Session 2009 - Eucharistic Adoration in the spiritual experience of St. Peter Julian Eymard

Documents - Eymard Writings

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In the context of this session on the writings of our Father Founder, I'll share with you something I prepared for the session recently organized by our Italian brothers in Rome on adoration; namely, *Eucharistic adoration in the spiritual experience of St. Peter Julian Eymard*.The subject is vast and my sharing can only be limited. Now we have at our disposal all the Eymardian texts, but the question challenges us: how can we exploit this wealth of information? What instruments should we use?

My methodology is this. First, it's necessary to situate the question in its historical context. Then, we must choose particular texts that seem to be more significant. Thus, on the theme that is proposed to us, as an introduction, I will review quickly the religious context of France in the 19th Century and the spiritual journey of Fr. Eymard as Founder. I will also point out the sources of my research and the criteria for their interpretation. After that, I will recall the place of Eucharistic adoration in the Institutes that he founded, and how he himself personally lived it.

Introduction

The religious context of France in the 1st half of the 19th Century.

On the religious level, the Revolution of 1789 resulted in a split in the institutions and practice of the Christian life. The de-Christianization that followed is manifested by ignorance and religious indifference, as well as forms of fanaticism that will lead to anticlericalism. With the Concordat of 1802, Christian life was revived in France something like a restoration: reorganization of dioceses, reopening of churches and seminaries, gradual recovery of the ancient religious orders that had been banned, the creation of many religious institutes of both men and women in order to face the immense pastoral needs: the education of children and young people, the care of the sick, evangelization in foreign missions, birth of lay groups for social action, parish missions for the revival of parish life. The Catholic Church gave the picture of a vast field of reconstruction and renewal.

On the level of Eucharistic devotion, we had to wait until the 1840's: Mlle de Mauroy discovers the Forty Hours in Rome and, with the support of l'abbé de la Bouillerie, the vicar general, it begins in Paris in 1843, then spreads to most dioceses of France. After the Revolution of 1848, two specific works are born: the Congregation of Reparatory Adoration with Théodelinde Dubouché, and the lay group of men for Nocturnal Adoration. From then on, there was a gradual rediscovery of the Eucharist with exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and adoration, marked by a strong emphasis on reparation.

The journey of Eymard before the foundation

Let us recall briefly the major events in the life of Fr. Eymard. Peter Julian was born in La Mure (Isère) on February 4, 1811, in a deeply Christian family. After many difficulties, he is ordained a priest in the diocese of Grenoble on July 20, 1834, and named vicar in Chatte, near Saint-Marcellin. In 1837 he becomes pastor of Monteynard, near la Mure. Attracted to the religious and missionary life, he enters the Marist Society in 1839. In that society he will first be spiritual director of the college of Belley (Ain) from 1840 to 1844. Then he is named assistant to Fr. Colin, the Superior General, until 1846, when he is named Visitor General and Director of the Third Order of Mary. In 1851, he is named Superior of the college of Sainte-Marie de La Seyne-sur-Mer (Var), a task that he exercised until 1855. After a year in Chaintré (Saône-et-Loire), he leaves the Society of Mary to found the Society of the Blessed Sacrament. He dies in La Mure on August 1, 1868.

At the end of his life, Fr. Eymard remarks: *The greatest grace of my life was a lively faith in the Most Blessed Sacrament, from my very youth.*Many incidents in his life as a young man in La Mure, as a priest in the diocese of Grenoble, and as a Marist give witness to this. As Visitor General in 1849, he discovers the Eucharistic revival in the capital on the occasion of a visit to his community on rue Montparnasse.

On January 21, 1851, at Fourvière in Lyons, he senses a very strong interior call inviting him to do something – a religious group? – to promote the worship of the Eucharist. This grace is again experienced, two years later, in the college of La Seyne-sur-Mer: he is ready to endure any sacrifice needed to do something. In fact, while fulfilling the administration and development of his college, he establishes the groundwork for an Order of the Blessed Sacrament, but his efforts will be cut short. He must relinquish his Marist vocation in order to respond to the Eucharistic attraction that becomes more intense. On May 13, 1865, after a long struggle, Bishop Sibour, archbishop of Paris, entrusts him with the mission of founding the Society of the Blessed Sacrament.

