit centered in love is, by any account, a remarkable one. In place of the religion of fear and distance he had known as a young man, he developed a spirituality of union with Christ, "the true center of love", especially through full sacramental participation in the eucharistic celebration. Long before Pope Pius X's decrees encouraging frequent communion, he insisted that people approach the holy table frequently, since (as he put it in 1868 just before his death) "the Eucharist was instituted in the form of nourishment. The soul needs, first of all, to nourish itself." Though he always remained a strong advocate of the practice of Eucharistic adoration, Eymard felt increasingly the need to insist upon its interior character and relate this to the practice and purpose of sacramental communion. As he put it,

"Adoration should not remain superficial, but reach to the heart of the mysteries. Adoration cannot be well done without communion. Communion allows the soul to see, to understand, to contemplate, to savor; and then the soul advances, as in heaven, from light to light."

We offer here a series of texts (taken from personal notes, letters and records of his preaching) that are representative of the mature development of Eymard's thinking.

1. The first extract is taken from a retreat preached to his religious in Marseilles during the octave of Epiphany, 1862.

If you knew the gift of God (Jn., 4:10), the ineffable, the perpetual gift of the Eucharist. If we could know, taste, appreciate the gift of his love. The Eucharist is (a) Jesus Christ become memorial, gift, tangible proof of his love for us; (b) Jesus Christ reaching each one individually; (c) Jesus Christ loving all of us individually, the sun for one and all; (d) Jesus Christ become, out of love, the guest, the victim, the holy communion of each and everyone till the end of ages. Yet, men abandon him, forget about him, despise him, reject him, profane him. It is the struggle between love and indifference: will the love of Jesus win or man's fear of love? (p.59)

2. In the early part of 1865, Eymard was in Rome seeking to negotiate a foundation for his institute in Jerusalem. He profited from the delays to make a three-month long retreat which was rich in spiritual insight and decisive for his own spiritual development. In the following passage, from the 11th of May of the same year, he reminds his hearers that all devotions must tend to holy communion as to their goal.

In the supernatural order, there is a grace of perfection... Why do we find so many graces of character or of attraction? Because Jesus Christ had compassion for us. The human mind is too narrow to grasp all the virtues at the same time or to possess them together. The strain would be too great; the links would be missing; life would not be unified. A dominant grace concentrates life with its many activities and even shortens the way to happiness. The principal grace is that of the Eucharist. It is a greater grace than attraction to the Passion of our Lord. Why? Because it brings Jesus closer to us: our Lord is nearer to us in the Eucharist than in the other mysteries of his life. His love, in the Eucharist, embraces us. It is up to us to respond in mutuality of self-giving. Very few reach perfection through attraction to some other mystery of our Lord, even the Passion. Any spiritual way, without communion, is immolating and sacrificing. The grace of the Eucharist, on the other hand, is a grace of tenderness and of expansiveness, and it is easier to let oneself go than to be cramped. From the Eucharist, you will reach out to Calvary or Bethlehem; but, apart from communion, those mysteries are without life. Anyone who receives communion many times a week has the eucharistic grace. He should direct to it all other devotional practices as to their source and summit. (pp.72-73)

3. Moving decisively away from a faith centered in suffering and obsessed by sin, Eymard recovered the perspective of the resurrection characteristic of the early centuries of Christianity. In this perspective, terms such as "feast" and "celebration" replace the exclusive emphasis on "sacrifice" typical of the time. Two texts referring to the feast of Corpus Christi, one from 1865 and another from 1867, illustrate this shift of balance.

You know why the Church does not celebrate the feast of the Blessed Sacrament on Holy Thursday. Holy Week is a time for repentance. Did not Holy Thursday end in the Garden of Olives? [...]

This is the day which the Lord has made, let us exult and rejoice in it... The feast of Corpus Christi: day of joy and of celebration. 1° For our Lord: a day devoted to his person. His other feasts celebrate a past mystery; today, everything is actual and directed to his adorable person present among us. There is in today's feast the concreteness of body contact. Let us express our joy... The Church could have celebrated Corpus Christi on Holy Thursday, but the celebration would have had to be subdued because of the impending death of the Savior. The Church adores the mystery on Holy Thursday, but celebrates it today, during Pentecost time, since the fulness of grace came with the descent of the Holy Spirit. The Church began at Pentecost and started its active life from that day. We now can feast our Lord with splendor. 2° For the Church. The Church is the spouse of the risen and glorious Savior, and not of Jesus Christ born poor or dying on the cross. Calvary is past. Our Lord is living among us today. The Church is not a widow, but united to her living Spouse. 3° For us. Corpus Christi is your feast and ours. The Society of the Blessed Sacrament exists only to prolong the feast of Corpus Christi. We must perpetuate the feast of the Body of Christ. (pp.96-97)

4. Although Eymard's emphasis was characteristically on the place of the Eucharist in the life of the Christian as an individual, his constantly growing awareness of the ecclesial character of the sacrament gave rise to texts surprising for their time. The following remarkable example, taken from an article he contributed in the 1860s to his short-lived magazine, called simply *The Most Blessed Sacrament*, eloquently illustrates this enlargement of perspective.

