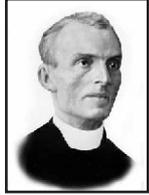


A YEAR WITH FR. EYMARD Day by Day

“The Society of the Blessed Sacrament is not satisfied with adoring, loving and serving the God of the Eucharist: its zeal for his glory desires to have him adored, loved and served by everyone, and to erect for him thrones of love and to gather faithful adorers for him. Jesus said: ‘I have come to set fire on the earth; my only wish is to see this fire engulf the entire world’ (Lk 12:49)” [Retreat on a Eucharistic vocation]



this kind of transforming love to even our very own kith and kin is perhaps what should be called 'original sin' today. Everybody is seemingly so

steeped in self-seeking and self-promotion and fulfillment that venturing on a project of giving love to others seems a highly risky and hazardous journey.

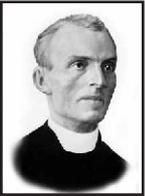
As he broke bread and shared it with his disciples at the Last Supper Christ's central message was precisely that his followers should not wait to be loved first before reaching out in love to others, but that having been guaranteed Christ's own personal love they should go out and love the unloved, even to the point of becoming 'bread broken for a new world.'

So the biggest act of gratitude we could give to Jesus for his great love for us is that we in turn love the brethren, especially the members of the Body of Christ. A SSS religious must stand out for his immense capacity to give love unceasingly, especially in places and to people where it is taken for granted, where it is not appreciated and reciprocated. Seeking not so much to 'be loved' as to love, the SSS religious lights up hearts with this fire of love which by its very nature spreads to others out of its sheer inherent goodness.

From the start of his search for the 'answer to all the ills of the society in which we live' Fr. Eymard was clear that Love is the only and much-needed solution. Yet, of the men who would choose to follow in his footsteps, he not only insisted that they should be thoroughly schooled in this central virtue of love and be living examples of the kind of love that God has for his children; he wanted them further to be apostles spreading the fire of this love to every single human person on earth.

The basis of this ardent desire of Fr. Eymard is his realization that every human being hungers for love as the one thing that makes life worth living. Love is the only thing that every person needs, and which unfortunately is the remedy he gets least of all. This love should be found first and foremost in the family which is the primary school of Christian life. Yet, even a cursory glance across our big cities is enough to convince us that true, unconditional love is a very rare commodity indeed! Our inability to offer

“Pray that we may become true disciples of the love of Jesus Christ in order to be one day worthy apostles.” [To A. Adele de Revel de Nesc, May, 1856]



undertaken mainly in reparation for sin.

Having grown in this spiritual atmosphere of intense negativity, (his family was fully steeped in it) it is amazing how

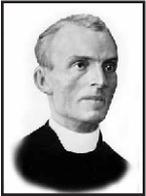
Perhaps the greatest contribution of Fr. Eymard to the Church of his times was his consistent and almost persistent emphasis on LOVE as the central reality of Christian living. To appreciate the tremendous value of this insight of his, we need simply recall the spiritual condition of Christians in the 18-19th centuries. In the aftermath of the French Revolution most people seemed 'to throw the baby out with the bathwater.' The masses had been taught that the 'divine right of kings' with its consequent oppression of the poor originated with God's own design as taught by the Church. This generated a violent reaction against God and all Catholic religious practices. In the wake of this revolution, therefore, two almost opposite trends emerged among Christian people.

Fr. Eymard, from a fairly early stage of his life, was able to eschew these aberrant spiritual trends and advocate the positive practice of love as the only thing that mattered. Realizing the tremendous odds he would have to fight against, he sought out people who would be ready first to be disciples, schooled in the Gospel approach of love. It is these disciples whom he hoped would then go out and be apostles of love, spreading the fire of God's love to all.

Fr. Eymard's insight into the centrality of love was something special and distinctive that he had to offer to the world, even if it was not something altogether new. He based himself on Sacred Scripture, notably the writings of St. John and St. Paul. How wonderful it would be if today we SSS religious likewise have something special and distinctive to offer to the 21st century world of highly advanced technology and rapidly spreading globalization! Do we possess any special insight into God's inner nature that is the most appropriate answer to the maladies of our times?

The first was to steer clear of everything religious and take charge of the world with the new-found human resources, several aspects of which were linked with the Industrial Revolution. Perhaps the biggest victim of this general upheaval was France, once known as the “eldest daughter of the Church!” Large sections of the French population just gave up everything associated with God and religion. The second trend developed as a reaction to this secularist attitude producing among the few loyal Christians the opposite movement of 'reparation' for all the sins of the world! This latter trend of espousing great corporal austerity and penances was further influenced by the Jansenist heresy that swept throughout the Church. This heresy particularly advocated a very strict penitential life with a heavy focus on physical penances

“The Eucharist is the reign of Jesus Christ in the world and especially in the hearts of his children: there you have the beautiful and attractive mission of every religious of the Most Blessed Sacrament; disciple and apostle of Eucharistic love: that is his true name, his grace and his life.” [Retreat on a Eucharistic vocation]



to the SSS, and yet how challenging! As our RoL no. 7 puts it: “...Our availability and our concern for sharing and fellowship manifest the

presence of the Risen Lord. We become witnesses of Christ by making ourselves servants of our brothers.”

To help establish the Eucharistic reign of Jesus in the hearts and lives of all people - this is our specialty that must stand out in the myriad forms of service we adopt towards our brethren. This is the 'golden thread' that runs through all truly SSS spirituality and apostolate. In the bi-centenary year of Fr. Eymard's birth, we work to make this challenge to offer all people a taste of God's unconditional love, a little more realistically visible and tangible!

Evidently, if this quality is going to stand out in the lives of SSS, we would need to practice assiduously the central feature of the Eucharist: the Paschal Mystery, or an effective dying to the Self or Ego in our lives. This was further the specialty of Fr. Eymard – the Gift of Self he made to Jesus even to the extent of taking a fourth vow, the Vow of Personality! He literally made himself 'like clay in the hands of a potter', totally at the disposal of his Master for whatever he might want of his disciple and apostle!

Unfortunately for very many Christians today, the Eucharist has become a mere ritual activity done with profound sentiments of piety and devotion, but with very little power to last beyond Church ceremonies. When we examine why Jesus gave us the Eucharist, we realize that he didn't intend to give us himself merely to comfort us in times of persecution. While this aspect of comfort cannot be overlooked, what was most central in his mind was that his abiding presence among us should be a constant inspiration for us to work to extend his self-giving and self-emptying influence to all of humanity. It is only this selfless way of living that would bring about a new world where all live with dignity and in peace! It is in this manner that he wished his reign of love to spread to all mankind.

Jesus came to interact with people, to seek out those who seemed lost and forlorn, to befriend the outcasts of society, the poor, the marginalized, to restore dignity to those regarded as the very dregs of society. He wanted to show every human being that s/he is made in the image and likeness of the Father who loves each one with a very special personalized love. SSS religious are to immortalize this mission of Jesus.

What a beautiful mission entrusted

“Find me from among your alumni a few men afire for this new Order” [To l'Abbe Bramere], November 1854]



Deeply aware of being specially chosen and entrusted with the task of spreading the experience of God's unconditional love in human form to all people, Fr. Eymard soon discovered that he faced an uphill task. As Jesus himself had said: 'The harvest indeed is great, but the labourers are few...' (Mt 9:37), so Fr. Eymard too asked his dear friends who he knew would understand his intentions and the urgency behind them, to send him energetic recruits; thus he hoped to form a nucleus of 'men on fire' with the ideal of being missionaries of love.