The documentation and its interpretation

The vast publication of the complete Eymardian Writings, available as a computerized edition on the *web*, and now in a printed edition, invites us to choose some texts. I limit myself to these:

- for the mind of Fr. Eymard, to the Constitutions of his Religious of the Blessed Sacrament in 1864, with a few extracts from his preaching,

- for his personal experience, to his personal retreats as Founder, from 1863 to 1868.

As for the criteria of interpretation, I point out two things:

-The mind of Fr. Eymard is not uniform. His approach to the Eucharist evolves with the years. That is why we must keep in mind the date of the documents and their literary style.

-On the other hand the big retreat of Rome in 1865 marks a new stage. There he attains his spiritual maturity: his charism unfolds with a particular richness.

1. THE FOUNDER AND HIS WORK

The Society of the Blessed Sacrament

Founded in 1856, inaugurated on January 6, 1857 on la rue d'Enfer, the Society of the Blessed Sacrament develops little by little in an atmosphere of poverty and insecurity. In 1858, Fr. Eymard establishes his community in a secure way on la rue du Faubourg Saint-Jacques, in the 14th district, and initiates the work of the First Communion for adults. With Marguerite Guillot, he will also form the nucleus for the Society of the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament. Then follow the foundations of Marseilles in 1859, and of Angers in 1862.

In April 1864, Fr. Eymard prints the Constitutions of the Congregation of the Religious (RR77): they are the fruit of a long maturation, after many drafts and editions. By this time, the Institute had been approved in 1863 by the Holy See, and Fr. Eymard had integrated into this edition the remarks of the Congregation of the Bishops and Regulars after it had examined the text of 1863. Therefore, the Constitutions of 1864, in use by the Congregation, represent the mind of Fr. Eymard at this time. He will not publish any other version before his death, even if he continues to annotate some copies and compose some corrections.

He defines here the *two purposes* of his Congregation:

1. To give above all and by all his children a solemn and perpetual worship of adoration to our Lord Jesus Christ abiding perpetually in the most Blessed Sacrament of the altar out of love for men,

2. To dedicate themselves to the love and the glory of this very august Sacrament by the apostolate of each of its members who, under the auspices and guidance of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, must apply themselves to this in the measure of their grace and their ability.

This is followed by the chapters: *The service of adoration, What is to be observed in exposition, How our religious should adore, Observance of the sacred rites,*then on the Mass, Holy Communion, and the Divine Office. Chapter 24 develops the different forms of apostolate: the first, common to all the religious, is adoration itself, then the sciences and arts at the service of the Eucharist, the study of the liturgy, the welcoming of retreatants particularly priests, the work of the First Communion of adults, finally giving of retreats.

Eucharistic adoration in his Institutes

Thus, in his Institutes – the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament have a similar rule with a particular accent on the contemplative life – Fr. Eymard gives first place to Eucharistic adoration. Adoration can be defined as the act of worship by which the Church gives to God the homage due to him by Christ in the Holy Spirit. Eucharistic adoration is the very same homage of love towards the Father flowing from the gift that Christ makes of himself by instituting the Eucharist, and according to the very dynamics of this gift.

To sustain and nourish the prayer of the religious and faithful, Fr. Eymard presents the *method of the four ends of sacrifice,*a simple and practical method: consecrate a time to adore, to give thanks, to ask pardon, and to intercede for the Church and the world. Since he adopted this method – while leaving each one the freedom to pray according to his grace – it was because it corresponds to the double movement of the Eucharist celebration:

- towards God, adoration – contemplation of his ineffable mystery and thanksgiving for his infinite benevolence,

- for the Church and the world, reparation for all the sins committed, and intercession with the intentions of the universal prayer then used in the liturgy of Good Friday.