Jesus loves the Church as his bride: he died for it, St. Paul tells us, in order to sanctify it that it might be shining, spotless, holy and faultless. It is impossible that this divine spouse ever abandon the bride of his heart from which it emanated. St. Paul advises husbands to love their wives as Jesus Christ loved the Church. What true spouse who had the power to return from the grave would hesitate to rejoin his beloved wife instead of leaving her only cherished memories? We do not have such power, but Jesus rose from the tomb, like the Lion of Juda, and showed himself to his apostles. Far from abandoning the Church, he multiplied his presence on earth to be available to each one. He did not leave his bride widowed, but gave her the joy of having him always. Rejoice, you who were barren; shout for joy, you who were childless, as the prophet and the apostle said, for now you have more children than a fruitful wife. In fact, the Catholic Church must win to its faith and love the whole world. All must be her children. What nourishing food shall this mother give her children that they may become other Christs? How will she nurture martyrs and confessors and virgins? With the bread of the strong. How full of life are the true children of the Church! We alone have a sacred bread, not for levites only, but for all the faithful, from the tottering child to the seasoned veteran. This is our power and our joy: thanks to the Eucharist, we partake of the same bread and drink of the same cup without envy or discrimination. It is a joyful agape that lasts forever. Blessed be

Jesus Christ for leaving to his Church, not a portrait of himself, but his living self. May we appreciate more and more this sacred food in order to be worthy of our calling. (p.81)

5. That Eymard's insights into the nature of sacramental communion were fruit of a profound personal experience of the mystery can be sensed in all that he had to say about the theme in the final years of his life; it is that which gives to his words their undoubted power of persuasion, a quality often attested to by those who heard him.

28 March, 1867. The bread of the Eucharist is primarily food for the spirit. In holy communion, we enjoy the Lord in and through himself. Our Lord called himself the bread come down from heaven, a bread of faith and of life. I maintain that, only in communion, do we find an intimate knowledge of our Lord. He said: he who loves me, keeps my word and I will disclose myself to him. That is to say, I will reveal myself to him through love. That intimate manifestation is obtained only in holy communion. That joy of the spirit, that contact with our Lord in communion gives us a taste of God. Taste and see, Scripture says. That taste for God is the family feeling; it brings us close to his heart. It is a knowledge by feeling and not by reasoning. In holy communion, we experience love, we know the heart of Jesus, we penetrate his secret.

9 May, 1867. Notice what Jesus says when he first announces the Eucharist: I am the bread of life: he who eats me will live for me and in me. The two lives are entwined: the divine life and the united life of the soul. A partnership is formed. Our Lord adds: he who eats me will never die, he will live forever. To receive communion is to be united to the risen Christ. Communion is a union of love. As union requires the sharing of sentiments, thoughts, joys, and sorrows, so communion leads necessarily to a sharing of life. Communion is a heavenly banquet, the marriage feast of the Lamb (pp.76-77).

6. Eymard's words on the same theme, written close to the end of his life, to Mrs Edmée Brenier de Montmorand, at that time resident in Shanghai, have in their clarity and ardor something of the quality of a last will and testament.

1 May, 1868. Your dear aunt relayed your news to me. I read them before our Lord, and thanked him for the graces which he gives you. It is evident that he has taken charge of the direction of your life. However, listen to this advice: nourish your soul on our Lord, on his spirit, on his virtues, on his word reported in the gospels, and on the mysteries of his life. Never lose sight of him, for he said: If you dwell in me and my word dwells in you, whatever you ask will be granted. Place yourself in the sun and you will have all its rays at their source. Draw from all that you do the bread of life of Jesus, and you will have strength. Dwell in the radiance of the goodness of God, the glow of his perfections, the personal interest of his love, his revelation to you. Be happy when Jesus shows you the rationale of his love for you, of the goodness of his dealings with you, and especially of the trials and sacrifices that he lovingly sends you. Dear child, study our Lord, come to know him, to read his secrets, to see the workings of his heart, and you will be amazed. Rise to his heart, that haven and blessedness of life. Give to others the flames of your love, but your heart, keep it in the heart of Jesus. (p.63)

7. In the final years, Eymard explored continually the implications of his insight into the formative power that Christ exercises in the heart of the person of faith through the medium of sacramental communion.