Unfortunately during his own lifetime, his experience in this matter was no different from that of Jesus himself, nor of our own today. In most cases, the ones chosen initially somehow did not rise to the expected level. For Fr. Eymard, the only worthy and effective ones would be persons who, like himself, would be so taken up with this mission that they would be ready to sacrifice everything, even their very lives, for it. This would mean, in practice, nothing short of living the 'vow of personality' which he himself took under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. However, he never enforced this vow on his followers, knowing full well that it is a special grace given by the Father to a select few.

It is worth noting however, that though his aspirations were perfectly legitimate and quite in harmony with the unfolding of his own love for Christ, yet not even God would expect that 'the whole world' would be on fire with a loving response to his generous offer of

love. The reason for this is obvious: Love cannot be forced and until a person realizes, perhaps through a very deep and personal 'aha' experience, the implications of the Father's unconditional love for him/herself, his/her attachment to Christ will remain necessarily somewhat superficial. Jesus himself had observed: 'No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father' (Jn 6:44/65); to be called to this mission of love then is also a great and special grace from the Father. Yet this would not exempt Fr. Eymard from making the necessary effort to reach out to all.

Nevertheless, no sooner a person realizes at some depth what such a gift implies: a marvelous quietening of all the restlessness that characterizes people of our times, the gradual yet definitive shedding of the infatuation with material wealth, power and worldly success, the abandoning of the ruthless domination over and exploitation of others – can one just sit back and enjoy this treasure only for oneself? Rather, one would naturally be restless, straining at the leash, devising ingenious ways and means to convey the real 'truth' to everyone around, especially to those one cares for. And in this enterprise no pain would be too great, no effort too demanding – all because of the love one bears for the Master.

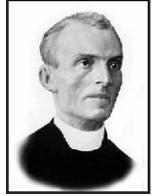
(Laudative Brief by Pius IX 1859)

“Now we are getting ready for the two big objectives of the Society, the contemplative life... and the active life of Eucharistic zeal... in a single word, to spread Eucharistic fire into every heart.” [To Mgr de la Bouillierie, June 1856]

In John's Gospel, Jesus says, “Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these” (Jn 5:19-20). Jesus himself would have noticed this double movement in his own life, viz. he first sees, observes, relishes what the Father does, and then during his earthly mission he works out the same. The Father is always the source and origin of all that we are and do.

And so it is not surprising that the SSS religious too notices these two dimensions in his religious life: the contemplative in which, through a 'glance of love' he drinks in all that the Father himself does, and then the active dimension in which he reproduces the very same pattern of the Father's work. This approach invites us to examine the quality of our prayer, especially the time we spend before the Blessed Sacrament. This prayer, unlike all the other forms of prayer available to the Christian, is something special. While it could include praise, worship, repentance, adoration, petition and the like, it is at its best when, like Mary, we just sit at the

Lord's feet listening to all he has to say to us. The great mystics sum it up in one phrase: 'a glance of love!'



In such prayer there is a higher proportion of listening to speaking. This is the stance of the true disciple who sits at the Master's feet, learning from him. For us SSS, our Prayer before the Sacrament is the atmosphere in which we learn 'the secrets of the kingdom of God' (Mk 4:10-11) revealed only to those who form the inner circle of Jesus' close friends. And today, unless we have something 'special' to share with others, gleaned from our own personal closeness to the Lord, we will be simply repeating the hackneyed phrases that others say and teach, like a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal! And there won't be much power in what we share! The one 'grain' of truth that we obtain personally and straight from the Master's heart, as it were, is worth a thousand others glibly borrowed from various authors, no matter how clever they be, and that is the one we will share effectively with others.

Having ourselves reflected on these deep personal insights, we then pass them on to others. Even though expressed in simple terms, such truths contain an inner, almost divine, power to attract people – not to ourselves, but to the author of these truths, Jesus himself. Fr. Eymard spoke always in very simple language, the language of the heart rather than in erudite phrases and idioms that so often only tickle the ears but barely touch the heart! One can and does experience this power only when there is a genuine dying to the Ego within us.

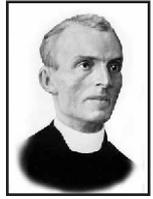
(First solemn exposition in Paris 1857)
“If the fire is not fed, the flame will die.” [Monthly Retreat, November 1860]

This statement of Fr. Eymard is nothing more than sound common sense – yet how deeply have we realized its meaning in our own personal prayer life? It is commonplace to remark that the enthusiasm that we had during the novitiate and early priesthood days, was far more intense than what is evidenced in later years. While that fire of love should have been growing with advancing age, Life shows us that it invariably diminishes instead – in inverse proportion to the number of years we've covered!

The reasons for this could be numerous. For one thing, the Self in us is so subtle and crafty that unless we are very careful and persistent in rooting it out, it will increase rather than diminish. Unknown to us the Self will have substituted its own goals and objectives into our plans and schedules, so that we end up working to extend our own 'kingdom' rather than the kingdom of love to which we had originally committed ourselves. The Self remains concealed within us causing the fire to be gradually and imperceptibly extinguished.

Another reason could be that as time rolls on, we find ourselves involved in excessive external activity – and because this is usually geared to success, acclaim, publicity and the like, we soon get addicted to it and find it very difficult to release our tight grip on things. Even when the Lord almost forces us to let-go through sickness, failure or whatever, we generally ensure that we get 'back to

normal' as soon as possible. We recall how this happened repeatedly in the life of Fr. Eymard too. He worked with a lot of good will and spiritually



motivated intentions, yet during the Great Retreat of Rome, he found himself in practice very much 'a persecutor' of Christ ('Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? – Acts 9:4). It was his solitude and utter sincerity during the retreat, and also the loss of his 'great project' of obtaining the Cenacle, that perhaps aroused in him the desire to 'be for Jesus what Jesus was to the Father!'

Unfortunately, he had barely three short years in which to show us how he fed the fire of love within himself. During these years, every minute was precious. One striking example of this awareness in him is the fact that on the night he broke journey at Grenoble before proceeding to La Mure for the last time, we are told that he wrote seventeen letters of spiritual direction to various people. Knowing perhaps that these would be his last communication with these chosen few, he would have kept them short, undoubtedly, yet we cannot afford to forget that he was a pretty sick man at that stage!

How do we consciously stoke up the fire of love within us: at times of prayer, work, interaction with others? Does rejection, failure, humiliation and the like bring us any closer to God; do these serve as a 'wake-up call'? Do we feel its burning heat ourselves before others also benefit from the warmth of love?

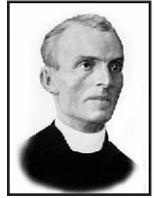
“You always have new graces... you must not get stuck in the past, you must not live on the old stuff like certain people, because we have nourishment that is always new. Be grateful for the graces of the past, but you have new ones... live in the present [...] because we have not fed the fire with anything new, that's the reason we do not accomplish much of anything...”
 [Preparation before Adoration, August 1860]

Fr. Eymard is often compared to Jacob, always on the move. Now this was not just a physical trait of his, but it also describes his spiritual journey, especially the inner growth of his prayer life. It also suggests that he was fully aware that he had been entrusted with something that was not only necessary for the people of his time, but also new and refreshing. Like Jesus, therefore, Fr. Eymard too advised that 'new wine must be put in new wine-skins!'