This is how he presents the method: *In their adorations, the adorers shall apply themselves to honoring the four ends of sacrifice, namely: to offer perpetually to God the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ a homage of praise and honor, of love and thanksgiving, of propitiation and petition, for the greater service and the greater reign of Jesus Christ in his sacrament; for the Sovereign Pontiff, for all the religious orders, for priests and princes, for the destruction of all heresy and schism; finally that the Jews may see the light, that the heathen may adore their Savior; and that all, in fine, may love our Lord Jesus Christ and hasten to his Sacrament of life*(RR 78,4,4).

Fr. Eymard does not innovate anything on this point, and he is aware of this. Many others before him had practiced and taught it. It is rooted in the prayer of the Church and, in a special way, it is inspired by the mysteries celebrated in the liturgy: *Lest adorers, however, grow lukewarm in the daily exercise of adoration, they should prepare themselves for it carefully and devoutly. They should learn to honor and, as it were, to actualize all the mysteries of our Lord Jesus Christ in the super-excellent worship of the Holy Eucharist; to meditate and glorify all his virtues in this supreme gift of his love. They must also celebrate the feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the Saints to the praise and glory of the hidden God. – However, the best way of adoring our Lord is that which the Holy Spirit inspires and fosters in a humble and upright heart. Let each one, therefore, be attentive to his own special grace and, as one called to the better part with Mary, advance in recollection and the virtue of holy love at the feet of our Lord*(RR 78,4,5).

He adopts this method as *the form of life of our prayer.* He notes this in chapter 10 of the Constitutions: *Since the form of prayer is the rule of our life, that of our society shall be the form of prayer of the Church our Mother, in the exercise of the four ends of sacrifice.*And he invites his religious to foster it, *to show its meaning and especially the virtues that are part of it and the precious graces that flow from it.*(RR 78,10,5). He composes a text to be used by the faithful under the title of *Method of adoration by the four ends of sacrifice,*that is published in Nantes in 1867 (PO 33).

Adoration and the pastoral needs of an era

Isn't there a danger to over-evaluate Eucharistic adoration? Without doubt, in Eymard's time it had a particular importance from the fact that the celebration in Latin was understood only by a small number of people and that Communion by the faithful was rare, reserved to a few privileged souls, or on big feast days. By way of information, according to the Constitutions of 1864, the Brothers are allowed to receive Communion normally only twice a week, on Sunday and Thursday, and on certain feast days. If frequent Communion is recommended, it is granted only at the will of the Superior *'by degrees, according to sacred orders, the virtue or the profession of each'*(RR 78,7,5).

It is a fact that the spread of Forty Hours promoted the practice of Eucharistic adoration in France, and began a spiritual renewal. In 1864, in the review *Le Très-Saint Sacrement*that he starts, Fr. Eymard praises the 19th Century as the *Century of the Eucharist,*and his reasons are the development of exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and adoration. These respond to a need that he describes in this way: *The great evil of today is that we do not go to Jesus Christ as to our Savior and our God. We neglect the only foundation, the only law, the only grace of salvation. The evil of barren piety is due to not starting with Jesus Christ, or not reaching him. We stop on the way, and admire the flowers. Divine love that does not have its life and center in the sacrament of the Eucharist is not where its power is: it will die like a fire that is not stoked*(PG 232).

These reflections are similar to what he wrote on October 22, 1851 to one of his directees, Mme Tholin-Bost: *I often reflected upon the remedies for the universal indifference which is taking hold of so many Catholics in a frightening way. I can find only one: the Eucharist, love for Jesus Eucharistic. Loss of faith comes in the first place from loss of love*(CO 286).