4 April, 1867. The Eucharist is the bread of the spirit. It is also the bread of life, the bread of the heart, the bread of love. It is the gift of God himself. What greater proof of his love could God give us? It is the sacrament of sacraments, preeminent by reason of the love which inspired it. It is the heavenly food by which the soul batters on God. It is above all the testament of God through which we find (a) understanding of the law of love, (b) the special grace to love, (c) the practice of love.

For, what is love? It is giving. How do we recognize it? By what it gives. The Eucharist fulfils both conditions. Our Lord gives us all graces, he enriches us with every gift by giving himself, the fountain of all holiness. In the Eucharist, we receive the fruits of all his mysteries, past, present, and to come. We are forced to recognize God's love in the perfect and complete gift of himself... We feel his love in holy communion. Was it not after the institution of the Eucharist that our Lord proclaimed his commandment to love? After giving himself to us, he could say: abide in my love; love me as your brother, love me strongly.

Moreover, communion gives us the grace to love. How can we recognize our Lord as a friend? Friendship, as you know, is based on equality and union. Both items are found in the Eucharist. God has come to dwell with us, to share with us life, goods, merits. He made the advances first, so that it is not boldness to call him a friend, but a privilege. After the Last Supper, he said: I shall not call you servants, but friends - not the glory of God, not the power of God, .. not like the archangels, but friends... because all that the Father has taught me, I have told you. You now know the secret of the King. (p.77)

8. The image of the Cenacle, the "upper room" of the Last Supper and traditional site of Pentecost, assumed great importance in Eymard's thinking during the 1860s. In a sermon preached for the Feast of the Ascension (25th May 1865) Eymard dwelt on the words "eating together", taken from the reading of the day from the Acts of the Apostles.

Our Lord went from the Cenacle... A deep mystery is hidden here. The sacred writer tells us that he left after they had "eaten together". He celebrated his farewell meal with them like a friend before taking leave. We too must start from the Cenacle. Why? Because we need food not to weaken on the road. My brothers, to travel the road of life, we must take our bread, the bread of the strong, the bread that sustained the Apostles in their conquest of the world. It is there that holy souls find strength and endurance; those who fail to eat drop by the wayside. They acted imprudently in not taking provisions. To resist the strain of life, we must draw strength from the Cenacle. (pp.55-56)

9. For Eymard, the Eucharist, by uniting believers in the most intimate way to Christ, extended the incarnation to the end of time, thereby enabling Christ to continue his redemptive life in human beings to the glory of his Father.

Communion gives our Lord a second life with which to glorify his Father. In heaven, our Lord in his glorified state is not able to honor the Father by the homage of a free and generous love; and so he created for himself a second life by the Eucharist, for in communion he comes into us, abides in us, unites himself to us... By this sacramental union, we give a visible body to the risen body of the Lord, a heart of flesh to envelop his loving heart, a freedom of life to continue his virtues. Thus the soul is transformed by communion into Christ-likeness, makes him live in its own being. A spark of divinity enters the communicant: he will work, but it is our Lord who supplies the power by his grace... Our Lord is able to say to his Father: I love you, I adore you, I suffer once more, I live again in my members... (p. xv)

10. Constantly exploring the implications of the union established with the faithful through communion during his 1865 retreat, Eymard looked to the Incarnate Word and to the Blessed Virgin Mary as models. On February 7th he jotted down these words in his journal.

2° Mary... was all attention to her divine Offspring... Such is the life our Lord expects of me... If I form Jesus in me, live in Jesus in me, and do everything for Jesus... that is the goal I must reach at any cost ... Jesus wants me to share the grace of Mary in his Incarnation by coming to live in me so that I may live in him and for him... It is in us that he wants to establish his kingdom... and compel us to dwell with him in us just as the Blessed Virgin did at the Incarnation... Our union with him was the final prayer of our Lord: that they may be one even as we are one... St. Paul says that we are members of Jesus Christ... and he adds: Christ lives in me... The Eucharist is a living union: who eats me, abides in me and I in him. We receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ in order to be united more intimately to his spirit, to his soul, to his actions, to his virtue, to his merits, in short, to his divine life... There is a union of faith with Jesus Christ... There is moreover a union of love with him, a union of spirit... Lastly, there is a union of partnership which is the closest thing to the hypostatic union of the human nature with the divine nature in the person of the Word, wherein human nature loses its personality, no longer existing in its own right, but belonging to the person of the Word. It was to help us to that union that our Lord instituted the Eucharist... (p. 23)

11. The culminating moment of his long retreat occurred on March 21st, when after long weeks of ascent of "the mountain of love" he made a perpetual vow of his personality to the Lord. His journal entry at the time witnesses to the mystic's struggle to express, through the terms of classical theology, an experientially based insight into the unitive language of the Johannine and Pauline writings.