In practice, not many persons dare to be new and different in their approach to life. Most choose to follow the beaten track – some, out of fear lest they fall foul of ecclesiastical authorities, others because the 'new' is not always readily acceptable to those accustomed to the old (see Lk. 5:39). Still others, of course, avoid new avenues and approaches because of the effort it involves – to think these insights through to the end, to link them meaningfully to the old, to find comparisons and similes which will explain it more clearly to others – they would rather use the old and get on with it

rather than expend so much energy on being new.

Further, for Fr. Eymard, it was not 'novelty for novelty's sake' that inspired him but rather the

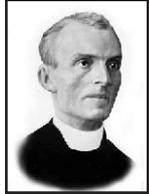


realization that those entrusted with 'the secrets of the kingdom' cannot deprive others of these, but must share them liberally. No area in the Father's house is 'out of bounds' to his beloved children. In fact, the Father delights in surprising his faithful children by providing them from time to time with deep insights into his marvelous love. Our favourite task should be discovering these and sharing them with others – how much enriched would the world not be then!?!'

Fr. Eymard further assures us that when we present our people with something new we will achieve great things. Most people in our times are satisfied with reciting prayers composed by someone else; they rarely pray from the depths of their own heart, except when in deep trouble. Realizing their inability to pray personally, we who are disciples and apostles of the Eucharist should perhaps be better motivated to feed them with nourishment that is always new! Like the 'good scribe' spoken of by St. Matthew, we need to 'bring out of our treasure what is new and what is old' (Mt 13:52). And then our greatest achievement will be that we will have brought people into the inner circle of God's love. (Jn 4:23-25). In this matter, as in most others, it is always helpful to lead from the front, through our own personal example. Unless we ourselves make the needed effort, we cannot expect others to do it – for one thing, they might not know how, or may not see its beneficial results!

“What is the Eucharist? “It is fire; does fire sleep? It is always active. When fire is extinguished, there is no more life. Place the small fire which is in you with this grand fire which is the Eucharist.” [Adoration, June, 1861]

with Christ's own fire of love – then we have people like a Fr. Maximillian Kolbe who



literally offered his life for another, or a Mother Teresa of Calcutta who brought solace and inspiration to thousands through her own self-giving. For her, the Eucharist was central for she believed she would never be able to engage in such a mission without sharing in the fire of God's own love for his suffering children.

It is interesting to see Fr. Eymard compare the Eucharist to fire that is always active – as long as it has sufficient fuel to keep it going. The Eucharist will always be productive in our lives as long as we bring ourselves to the celebration as bread that is to be broken for others, for the life of the world. Unfortunately, for the vast majority of Christians it has become mere nourishment for oneself – and that too in an almost automatic, magical manner! Most people believe that their main work as Christians is an assiduous maintenance of their spiritual lives and not mission to others!

We can lead others to place their little fires into the great Eucharistic fire by exhortation – but this will produce only limited results. When our exhortation is linked with personal example, with the witness of our lives, then great will be the conflagration. RoL21 says:

“Called to live as a eucharistic community,
we seek, by our vocation and way of life,
to give a more explicit witness to the life of Christ
which springs from this sacrament.”

And Rol 37 adds:

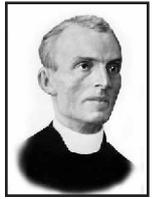
“The most telling message of our communities
is the witness of their lives.”

Rarely would Christians come to the Eucharist bubbling with the attitude of total surrender to God's will for them as Jesus himself did. When we bring a self-centred attitude to our celebration, there isn't sufficient 'fuel' for the Eucharistic fire to do its work of transforming the person; large pockets of our lives remain firmly entrenched in the grip of Evil and the Self, even when ostensibly the evil is not tremendously harmful to others. It will not take long for such persons to relapse into total self-absorption or apathy with regard to the kingdom of Eucharistic love. The fire in their lives will have been extinguished totally!

But when the little, yet wholehearted fire within us is surrendered and united

“Each religious will thus make the love of Jesus Christ in the divine Eucharist, the centre piece of his virtues, if he wishes to become a true disciple and a worthy apostle of the love of Jesus Christ.” [Project of the Constitutions 1856]

stresses that 'each religious shall *make* this the centre...'



He used to stress that during the formation of his religious they should be

taught how to make Eucharistic love the true centre of their lives. Having learnt it at this early stage of their religious journey, he hoped that they would continue to deepen and extend it more personally as they went along. However, in actual practice, this does not happen as often as one would want to see it happen. The results nevertheless, are plain for all to see – we fall short of our ideal of becoming true disciples and worthy apostles of the love of Jesus Christ.

Fr. Eymard wrote several drafts of the Constitution he desired for his religious. Each time he worked at it, he sought to provide a better and fuller expression of the ideal he had so clearly grasped. And in each draft of the Rule or even in every other writing of his, he never failed to place the love of Jesus in the Eucharist at the centre. It is from this central reality that all else flowed, as far as he was concerned. 'Love is the answer to all the problems of the world,' he would often remind his religious and he demonstrated this in his own life, especially after the Great Retreat of Rome.

There is no gainsaying the fact that even in our own day, the love of Jesus is still the one thing that is necessary (Lk 10:42) and which every single human person longs for; besides it is the only atmosphere in which we will ever be able to live as true children of our Father. The new heavens and the new earth which the Risen Lord offers us demands that at least we SSS, as God's chosen instruments, make the effort to base our lives on his love as the centre. Yet the forces of evil around us like consumerism, globalization and the rest keep drawing people in the opposite direction - of Self as the centre! The bi-centenary year of Fr. Eymard's birth would be a good and favourable occasion for this kind of effort by every person wishing to be a disciple and apostle of God's love in the world of day.

To have the love of Jesus in the Eucharist as centre means in practice that every thought, word, decision and action of ours is viewed through the lens of this love – does it reveal this love more clearly, foster it more forcefully, enable others to re-discover it for themselves easily and then live it more enthusiastically; does it effectively eliminate its opposite force which is 'self-centredness' or not? Now this kind of 'centering' does not happen automatically; it comes as the result of persistent and painstaking effort to make it the foundation of our very lives. Left to ourselves, we would inevitably go the way of all mankind, which is the direction of self-interest. No wonder Fr. Eymard

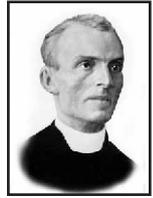
In the Directory for lay members of the Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament Fr. Eymard says: “Become the disciples and apostles of the God of the Eucharist.” [To Marie de Féégely de Vivy, July 1863]

“...out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Mt 12:34). Jesus, of course, would have said these words in a different context, yet we could say that since his heart was full of the centrality of God's love, Fr. Eymard could not but speak of it 'in season and out of season.' He recommended this earnestly not only to his religious but also to the lay members who shared his ideal. Fr. Eymard's desire evidently was that there be as many enthusiastic instruments as possible engaged in this work. Besides lay people can reach out to many more persons than priests and religious can; they rub shoulders with them in the home, in the neighbourhood, marketplace, workplace, when traveling and even when on holidays.

The important point, however, is that we be convinced that this is the one and only remedy that all are in need of today. This conviction can come only from one's personal experience. Having seen how we ourselves have benefitted from this love in our daily lives, we then share our personal experience with others, as they too struggle to experience true peace, fellowship and harmony in the family, workplace and elsewhere. Discipleship always comes before apostleship.