Fr. Eymard is aware of the pastoral challenges of his time: many people lack faith, there is rationalism, materialism, and the worship of money. Preaching is often only moralizing. We no longer know Jesus Christ. We must preach the Gospel, bring the faithful back to the very person of Christ, to his love as it is revealed in the mystery of the Eucharist. For him, Eucharistic adoration is not an end in itself, but a means to meet Christ, *'to return to the source of life, to Jesus'*, as he mentions in the article quoted above, and he links this with the celebration.

The centrality of the celebration

The complete edition of the writings of Fr. Eymard reveal the care he took in studying, among others, the documents of the Council of Trent on the Eucharist, and how he tried to link adoration to the celebration. The method of prayer according to the four ends of the sacrifice sends us back to the celebration itself. On this point, it is proper to quote an explicit text from the Constitutions of the religious, called 'de Saint-Bonnet', written in October 1863. Under the title *Concerning the celebration and the hearing of Mass*, he notes as a preliminary: *(worth copying) 1. Among all the works of piety, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and Communion with the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ constitute, without doubt, the end and life of all religion. Therefore, to celebrate and receive the Eucharist worthily -- this divine mystery par excellence -- may each one's piety, virtue and love be oriented towards it as a means towards their end*(RR 74t,6).

The clarity of this text stands out against many Eucharistic meditations of his day. We are not sure, in spite of our research, if the text is from Fr. Eymard himself, or if he took it from some author. In any case, the words *'worth copying'*suggest that he adopted it, at least on second reading, even if he never included it in any future draft of his Constitutions. This centrality of the celebration announces the teaching of Vatican II, a century in advance.

The fruits of the Eucharist

Therefore, the celebration is the center from which comes all worship of the Eucharist. It is the source of all the fruits of the Eucharist coming through sacramental Communion. On this point, the edition of the writings of Fr. Eymard offers a harvest of more than an abundant number of texts. While he preached often on adoration and its practice, his instructions on the Mass and especially Holy Communion are much more numerous. For example, we can merely take the themes of his instructions after 1856 (edited under code numbers PG 201 to 369) to notice that his preaching is centered on Eucharist, and for a great part on the fruits of Communion.

In a passing way, we can notice a few points: Communion is nourishment, it restores our strength, it heals, it is the new manna, it is the power of transformation, the rehabilitation of man, it is the place of our divinization, the triumph of love of Jesus Christ. In the same way, in its ecclesial dimension, it is the continued Incarnation, the sacrament of the presence of Christ, the memorial of his Passion, the banquet of the New Covenant, the family feast, the bond of unity, the center of life and love, the promise of the Kingdom.

To this 'sacramental' approach to the Eucharist, it is right to add a more personal dimension that comes from his diligent meditation of St. Paul and St. John. In a recent study, Fr. Manuel Barbiero has underlined the contribution of St. Paul in the spirituality of Fr. Eymard, the highest expression of which is found in the frequently quoted text of Gal 2:20: *It is no longer I who live, it is Christ who lives in me.*(cf. The review *Partager*, Paris, n° 37, January 2009, p. 12-16).

A similar study would allow us to discover the special place of St. John in his meditations and his instructions on chapters 6 and 13-16 of his Gospel. Among the most frequently quoted texts, we find in descending order of frequency: Jn 14: 6 (95 times); Jn 15: 5 (89 times); Jn 6: 56 (77 times); Jn 6: 57 (63 times); Jn 14: 21 (57 times); Jn 14: 23 (52 times). Consequently, Eucharistic Communion appears in a special way as the sacrament of union, of friendship, of mutual love, of intimacy with Christ.

Communion is also the source of a commitment to the service of mission, especially for those most in need. On this point, the work of the First Communion of adults, that he proposes to Archbishop Sibour and begins in 1859, constitutes the most explicit witness of his concern for the marginalized in the pastoral ministry of his time, and which takes on a social dimension. Till the very end of his life, he will devote himself to this privileged work. In a letter to Virginie Danion, he refers to *the poor scavengers, the poor abandoned children of the factories.*And he adds: *Beautiful and loveable mission: it is the royal mission of the Eucharistic wedding*(CO 1099).