Towards the end of my thanksgiving, I made the perpetual vow of my personality to our Lord Jesus Christ in the hands of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of St. Joseph, under the patronage of St. Benedict (his feast); nothing for me as a person and, asking for the grace needed, nothing by me. Model: the Incarnation of the Word.

Just as in the mystery of the Incarnation, the sacred humanity of our Lord was deprived of its own personality so that it no longer sought itself as an end, no longer had any interests of its own, no longer acted for its own sake, for it had another person substituted to its own, that is, the Person of the Son of God, who sought only the interest of the Father and had his eyes fixed on him at all times and in all things, so must I be without any desires or interests of my own, and have none but those of Jesus Christ who abides in me to live therein for his Father and gives himself to me in communion to do just that: As the living Father sent me, and I live by the Father, so he who eats me will live by me. It is as if the Saviour said: In sending me through the Incarnation, the Father has torn out of me every root of self-seeking by leaving me without a human personality and uniting me to a divine person in order to make me live for him; in the same way, through communion, you will live for me, for I shall be living in you. I shall fill your soul with my desires and with my life, which will consume and reduce to nothing whatever is personal in you, so much so that it will be I instead of you that shall live and

desire everything in you. Thus you will be entirely invested with me: my heart will beat within you, my soul will act through your soul, your heart will be the receptacle and the pulsation of my heart. I shall be the person of your personality, and your selfhood will be the life of my person in you: It is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me! (pp.25-26)

Quotations are taken from Hervé Thibault, SSS, translation of a book by Lauréat Saint-Pierre, "The Hour" of the Cenacle in the Life and Works of Peter Julian Eymard [A translation of Chs. V,VI,VII of L'Heure du Cénacle (1968)]. Rome: Editions of the General House, 1991.

[Back to top](#)

EDITH STEIN

(1891-1942)

Edith Stein was born in Breslau, Silesia (now in Poland), on October 12, 1891, into a Jewish family. She was born on the Jewish feast of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement; apparently, her mother often mentioned this fact, and Edith grew up with a sense of being special because of it. Her father died at age 48; as the youngest child of the family, Edith's bond with her mother was "the strongest emotional bond in her life." She termed herself an atheist, unable to pray, a situation that lasted through her studies at the University of Breslau and the University of Gottingen; she began to attend the latter in 1913, to study under the German philosopher, Edmund Husserl.

In 1921, while at a philosopher friend's house, Edith picked up and read right through Teresa of Avila's autobiography. She bought a catechism, a missal and, soon after, a breviary. On January 1, 1922, she was baptized at St. Martin's Church in Bergzabern.

Her life changed radically. She lived a very active life praying the Divine Office and participating fully in the liturgy. She found a post in 1932 at the German Institute for Scientific Pedagogy, attached to the University of Munster. But this was only one year before the Nazi ascendancy. She wrote of her last days in Munster, "Now of a sudden it was luminously clear to me that once again God's hand lay heavy on his people, and that the destiny of this people was my own." Later that year, on October 14, 1933, the eve of the feast of Saint Teresa of Avila, Edith entered the Carmel in Cologne. Her religious name was Teresia Benedicta a Cruce, Teresa Blessed by the Cross.

Edith remained in Cologne as Sister Teresia Benedicta a Cruce until her superior judged it too dangerous for her to remain. Edith's superiors arranged for her transfer to the Carmel in Echt, Holland, on New Year's Eve in 1938, along with her sister Rosa, who had also converted to Catholicism. Their safety was short-lived. On August 2, 1942, as a response to the Dutch bishops' protest against the persecution of the Jews, all the Jewish Catholics in Holland were arrested, including Edith and Rosa. They were taken to Auschwitz and executed there on August 9. Almost the last words she spoke as she and her sister were being taken from the Echt Carmel were these: "Come, Rosa, we are going for our people!"

THE EUCHARIST

On the wall beside the font of St. Martin's Church where Edith was baptized on January 1, 1922, there is a plaque dedicated to her, outlining the scene from 1 Kings 19:7, where the angel said to Elijah, 'Arise and eat, lest the journey overburden you,' Freda Oben commented on this plaque: "It is the heavenly bread awaiting Edith at the baptismal font, the Eucharist, which alone enabled her to ascend the Mount Horeb of her life through the gas chamber, where she died for her people and her faith.

The following passage on the Eucharist is from her essay "The Prayer of the Church".

The Prayer of the Church
(See L. Gelber and M. Linssen, OCD., ed.
The Hidden Life, Essays, Meditations, Spiritual Texts
Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1982 pp. 89 ff).

Therefore the whole perpetual sacrificial offering of Christ - at the cross, in the holy Mass, and in the eternal glory of heaven - can be conceived as a single great thanksgiving - as Eucharist: as gratitude for creation,