We recall also that an apostle is one who is sent. Now Jesus would not send

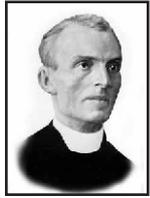
his chosen ones out as apostles unless they themselves had tasted the effectiveness of this love. In the Gospels we note that after enquiring what his



own apostles felt about who he was, to which Peter responded 'You are the Christ (of God)' Jesus strictly warned them not to tell anyone about it. This response of Jesus shows that there was still a very important dimension they needed to appropriate before they could safely go forth; and for that the Cross and Calvary were absolutely essential. Once the apostles went through this aspect of their training, they would be ready and so, it is only just before his final departure that Jesus commanded them: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:18-20).

In our case too, Fr. Eymard would not have us go out as apostles of God's love when all we have experienced is conditional love, the kind that humans are capable of offering us. Even when someone does say to us: “I love and accept you, no matter what!” deep down we are aware that we could be disappointed some day, simply because s/he is incapable of rising to that level. So, we need a thorough schooling in God's love first before we venture to share it with others. But once we have graduated in this school of love, our witnessing cannot but be powerful and effective.

“Before being an apostle, we need to know how to be a good disciple. To sanctify others, we need to sanctify ourselves. That is what Jesus Christ did for his apostles; he started by making them holy.” [Conference on 'The sanctification of one's actions']



change if one wanted to experience God's forgiveness. John the Baptist preached: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits

worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree, therefore, that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Lk 3:7-10). Here we see how effective change is demanded as the pre-condition for experiencing God's mercy.

We have seen earlier that before sending out his disciples, Jesus personally trained them to appreciate God's unconditional love. Yet, towards the end of the Gospels we notice that very few of them had learnt this all-important lesson. While both Peter and Judas failed the Lord in serious ways, Peter was able to return to God's forgiving love while Judas could not - perhaps because he felt that his fault (which stemmed from extreme self-centredness and stubbornness) was beyond the power of God's redeeming love.

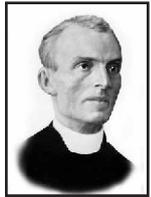
A genuine disciple must be personally convinced that no matter how far he strays, the Good Shepherd will always be near; he will not rest until the straying one is safe again in the sheepfold. It is this conviction that the disciple must share with others when he steps out as an apostle. Jesus offered his disciples several examples of divine forgiveness during their training period, the most outstanding one being the acceptance of the woman taken in adultery. Yet, often it is not the example of others that convinces people as our own personal experience shared humbly with them. What experience of God's mercy do we have to draw on when talking to others about it? Can we like St. Augustine make our 'Confessions' to bring glory to God for his generous forgiveness?

The reason behind these two different approaches is worth looking at. Peter was open enough to believe that the Father's love was totally different from all other forms of love he had experienced so far. He did not need to see this proved for him... perhaps the very look of Jesus as their eyes met during the Passion was enough to convince him of God's unbounded mercy: he went out and wept. Peter returned because he kept his gaze on Jesus and never allowed himself to forget all that Jesus had told them about the Father's love.

Judas, unfortunately, seemed to have his gaze riveted on himself, on the enormity of his failing which he felt was beyond the range even of the Father's forgiveness. Probably all he remembered was the warnings of the prophets who preceded Jesus, demanding an effective

“With the disciples of Emmaus, Our Lord told them that he had died, that he had suffered. These good souls understood nothing. But when they had shared the bread they exclaimed: It is all true - we experienced it like a fire in us.” [Conference, August 1859]

not so much on what we do as on what he does for us.



We also remind ourselves that for some persons believing, like loving another, is largely a

question of seeing, while for others it is hearing that does the trick. Still others rely on the sense of touch or feeling – but whatever be our preference there is nothing that can prevent the Lord from reaching us. Besides, he knows which approach is our preference in the matter of believing or even of loving, even before we tell him! However, when we act as channels for others, awareness of these different approaches can be crucial for success. Hence we would need to know our audience well before attempting to share with them the riches of God's love in the Eucharist. Appealing to them in the wrong way could not only render our efforts ineffective, but also possibly turn them away from the one and only remedy they have for all their ills.

The reality of God's love for us is so far beyond our understanding that the only way he can convey it to us effectively is through symbols (shepherd, hen with her chicks, mother eagle...) – the key moment in this exchange is the 'opening of our eyes' to see reality as it is. For God's love, like all his other qualities, is unbelievable especially to those who have experienced only conditional love from others. Besides, our natural sense of justice tells us that a sinner needs to be punished for his sin in some form or other. Thus, even when God draws us close to himself, we somehow interiorly feel distant, unworthy; we imagine we are cheating God, as if he does not know the enormity of our sinfulness!

Besides, we need to realize that not all people will respond to our particular way of experiencing God and so we need to be open to trying out different approaches, relying always on God's strength and guidance. Also, we do not feel jealous that someone else is more successful than ourselves with the persons we had approached. The key point is that the fire of love must burn fiercely and permanently within us, making us want to share God's goodness with everyone we meet, no matter how difficult or costly the venture be!

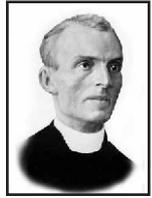
When we look into our lives we discover a certain 'threshold' that needs to be crossed before we can believe with full abandon. Till that threshold is reached, we will constantly be demanding signs and proofs! Yet, in his goodness the Lord offers us sign after marvelous sign working towards the crossing of that threshold. However, while the Lord does his part, there is also something we should also do to come closer to that crucial border! Reading the Scriptures and reflecting on the experience of others helps us understand and accept that with God there are no limits to his love and understanding. His love for us is not based on who we are, but on who he is,

“I had heard him preach a triduum in our chapel of Notre Dame de Grace...[...] He had a look of fire, [...] I heard some important people talk on the Eucharist, like the Bishop of Segur, one of the apostles of the Eucharist; but Father Eymard’s style and power were totally different. He spoke simply, without any affectation; he adapted himself to his listeners. His words flowed like streams of light and fire.” [A. Guitton, *Peter-Julian Eymard Apostle of the Eucharist*, p. 329-330]

Experience shows that convincing another person depends not so much on volume or length of argument as on the depth of the conviction with which one speaks. In fact, it is said that human communication is in some way like trees – the greater the wealth of foliage the tree has, the less fruit one is likely to find on it! Often silence speaks loudest! After his Rome retreat Fr. Eymard was a changed person and from then on, all he needed to do 'to produce fruit' was just to 'be' himself. Having given himself over totally to the Lord, he constantly responded in answer to his basic question: 'What would you have me do, Lord?'

Writing to the Corinthians Paul says: “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31-32). The ideal, of course, is to be able to do this consciously yet without affectation or drawing attention to oneself in any way. Our communion with God needs to become almost second nature, a

veritable 'being born again' so that we speak of him and work for him as if engaged in any other ordinary human function. That can happen only when we are fully steeped in his love and work with single-minded devotion.

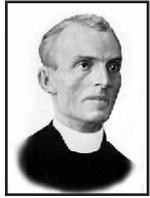


It is amazing how easily even simple people can tell when another person speaks from the heart and not from the head alone. Often we feel that our speeches and homilies must be buttressed with a string of quotations from famous orators or writers. Yet, the most effective part of our communication is always an honest self-revelation. Unfortunately, more often than not, even our liturgical communications have become studied and erudite presentations of doctrine. If instead we could only speak from the heart and share our own faltering faith journey, that would perhaps touch people more effectively and put them in contact with Christ. Fr. Eymard, we are told, spoke without any affectation!