In this way, Eucharistic adoration nourishes itself with all the riches of this sacrament and prolongs its fruits.

2. THE SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE OF ADORATION IN THE LIFE

OF fR. Eymard

I limit myself, as I said, to his three personal retreats as Founder:

- the first took place in Rome with the Passionists, from May 17 – 25, 1863, on the occasion of his trip to obtain the decree of erection of his Institute,

- the second, also in Rome, was with the Redemptorists, from January 25 to March 30, 1865, on the occasion of his trip to Rome to obtain authorization to found a community in Jerusalem,

- the third, at the novitiate of Saint-Maurice, near Paris, from April 27 to May 2, 1868, merely a few months before his death.

1. In his first retreat of Rome in 1863, Fr. Eymard focuses on his mission as Founder. All the structures are now in place, communities have been set us, constitutions have been composed even if not yet approved, the decree of erection will be granted him. But he is very aware that on the personnel level everything remains to be done. If *the main external work of the Society is finished, the internal remains to be done, and that will be the most difficult,*he notes. And he notices here a new demand for sanctity.

He writes very little about adoration itself, except this note: *Adoration has lost its primary place among the four ends, or else there is no preparation for it… it has been rather vague, and I have been preoccupied with my work.*Finally, he asks *the Holy Spirit, no longer for others, but for myself.*And he adds, *I finally understood that God prefers an act of my heart, the gift of my person, rather than everything that I can do externally… that an interior act is more glorious and loveable for him than all the apostolate in the world*(NR 42,1).

Fr. Eymard, however, will not stop his apostolic activities. But he does ask the Lord for a new spirit.

2. With the big retreat of Rome in 1865,something else happens. To follow up his plans for the Cenacle personally, Fr. Eymard goes to Rome on November 10, 1864. The case is submitted to a commission of cardinals, but the decision is constantly delayed. On January 25, 1865, he goes on retreat with the Redemptorists near St. Mary Major, and stays there until the decision is made. On March 29th he is notified: the decision is negative. Heart broken but resigned, Fr. Eymard leaves Rome the following day.

During this long retreat, Fr. Eymard submits himself to a self-examination. His written notes – three meditations a day – make his soul very transparent. With the light of the Holy Spirit, he examines himself searching for the will of God for him, reviewing the events that have marked his life as a priest and religious, focusing especially on what involved his Eucharistic vocation. He rejoices in the way God has led him, and he is attentive to the call of grace. One idea keeps coming back, like the red thread that returns in his 'confessions', namely, that of 'gift': God gives, he gives himself, and he gives himself completely. And the Father renews the gift of himself, with the desire – constantly formulated – of an absolute gift.

In this very long document, capable of different interpretations, I propose to follow Fr. Eymard's journey in the line of Eucharistic adoration, from the beginning up to the grace of the gift of personality that he receives at the end.

***1. With the desire to give himself totally*– Totus pro toto**

- From the beginning of the retreat, Fr. Eymard is aware that he has not given himself totally out of love: *I saw how I have given myself to our Lord in the Most Blessed Sacrament only through the devotedness of love, only through service, worship and zeal.*And he concludes: *What must I do? I must give myself to Jesus Christ and serve him by the gift, the holocaust of self.*I want *not* what is yours, but *you*. [cf. Im 4, 8: 3]. ***Our Lord gave me to understand that he prefers the gift of my heart to all the exterior gifts I might offer him,*** *even if I were to give him the hearts of all men without giving him my own.*My son, give me your heart [Pr 23,26] (January 29 -NR 44,8).

- A little later, on February 1st, meditating on the characteristic virtue of an adorer, he discovers the sublime model in the annihilation of Christ. *He emptied himself, taking the form of bread*[cf. Ph 2,7]. *Therefore, O my soul, therein is the whole law of your holiness; therein all the personal and real glory which God expects of you, in you, through you.*He emptied himself [Phil 2:7]. He must increase, but I must decrease [Jn 3: 30]. **I must become, as it were, a sacramental species, which is certainly without pride or vanity, since it has no life of its own.** (NR 44,15).

