

Bread Broken & Shared

A Newsletter for friends of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament of the Province of Saint Ann



by **Bernard Camiré SSS**

It was my great pleasure to preach the annual novena in honor of St. Peter Julian Eymard at the Blessed Sacrament Fathers' Shrine in Liverpool, England. In response to the prompting of several of my fellow religious, I am pleased to share with a wider audience, in the pages of Bread Broken & Shared, the content of the ten sermons preached during the novena and on the feast of St. Peter Julian. These reflections on the Eucharist and St. Eymard were preached to a specific congregation, but required only minor editing to communicate their message to a broader Catholic audience. I hope that audience will be as receptive as the original assembly of hearers.

With the recent economic meltdown, that has occurred in just about every part of the world, a great many people have become very preoccupied and nervous about "wealth," i.e., the wealth, large or small, that they presently have or that they've been hoping to have. A couple of years ago, our Holy Father, Pope Benedict, brought up the topic of "wealth." The occasion, however, was not an economic crisis, a concern about material wealth; the occasion, rather, was his putting together a wonderful summary of the 11th Ordinary General Assembly of

The Eucharist and St. Peter Julian Eymard

the Synod of Bishops that considered in depth the sacrament of the Eucharist. In his masterful summary, the Apostolic Exhortation entitled *Sacramentum Caritatis* (Sacrament of Charity), Pope Benedict states: "In the most blessed Eucharist is contained the entire spiritual wealth of the Church." We probably read that quote or heard it somewhere a couple of years ago, but did not really catch the weight of those words: "In the
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most blessed Eucharist is contained the entire spiritual wealth of the Church.” Over the next several months, I should like to explore some of that “spiritual wealth” that we Catholic Christians possess in the holy Eucharist.

In addition, I should like to explore another, secondary, store of “spiritual wealth” of the Catholic Church, namely, the life, example and teachings of the Church’s saints. On August 2nd of every year the Blessed Sacrament Fathers and Brothers celebrate the feast day of their founder, St. Peter Julian Eymard – a saint who has been given the title, “Apostle of the Eucharist.” The title has been justly bestowed, I believe, because if we have any acquaintance with the saint, to say his name or to think of him is to bring to mind the Eucharist, so intimately is his person associated with this sacrament. In the months ahead, I should like to offer some reflections on the Eucharist and how that sacrament encompassed the life of St. Peter Julian Eymard; how it influenced and found expression in the phases of his life, the undertakings of his priestly zeal, and the valued teachings that he handed on to us. It would be helpful, I think, to begin with a brief overview of his life and mission.

Peter Julian Eymard was born on the 4th of February, 1811, in the town of La Mure d’Isère in the diocese of Grenoble, situated in the French Alps. After having to deal with his father’s resistance to his pursuit of a priestly vocation, as well as with certain health problems, he eventually entered the diocesan seminary of Grenoble and, in 1834, was ordained to the priesthood. After some years as a diocesan priest, he felt drawn to the religious life and entered a newly-formed Congregation, the Marist Fathers, in Lyons. In a surprisingly short time - and I think it is a testimony to his intellectual and spiritual competence - he was entrusted with various important responsibilities in that Congregation. However, there was something continually stirring within his heart and soul; he experienced an ever-growing attraction to the Eucharist and a desire to do something exceptional for that central of sacraments in the life of the Church.

This powerful attraction reached a significant point one day, in January of 1851, as he was praying in the Marian sanctuary of Fourvière in Lyons. As he prayed, he was “profoundly moved” (as he put it) by the lack of spiritual formation among many Catholics, and especially by a lack of true understanding and appreciation of the sacrament of the Eucharist in Christian life. This lack manifested itself in attitudes of indifference towards the Sacrament and, worse still, in acts of sacrilege. It was as a result of this spiritual experience at Fourvière, that he decided to form a Third Order of men dedicated to reparatory adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. But this initial idea gradually took on a different shape over the next several years, and finally became a definitive objective, namely, to establish, not a Third Order, but a religious Congregation dedicated to the worship and apostolate of the Eucharist.

When it became clear to St. Eymard that the Congregation he had in mind had to be a distinct entity from the Marist Fathers, he asked for a dispensation from his vows as a Marist. And when that was obtained, he went to Paris, where, on the 13th of May, 1856, he founded the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament. The Congregation, consisting of only a few members and situated in a small

chapel on Rue d’Enfer, received the approbation of the Archbishop of Paris, Marie Dominique Sibour - and, later, the blessing and definitive approbation of Pope Pius IX in 1863.

One of the happiest days in the life of Fr. Eymard was the day, the Feast of the Epiphany, 1857, when the Congregation was officially inaugurated with solemn exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Over the next twelve years, four further foundations were established: three in France and one in Belgium. Before his death at the young age of 57, Fr. Eymard managed to fill his days with an incredible amount of ministry: sacramental administration, catechetical instruction, preaching engagements, writing, spiritual direction, etc. In all of this he revealed his passion for the Eucharist; his burning desire to see the Eucharist imbue Christian life and influence society.

Over the coming months, I shall share some further facts of St. Peter Julian’s life and his teaching on the sacrament of the Eucharist – both of which reveal his profound understanding of the Eucharist’s place in authentic Christian life and his personal love of the Eucharistic Christ. My hope in doing this is that you will continue to grow in your understanding of the Eucharist and allow its riches, its “wealth,” to enter more deeply into the texture of your daily Catholic Christian life. ✠

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