That is not to say that there will not be people (perhaps even several) who look for only the flowery and ornamental in our communications. But if one genuinely seeks the Lord, even the faltering speech of a simple person could be rich in meaning and bring about a genuine encounter with Jesus. Another characteristic of a true apostle is that he adapts to the needs of his listeners; he speaks so that they may understand, and not to show off his own learning. On what do we rely when sharing our faith: on eloquence, oratory or, on our personal faith experience of Jesus?

“You are called to set fire to the four corners of the globe.”

[Retreat given in Paris to the SSS family, August 1867]



When someone discovers a much-needed cure to a dreaded disease like cancer it is not surprising that he becomes passionate about sharing his discovery with all and sundry. And in his sharing, he does not have to aim at ensnaring people as is sometimes done in a highly technical advertisement, based on the most recent psychological research. What he needs is simply a deep personal conviction of the truth he has come to experience in his own life. Especially when he sees people suffering from scarcity of an effective remedy, he will be all the more zealous to share his discoveries, even if the initial reaction of people is somewhat unfavourable.

When Christopher Columbus, through his painstaking toil and labour, devised a shorter route to go from Europe to India, he could not rest peacefully until he had offered this to the whole world. And so, even at great risk to himself and his crew, he set out and kept at his project even against heavy odds, until he was able to vindicate his belief. His success was inspiration enough for others to venture along the new route. However, when dealing with the interior life involving faith experiences, the effort to attain the goal can be a lot more difficult. Yet, if we keep in mind that we work not for our own selves, but rather as instruments in the hands of the Lord God, it becomes easier to face all opposition.

Nevertheless, the key element is the deep realization that we have been entrusted with these Eucharistic treasures

not just for our personal enjoyment, but as 'apostles' bearing the responsibility to pass them on. Perhaps this is where most Christians fall short; they seem to feel

that being a Christian is a personal blessing the Lord grants them. All their efforts after Baptism are directed towards enhancing this gift, of enjoying its benefits for oneself alone. That is perhaps the greatest reason why most Christians are so lackadaisical in sharing their faith experiences with others. Once we accept that the primary reason for being Christians is that we might go out and share the Good News, then the fire, the passion for making Jesus known and loved would be a raging flame.

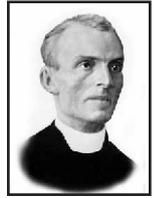
We need to work to spread God's love primarily in the place where we are. If the Lord needs our services elsewhere, he will ensure that somehow we reach the place and the people he has chosen for us. So, we need not worry about whom we shall evangelize. All we need do is begin with those around us, those who form part of the warp and woof of our lives. We need to be careful not to take anyone for granted because it is not we who choose the Lord, but rather he who chooses us. We need to be attuned to the fire of his love within us. Our prayer could be: 'Lord show me the ones whom you wish me to evangelize today! Make me an instrument of your love to all whom you send me today!'

“A priest who lets a day pass without reading the Scripture has lost his day.” [Retreat given at Notre-Dame du Laus, June 1837]

Fr. Eymard reverts to this theme again and again in different ways. We have reflected on how he insisted that fire needs to be fueled and fanned into flame else it soon dies out. Here he emphasizes that the effective disciple needs to be constantly replenished at the source and origin – God's own Word in the Scriptures. In our day we have no excuse for not heeding this suggestion; we have so many editions and versions of the Bible available in almost every possible language. Besides, modern up-to-date commentaries are also freely at our disposal. All we need really is a conviction that just as our bodies would grow weak when not nourished adequately, so also our spirits grow lifeless when deprived of the nourishment of God's Word in the Scriptures.

But, it is not just a matter of reading the text faithfully yet mechanically each day. The word we read needs to be 'broken', relished and assimilated; it needs to become part and parcel of our lives. We need to see it in relation to several other passages in the entire Bible – these references will further explain the text or add nuances which are very important for a fuller and richer understanding. It is said that the Scriptures themselves are the best commentary on any given passage in the Bible! Hence, our reading needs to be a leisurely and prayerful one in which we allow time and inner freedom for words,

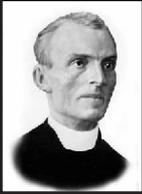
images and texts to link up and enrich the basic text. It is the Spirit who will lead us in this enriched reading of Sacred Scripture.



If we recall the experience of the two disciples journeying towards Emmaus, we notice that it is the Risen Lord himself who explains the Scriptures to them in depth; he combs through the Scriptures linking several texts with one another till they are on fire with its urgency and power. Having grasped the truth that it was necessary for the Christ to have suffered and thus enter into his glory, they would never again forget its meaning and application in their lives. It is only this kind of in-depth reading that will enkindle in us the fire of divine love and make us active apostles working energetically to spread God's kingdom of love.

Another point worth keeping in mind is that the more we act on the word after receiving it, the more effective will it be in our lives (James 1:22-27). We have Jesus' own response to the woman who blessed his mother, 'Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!' (Lk 11:28). Often our unwillingness to *do* what the word demands of us is what subconsciously blocks even our understanding of it. Hence, a heartfelt prayer to the Holy Spirit before we begin invariably helps towards a more fruitful understanding and energetic implementing of God's life-giving message to us.

“Now this is what I must be for my brethren and for my neighbours, the word of Christ” (cf. Col 3:16)” [Personal Notes, May 1845]



For one thing, in Fr. Eymard's day the Scriptures were certainly not as easily accessible to people as they are today, nor were the numerous commentaries

God's Word unfolds the message of eternal life (Jn 6:68): it enlightens us about the purpose of our lives, reminds us of our origins and assures us of our final destiny in God's kingdom of love. Further, we can never afford to forget that God's Word was made flesh in Jesus who dwells among us (Jn 1:1-14). Those who accept him become true children of God! Further, the Word of God not only nourishes us, it also comforts the afflicted in their sorrows and guides them in their confusion. And when these same people become complacent and over-confident, the Word discomferts and unsettles them sufficiently to bring them back to himself. The Word further inspires and urges people to give of their best even in difficult circumstances (Your word is a lamp for my steps... Ps 119:105).

and helps that we have at our disposal today. And so, a human messenger would have been all the more helpful and necessary in his age. Not only would he want to be that for his people, but he wished that every one of his religious would do the same. In short, he would have them each be a 'living Bible' for all people to read – a high ideal, undoubtedly and a great challenge too!

Fr. Eymard's insight seems to be that just as the word became flesh and in human form continued to do all that the Scriptural word was meant to do for God's people, so he (Eymard) should become the word enfleshed for the people of his times. He sees himself as called to 'incarnate' the love, compassion, concern and forgiveness of God for his people, to translate these virtues into living actions. This understanding of his was fundamental, since people are moved to action more by inspiring examples than by the cold letter of a book! For, when a person acquires a new understanding of reality through his own struggles and efforts and shares it with others, his witness becomes all the more powerful. Fr. Eymard wished to offer this kind of a help to his contemporaries.

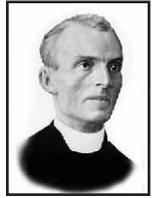
What is most effective with people is that the apostle himself practices what he preaches to others. His is not just an impersonal message of hope and comfort, but a life-giving word. God's message is a matter of life and death. This is what makes the difference between a Good Shepherd and a hireling, an enthusiastic instrument and one who works only out of self-interest. Often one is ready to become the Word for others as long as they are receptive and grateful. But what if the recipients aren't all that appreciative? Should such an experience dampen the enthusiasm of the apostle or rather make him even more determined to find better means of approaching them with the message of life? A true disciple and adorer would work to spread God's message for the sheer joy of being able to contribute his mite to the coming of God's kingdom and for nothing else!