- In his desire to live in greater conformity with Christ, he meditates on the mystery of the Incarnation on February 7th: *At last I am penetrating into the mysteries of our Lord; I shall find life therein. I have not desired, or negligibly so, the coming of our Lord in me because* ***I gave myself entirely to exterior things.****I have not desired Holy Communion because Communion calls for recollection and would restrain my love for study and for exterior works.*Meditating on the life of Mary in the Incarnation, he concludes: *If I form Jesus in me, live in Jesus in me and do everything for Jesus, he will be my counsel, my strength, my consolation, my center of love*(NR 44,27).

- On the following day, he meditates on union with Christ based on Chapter 15 of St. John. After talking of union of faith and union of love, he mentions the union of incorporation 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 is minus its personality, which no longer exists as a person but gives way to the divine person of the Word***(NR 44,29).

- On February 11th, he discovers the demands of the 'interior service' of our Lord: *Coming down to the practical, I saw that in order to become a true religious and Superior,* ***I must live this interior life of adoration, content myself with our Lord Jesus Christ,****and be apprehensive of exterior ministry; for it is better to work at forming my brethren, better to burn than to shine, better to be root than branch* (NR 44,34).

- On February 16, after a trying night, he finds in a text of the Imitation of Christ: *My son, you must give me all for all, keep no aspect of yourself as your private concern.*[Im. 3,27 :7] *There, now, I have found the whole secret of it:* ***the unconditional gift of self to our Lord. I made this gift,****and took an oath on it before the Most Blessed Sacrament at the Consecration; my tears ratified it. At Communion, I placed my heart – in the act of giving itself – in the ciborium that it might itself become a ciborium*(NR 44,42).

- The service of Christ, lived too long in a merely external way, reveals itself with all its demands of an interior gift: *Since I am therefore attached and dedicated to the service of the adorable Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, I owe him the service of my whole person, of my whole soul, of my whole body, of my whole strength, of all my actions. It were thievery to filch some of these actions, a sacrilege to sully them, a treason to do them for others.* ***Jesus sacramental must then be the center of my life, as he is its first and only law.****Servant of the Eucharist! Such therefore is my royal and divine title!* (February 21st – NR 44,56).

- On this same day, in his third meditation, he received a beautiful thought from the Lord: *Towards the end of my meditation […] I was asking him just how he wanted me to serve him. And then it seemed to me that I heard these words:* ***'Be to me in my Sacrament what I was to my Father in my Incarnation and my mortal life'****. That thought made a vivid impression upon me; I thanked the good Master for it, and I gave myself anew to him to be entirely his as he was his Father's. But how does Jesus belong to his Father in his divine life of the Word, in his mortal life, in his sacramental life? That is what I must examine and reproduce in me. – Oh! What a beautiful thought!* ***I must be to Jesus what Jesus was to his Father:***I in them and you in me [Jn 17: 23]. – As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love [Jn 15: 9]. *This is St. Paul's*Christ who lives in me [Gal 2: 20](NR 44,60).

- On February 26th, he meditates on adoration as it affects him personally: *I must be an adorer only, that is, I must make of my whole being, of my whole life, present and future, a homage of justice and love to our Lord Jesus Christ in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the altar, solemnly exposed forme –* ***Adoration of him byme;*** *that is the essential thing.*I seek not what is yours but you. [*cf. Im 4, 8: 3] – I must adore our Lord, his love in the Most Blessed Sacrament, his sacrifices, his state, his goodness, in a word, the cause of the institution, of the perpetuity, of the multi-location of the Eucharist;* ***I must also get in touch with the health-giving and nourishing grace of this divine Sacrament.****I must unite myself to our Lord by that grace, and glorify him in his sacramental state; then will my soul abide in his love.* Abide in my love [Jn 15: 9]. ***I must go to the Eucharist not through the mysteries and virtues of our Lord, but rather from the Eucharist to his mysteries and virtues.****It is the sun that produces the rays; it takes too long to trace our way to the sun along one of its rays; we are apt to stop on the way up.*(NR 44,67).