“Jesus Christ is light, the sun of truth, and he is a divine fire. He is the fire of charity that enlivens us, and enlivening us he inspires us. what are his attitudes? Open the Gospel, may Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament inspire you about everything; there one places oneself at his feet and one has a response of truth; consult God. This is why every soul wishing to live by Jesus Christ is necessarily meditative, contemplative, an adorer.”
 [Monthly Retreat, December 1860]

We often see in life that an apostle can be enthusiastic and energetic as long as his/her efforts meet with success. But when rejection, ridicule, failure and persecution constantly dog his/her steps, s/he may be tempted to give up. Jesus in fact, did not promise his followers that they would be successful always – rather he forewarned them to take up their cross each day and follow after him. “If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you also...” (Mt 10:23-24) All that the genuine apostle needs in times of rejection and persecution is to return to his Master and unite his sufferings with that of Jesus. He should place the small fire of his love alongside the great fire of Christ's love in the Eucharist. It won't be long before he finds himself re-energized. This is the only source where he will find himself repeatedly renewed and sent on mission again.

In the presence of his Lord and Master, especially before the living sign of his own self-giving, the apostle finds new strength and purpose. And again, it

is not by engaging in great argumentation, but in silent loving contemplation that he will be renewed. God's work is always done in silence and stillness. The instrument will need to learn how to offer to the Lord his own brokenness and limitations and allow the Lord and Master to replenish his depleting resources.



It is helpful to recall that the project we have undertaken is no human project, but God's own mighty plan for his people, and God's ways are not our ways: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Is 55:8-10). **We can understand something of God's ways only when we sit in total silence** in his presence and assimilate his plans and purposes. Fr. Eymard passed on to his followers what he learnt from his own personal experience. Unless we return constantly to the stream of living waters, Jesus himself present for us in the Sacrament of his love, we will inevitably find ourselves lost and withering away. The consoling fact, of course, is that he, the Lord and Master, waits for us with infinite patience and love in this great Sacrament.

So, it is here that we will find ourselves replenished and reinvigorated as often as we need to. There is no limit to the visits we make to him, the divine physician, as long as we come to him in love and faithfully take his love back to his beloved people.

“Loss of faith comes above all from a loss of love; darkness from a loss of the light; glacial coldness of death from an absence of the fire.” [To Mme Tholin-Bost, October 1851]

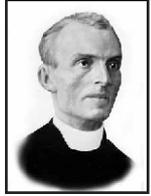
One of the most important elements in the forming of a love relationship is the trust that gradually builds up between the two partners. This trust grows to the extent that each one literally vividly 'sees' or experiences the goodness of the others. As the other begins to appear more and more trustworthy, the bond of love grows ever stronger. It is thus we could say that faith (trust) and love are inter-dependent. Once the trust between friends begins to corrode, the inevitable result is that love too becomes dimmer and might even finally be altogether extinguished.

Psychologists remind us that unless there are constant 'deposits' consciously made into the emotional bank account of the other, this trust is likely to diminish and disappear. Deposits are made by simple actions like faithfulness to a promise made, little deeds of kindness, sincere expressions of appreciation and gratitude. This is something so obvious that we often take it for granted. A relationship between two persons is a living reality, and as such it needs to keep growing constantly. In such bonds, the relationship either keeps moving forward or else it moves backward. It cannot remain stationary. So, unless one constantly seeks to push it forward, one consents to allow it to slip backward.

On his part, God is constantly at work seeking to deepen the bonds of love and trust between himself and his beloved children. So the problem is never on his side. It is always on our side, as when we

take him and his love for granted, or we allow other creatures to come in between, or when we give them more importance than is their due. But perhaps the biggest and most dangerous obstacle to trust is the dominance of the Self. Should there be any conscious and deliberate concessions made to the Self especially in the opposite direction of love – we can be sure that the fire will die down in our lives of commitment, definitely even if only gradually. Our daily failures of weakness and natural frailty do not generally come in the way, especially if the level of trust is fairly high already and efforts are regularly made to keep this level of trust growing.

Thus, our concern should be never to consciously allow any obstacle to come in between Jesus and ourselves. Or, to die to Self as much as we possibly can, so that 'it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me (Gal 2:20). The more we are emptied of the Self, the more will we be filled with God and experience his strength shining through our weakness, his wisdom through our stupidity, and his generosity through our niggardliness in self-giving! What is more, the Lord eagerly desires to work through us and that is why he has chosen us – all he asks is that he be allowed a free hand in our lives! 'Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne' (Rev. 3:20-21).



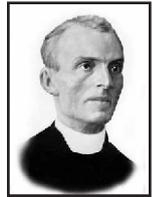
“We want to set fire to the four corners of France, beginning with the four corners of Paris that needs it so much.”

[G.Troussier, *Blessed Peter-Julian Eymard* vol.1, pp. 552-553]

All through his priestly life, Fr. Eymard had the good fortune of being close to the struggles of the common people. Truly could he have said of them as Jesus did when he saw the crowds coming towards him: 'I have compassion on these people because they are like sheep without a shepherd' (Mk 6:34). On that occasion, Jesus set himself to teach them many things – his teaching lasted the whole of that day, so much so that the apostles seemed totally frustrated that the main reason for their coming to that desert place had been forgotten altogether. Further, not satisfied with teaching them, Jesus went on to give them a tangible sign of God's love and concern by feeding them with bread and fish. Later developments show that on that occasion Jesus had succeeded in setting ablaze a veritable fire within the hearts of those people. They sought him out, even if for the wrong reasons; they had at least tasted something of the goodness of God.

Having experienced the love of God in the Eucharist Fr. Eymard too was consumed with a similar fire to go out and share with everyone the riches of God's love. However, rather than wait for people to come to him, he wished to go out to them, to go to the very ends of the earth as the Twelve apostles had been commissioned. Yet, it would be most practical to begin with Paris and ensure that it be not just the centre of France, the hub from which all change and revolution spread with centrifugal force, but also the

eye of the spiritual revolution that he wished to bring about through love.



During his own lifetime, he left no stone

unturned to bring the love of Jesus Eucharistic to his fellow Frenchmen. Against the background of the political and spiritual turmoil in which the country was immersed during that period, this turned out to be a very challenging task. As we look back from the perspective that we have today, we can say that Fr. Eymard did not quite succeed in spreading Eucharistic fire over the four corners of Paris, much less over the whole of France! As a matter of fact, one could ask how many of his religious even within the Congregation he started, truly focused on God's love as the centre of the Christian reality! But that is really beside the point: his ardent love for the Lord and his wholehearted desire to give of his utmost led him to do his best. The rest would have to be left in the hands of the Lord of the harvest!

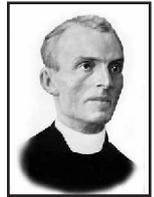
Can we too today work with the same conviction that all we are asked to do is our little bit and then we pass the baton on to the next generation who in their turn and in their own way will continue the work of Fr. Eymard and carry it forward according to the Lord's plan? We may not see the results of our labours, yet faith tells us that the Lord's project will definitely succeed – in its own time and in its own way! Ours is to proceed in faith and love.

“A purely contemplative life cannot be fully Eucharistic: the hearth has a flame.” [To Fr. de Cuers, May 1861]

One of the most common mistakes made when dealing with the spiritual life is to hold its two main aspects as opposites: the contemplative and the active life. We often speak of these two as if they were two altogether independent aspects, each able to exist without reference to the other. Perhaps the more appropriate way to conceive all this is to see Christian life as synonymous with Eucharistic life which embraces both the contemplative and active dimensions. After all, Eucharist is the source and centre of Christian living. Following Jesus as his followers (Christians) does mean making his Eucharistic sentiments our very own.

Now, the two arms of Eucharistic living are: the contemplative in which we remain still and silent before God as he reveals himself to us. This happens primarily during the Liturgy of the Word. Especially when we listen 'with the heart' more than with the head, we begin to catch insights into who God really is, how he loves us his beloved children and how much he is prepared to do for us! However, this contemplative dimension is never an end in itself. At no point can a Christian say like Peter: “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” (Mt 17:4). One cannot afford to remain on the mountain-top always; one needs to come down and share the experience with others because what is revealed to someone is never for oneself alone. And this forms the active dimension of Eucharistic living!

So, as it draws to a close the Eucharist itself sends Christians out on a mission: 'Go, the Mass is ended!' Basically what we are told is: 'Go and share



with others what the Lord in his goodness has revealed to you.' And it is in the very sharing with others that we encounter the Risen Lord again and even more powerfully. Recall the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: having discovered the risen Lord in the breaking of the Bread, they ran all the way back to Jerusalem to share their good news with the rest of the community. And it is 'while they were saying this that the Risen Lord stood once again in their midst and greeted them, 'Peace be with you!' (Lk 24:26-39).

Unfortunately most Christians seem to see their following of Jesus as something purely personal and directed towards their own benefit alone! The apostolic dimension is almost totally lost in their day-to-day living. This imbalance needs to be corrected even in our own day, as it was necessary in the time of Fr. Eymard too. Our activity is the flame that keeps the Eucharistic fire alive throughout the day! But the flame cannot continue to burn for long if it is not nourished by the fuel of contemplative prayer and silence in God's healing presence!

(Fourviere experience - Grace of Vocation 1851)

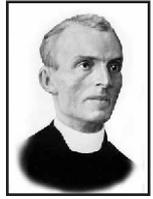
“An adorer apostle must always adore and preach Jesus Hostia.”
[The Great Retreat at Rome, 1865].

In Fr. Eymard's mind, the life of an adorer or Blessed Sacrament religious was never meant to be an escape from the world, a kind of haven where s/he could rest content in the love of Christ (Abide in my love!). Rather he seemed to have envisaged it as a call to be a channel – passing on to others what one received in prayer and adoration. The more blessings one received from the Lord, the more one was expected to give to others, especially to those hungering for a sense of worth and for meaning in life: the poor, the unwanted like the rag-pickers Fr. Eymard served – in fact all those on the fringes of society.

Jesus came that we may have life abundantly, that each person may realize the dignity that is his as a child of God and live accordingly. All the time an adorer spends in prayer and contemplation, he ought to drink in the magnificent vision of the Father for his world in which his beloved children presently continue to struggle. That vision is far from being realized much less fulfilled among us, and so the adorer finds himself caught up with an urgency to bridge the gap between what is and what should be.

He feels this urgency precisely because of the closeness to the Father that he experiences while in prayer. He resonates with the longing in the heart of Christ who said: “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So, there will be one flock, one shepherd” (Jn 10:16-18). As a further consequence of his prayer he realizes deeply how much the Lord depends on

his total cooperation to fulfill the task of gathering the lost sheep scattered all over the world. That yearning of the heart of Christ consumes the adorer like a fire and sends him



forth with an urgent message: “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Mt 11:28-30).

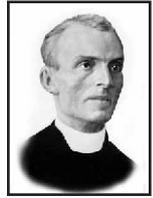
The genuine adorer understands well that Jesus remains hidden yet personally present in the Eucharist not primarily to receive our adoration and thanksgiving, but rather to draw all people to the Father: “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed!” (Lk 12:49-51). This was his message both in word and in action, all through his life! He cannot rest until every single human being has heard this invigorating message and is inspired to respond positively. How much then must he not desire that we reach out to every person that crosses the path of our lives. In fact, it is the Lord himself who brings these people to us and his plea is that we share with them his redeeming love for them. They need to experience that love enfleshed and in human terms before they can surrender themselves totally into his hands. Can we ever say then that we have preached him enough?!

One used to say that he (St. Peter Julian) did not know what he wanted, because he was a man of fullness and he wanted everything together. (Bp. Fougerat of Grenoble). “We want to take the whole of Eucharistic thinking” [To Fr. de Cuers, March 1856]; “we want to take the whole Blessed Sacrament” [To Virginie Danion, August 1857]

While the words of Bp. Fougerat seem to depict Fr. Eymard as a person who did not know what he really wanted, they indicate rather, from another angle, the depth of his understanding of the spiritual problems of his time. He was deeply aware that it is not just an aspect of the Eucharist that is the solution to these problems, but the Eucharist whole and entire. Although Fr. Eymard did not have at his disposal the precise theological terms that we use today after Vatican II, yet he was right on target – nothing short of the total Eucharist could be the real answer to all the problems of humankind!

This vision of Fr. Eymard is more clearly spelt out in the present Rule of Life of the Blessed Sacrament religious. Whereas almost all other congregations and societies have not more than one number of their Rule/Constitutions that deals with the Eucharist, the SSS have an entire section comprising of nos. 21-32 outlining the riches of the Eucharist as God's gift to us in his Son Jesus. Further, in nos. 33-45 we have a list of the different means by which SSS religious place the various facets of the Eucharistic mystery within the reach of God's people. Since the Eucharist was given us for the transformation of the whole world, it cannot produce its full effects unless

every single human being and every human situation comes under its transforming influence.



For this to be an effective reality in our

midst, we would have to focus on the entire Eucharistic mystery – not just on the celebration aspect of it, as most do, but on the prayer dimension as well. Most Christians understand the importance and value of the Eucharistic celebration, at least the Sunday celebration, but hardly find time to interiorize what they have celebrated through a prayer of prolonged adoration. And further, what we have celebrated and interiorized in prayer needs to be lived out or translated into concrete loving actions in day-to-day situations. As we look around the world we come across numerous marvelous initiatives which are truly 'eucharistic' at root, because they are selfless and altruistic – but the beauty of many of these is that they are launched and operated by persons who have perhaps never even heard of the Eucharist at all! What an inspiration should this not be for all SSS committed to live the entire Eucharistic mystery to its fullest (RoL – 1)! Should we not be more inventive and creative in making the Eucharist the source and summit of the life not only of the Church but of the entire world?

Our RoL No. 33 alerts us that 'his ability to translate his Eucharistic grace into diverse ministries stimulates us to be creative in our own mission.' It is the fire of God's love burning within us that will urge on onwards to newer and better expressions of apostolate!

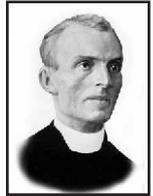
“We have only one thought, only one end, only one centre: the Eucharist! We are blessed if we can become specialized in leading to faith and love of the Eucharist people who are indifferent and selfish in our poor society.” [To Clappier, July 1856]

In his vision for his Eucharistic Society, Fr. Eymard wanted his religious to be leaders, men on fire, using every skill of theirs, every fibre of their being, every single ounce of their energy to spread the Eucharistic fire all over the world. They were to focus on one reality alone – Eucharist, and make it reach every single human being, so that all could abide in God's infinite love!