- On March 4th, he meditates on Eucharist as the center of life: *What does 'abiding in the love' of Jesus Christ mean? That we make of his love the center of our life.* ***This center must be the Eucharist; for Jesus is in the Eucharist.*** And he concludes: *Come, O my soul, leave this world, go out of yourself, forsake yourself; go to the God of the Eucharist; he has an abode, and he wants you there; he wants to live with you, to give himself to you, to live in you.* ***Be to Jesus what his human nature, deprived of its personality, was to his divine Person in the Incarnation. As we live for self and self in us is the person, so our Lord's human soul and body lived only for the divine Person of the Word – who itself lived only for his Father and by his Father.*** *–Resolution: Renew my gift of self, partial gift, self-surrender.*It is Christ who lives in me [Ga 2,20](NR 44,81).

2. The gift of personality

We could continue following this journey of Eymard, but these extracts are enough to enter into the feelings that animate him during this search, one that is humanly impossible. God rewards his expectations with a special grace, even if he is experiencing serious trials: he notes this with great equanimity after his Mass on March 21.

It is good for us to quote this entire text:

Towards the end of my thanksgiving, I made the perpetual vow of my personality to our Lord Jesus Christ in the hands of the Most Blessed Virgin and of St. Joseph, under the patronage of St. Benedict (his feast); ***nothing for me as a person*** *– with a prayer for the grace that is essential to this gift: nothing by me. The model of this gift:* ***the Incarnation of the Word.***

*Just as in the mystery of the Incarnation, the sacred humanity was deprived of its own person, so that it no longer sought itself as an end, no longer had any interest 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 his Father and had his eyes fixed on him always and in all things; so must I be without any desires and 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 in Communion to do just that in me:*As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me[Jn 6,57].

It is as if my Savior 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 person 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 will fill your soul with my desires and with my life, which will consume and reduce to nothing everything that is personal to you; so much so that it will be I instead of you that shall live and shall desire everything in you. Thus will you be entirely invested with me; my heart will beat within your body, 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 personality will be the life of my person in you.– It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me[Gal 2: 20] (NR 44,119).

The text that follows the record of this event is taken from M. Olier's *Catéchisme chrétien pour la vie intérieure*. During the following days, Father develops at great depth this life of union with the Lord, indicating the eagerness of his desire to belong entirely to Christ. ***I must therefore be united to our Lord Jesus Christ as his human nature was to the authority of his divine Person, as Jesus was totally to his Father.****But in order to be so, this union must be a vital one, received from him and communicated by him. This branch must first be warmed by the sun in order to receive the flowing life-sap. The seasoning sun which draws this divine fluid is recollection, holy desires, prayer, the gift of self – in a word, love.*Come, Lord Jesus [Ap 22: 20] –My life and my only hope (NR 44,124).

My God, how can I live a life of union? 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 (NR 44,125).

On March 28th, the very day on which the Commission met to decide the Cenacle affair, Fr. Eymard abandons himself totally to God: *As an act of resignation, I surrendered myself to the holy will of God concerning tomorrow's decision, with the promise not to recriminate at all in case it is negative, or to show bad humor if it is again postponed till later* (NR 44,135). – The following day he receives the negative answer. He makes the Way of the Cross. *There was nothing else for me to do. Our Lord was so good to me this morning; his grace and the element of surprise deadened the force of the blow*(NR 44,137).

God had already prepared him for this turn of events. On February 5th he had written: *What did me good was to understand that one act of self-contempt would give more glory to God than the success of the Society through me – than even success concerning the Cenacle, because by such an act I would be ransoming the cenacle in me and glorifying God through me, which God prefers to all the homage I might offer him without myself, apart from myself; that is a royal truth* (NR 44,15).

Father Eymard leaves Rome on March 30th, heartbroken and exhausted, *but with a fortitude born of love,*since love is stronger than death [Ct 8 : 6] – *This pure love was that of our Lord in the Incarnation by the sacrifice of his human person*(NR 44,137). More important than the Cenacle in Jerusalem, was the *interior cenacle, the cenacle in me,*as he had foreseen.

3. The retreat of Saint-Maurice in 1868

At this time, Fr. Eymard has been sinking into the dark night of the soul. While dedicating himself totally to his many activities as Founder and preacher, the failures and trials pile up. In this retreat at Saint-Maurice, three months before his death, he sees these as so many 'symbolic deaths', revealing the depth of his spiritual life, completely given to the very Person of Christ in his Sacrament and for his glory. In the solitude of the novitiate, he dedicates an entire week as a time of starting again. He experiences *a great need for this.*It is like a dialogue of love, in which he is forever grateful: *How he [the Lord] has loved me! To excess! What has he refused me? Nothing. I love him little, and he loves me tenderly* (NR 45,1).Nevertheless, he suffers from this little love. It is a spiritual dryness: *Ah! When Jesus filled this heart, it did not even think of airing its troubles; nothing of them transpired; it had room but for Jesus alone. When trials arose from without or from within, a quarter of an hour before the Blessed Sacrament used to strengthen and pacify me, but today hours leave me desolate. – I find it difficult to recollect myself, to explore spiritual realities, the interior of Jesus, my own interior. I am like a sick man who can talk only of his pains or of his disappointments. I am in the negative. And therefore interior sentiment in my adorations is dead; my soul is ice-cold. Jesus no longer makes his beautiful sun shine upon me. What a drudge I am!*(NR 45,11).

He longs for a prayer of repose, but in vain: *Oh! How I could do just now with prayer of repose at the feet of the Master:*Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while [Mk 6: 31]; -- *a repose at the feet of Jesus that craves for his grace, his goodness, his mercy, one look of love from him; a quiet and peace for my whole being, a loving and refreshing repose. I enjoyed a brief moment of that repose. – How I long for that other prayer the Savior speaks of:*I will bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her [Hosea 2:16] (NR 45,14).

At the end of this last retreat, he takes these promises: ***Make of adoration the very center of my life;*** *prepare my adorations as one prepares a meal, an important address.* And he concludes with these resolutions: *Pray exclusively…Work in peace and liberty…* ***I am God's handyman…****With my neighbor: endeavor to get others to talk and to talk little myself* (NR 45,16).

To the very end, Fr. Eymard consecrates his final efforts to be, by his life of adoration and apostolic ministry, *the day-laborer (handyman) of the Lord,*the humble 'ordinary' servant at the service of his Master and Lord.

As a conclusion

In his thesis, *Vita eucaristica e vita religiosa in S. Pierre-Julien Eymard,*Verona 1991, Fr. Manuel Barbiero brought to light the fundamental unity in the life and work of Fr. Eymard in the chapter entitled *Il fuoco e la fiamma* –the fire and the flame. This metaphor is familiar to Fr. Eymard who uses it to show the transforming power of Eucharist and its necessary radiation.

After his visit to Fr. Chevrier in Lyons in April 1861, Fr. Eymard gave an account of his meeting in a letter addressed to Fr. De Cuers, his first companion, who was drawn to the contemplative life alone. This priest from Lyons was also dedicating himself to a work of catechesis with the youth, similar to that of Fr. Eymard in Paris. The latter remarked with great clarity: *For my part, this work suits me. […] A purely contemplative life cannot be fully eucharistic: the hearth has a flame*(CO 1030).

Fr. Eymard lived the Eucharist in its fullness: his life of adoration nourished his apostolic ministry, and this ministry nourished his life of adoration. It was united: the hearth and the flame.