While that was Fr. Eymard's original vision, maybe over the years our focus has shifted to other realities as well. Besides with regard to Eucharist itself we have somehow settled for a merely traditional approach, relying on the superficial devotion of our Christian people. While there have been several new initiatives launched in recent years, these certainly would not be able to reach all those in our modern society who are 'indifferent and selfish.' That such persons are not really interested in the message we bear makes the challenge all the more invigorating, inspiring us to be inventive and creative.

We can learn a lot from the corporate business world of today where we see that their Research and Development sections are constantly taking up new challenges – otherwise they will have no place in the highly competitive market out there. They cannot afford to rest on their laurels and bask in the glory of past achievements. Even before customers

point out defects in their new products, they strive to achieve a 'zero defect' product thus ensuring that they remain always in the lead. What they discover



in their research has to be made available all down the line even to the last worker so that the results of those discoveries can be put to maximum use. There is noticeable among them a constant urge towards progress and against this background it would be worth hearing Paul's advice to the Corinthians: “Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one” (1 Cor 9:24-26).

As things stand it seems that the 'world' is going its own way leaving the Church and also us religious of the Blessed Sacrament far behind making us more and more a relic of the past having no place in the tough competitive world of today! What a challenge to all of us, as we celebrate the 2nd centenary of the birth of Fr. Eymard! We are called to discover the needs of our people today so that we can address them with precision, clarity and effectiveness. Trends in the globalized world of today show us that most people hardly pay attention to real Gospel truths and values. And yet, those who have sought to present these same age-old values in modern idiom and language demonstrate how successful the efforts can be. Here again, what we need is the fire of Eucharistic love blazing within each of us!

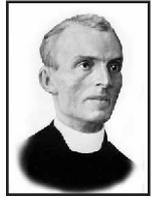
“We must be apostles, ministers and instruments of the Eucharist; (...) This is our centre of life, our vital source of action and apostolate. (...) We must preach the Eucharist by our works, by our writings and by our words; no one should speak better than us of the Eucharist: we are its religious.” [Retreat at Paris, August 1867]

This quote from Fr. Eymard's writings indicates clearly the great pride he took in his little congregation dedicated to the Eucharist. Besides, he realized that from among several others he was the one chosen to found the Eucharistic congregation entrusted with spreading knowledge of God's love as the central reality of human living. Hence, these two important consequences for Fr. Eymard as he undertook the apostolate: (1) to give to this work our very best in every circumstance along the lines chalked out for us by divine Providence. And (2) to be outstanding and not just mediocre in our contribution!

Implicit in this understanding is also the fact that this Eucharistic ministry is our God-given specialty. Unfortunately, several SSS not realizing the central position of this Eucharistic apostolate, hasten to other forms of apostolate that are more attractive, appealing, sensational or perhaps even glamorous. It is true that the Eucharist being central, almost every other aspect of Christian living can be somehow linked with it. Yet, the Eucharist proper is our first and only treasure and we seek to give a more explicit witness to the kind of life that

wells up from the Eucharist! (RoL, No. 21).

Fr. Eymard insistently reminds us of the centrality and absolute foundational character of our SSS



apostolate. As Paul put it in 1 Cor 13: 'if I do not have love, all is in vain... I am nothing!' Further, when our Eucharistic apostolate is carried out in the right spirit, the Self will find very little room to thrive on. That is what makes it a very special apostolate which sanctifies the giver as much as the receiver. But, of course, this is very hard and demanding on the poor Self that always looks for some compensation for itself... and if it does not find it, then it skillfully manoeuvres things in subtle ways which would not even be noticed except with expert and skilful guidance. And once Self gets a foothold the apostolate is vitiated and God's visage is distorted and everything is ruined because it focuses on itself.

Besides, we need to use every means available to us to diffuse this all-important message of love. We attend not only to what is close at hand and within our reach, but primarily to what will make our message more effectively heard and accepted far and wide. And then comes the climactic challenge – we should excel as professionals in our field, so that none is seen to be better than us. This is not so much a matter of personal pride, but of a total commitment to the cause of Jesus. And where we lack natural skills and aptitudes, we make up with our humility, brokenness, faith and love; we place ourselves wholeheartedly into his powerful hands allowing him to work in and through us. “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

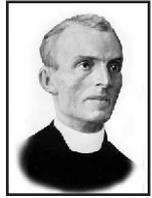
“Our Lord has made me to understand that he prefers the gift of my heart to all the exterior gifts that I could make him, even if I were to give him the hearts of all people without surrendering my own to him.” [Great Retreat at Rome, 1865]

Here Fr. Eymard dwells on the most central truth of all Christian apostolate. While the love of God is the fundamental tenet of our Faith, our loving response is likewise the key element that makes for fruitful Christian apostolate. It is not so much what we do that matters as the spirit in which we do it. And Love is that spirit that transforms all our activity making it not only acceptable to the Father, but also fruitful and productive of results. We recall Paul's hymn on love – 'I may even give my body to be burnt, but if I do not have love, I am nothing...' (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

At times, we opt for giving external gifts to our loved ones, imagining that the more 'things' we give them the happier they will be. Parents often fall into this trap, going out of their way to give their children a multitude of gifts – but not enough of themselves, of their time, their presence, their love and understanding. And while the children seem externally happy, deep within they are conscious that they miss something fundamental. In our relationship with God too, our deep and conscious love is what makes all the difference, not externals.

'Son, give me your heart' (Prov. 23:26) – is the Lord's request of each of us. And until we truly give him our entire

lives (symbolized by the heart) out of love, his repeated request will keep haunting our ears! God made us for a deep personal union with him



and until that is in place, all the rest cannot substitute for it. If we may put it this way: 'All our frenetic activity without love does not reach God; but our deep genuine love even if accompanied by little activity is most pleasing to him.'

While this approach might seem only natural, because this is what we ourselves feel with regard to another who says s/he loves us, we don't often see our own folly in our relationship with God. The realization that we tend to place **things** before **people** is a singular gift from the Father. It is not surprising that Fr. Eymard writes: “Our Lord has made me to understand that he prefers the gift of my heart to all the exterior gifts that I could make him...”

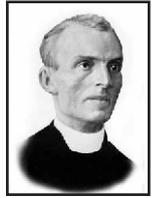
No wonder then that Fr. Eymard insisted in so many different ways on the centrality of love for Blessed Sacrament religious. He required that right from the days of one's novitiate this aspect would be stressed and cultivated assiduously. As we look around the Congregation today, and especially as we listen to the repeated admonitions of the General Team, we realize that this is one area in which we still have a lot more urgent and constructive work to do. The bi-centenary year could be a fruitful incentive in this regard.

(During my thanksgiving after Mass on 21 March 1865, referring to the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word and its connection with Communion, St. PJ says: "And it is to be thus in me that he gives himself in Holy Communion. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so a person who eats me will live because of me (Jn. 6:57)..Thus, through Communion, you will live for me, because I shall be living in you... And so, you will be entirely clothed by me. You will be the body of my heart; your soul, the active faculties of my soul; your heart, the container, the heartbeat of my heart. I will be the person of your personality, and your personality will be my very life in you. (See Gal 2:20) [Great Retreat at Rome, 1865]

In this quote Fr. Eymard describes the kind of interior union brought about by the Eucharist – a veritable fusion of two lives into one. 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me', is St. Paul's version of this. However, Fr. Eymard makes this even more personal. Using the philosophical explanation available in his times, he compares himself to the 'human nature' that the Second Person of the Bl. Trinity took over in the Incarnation. This human Nature remains un-individuated, that is, not yet stamped with the Self or Ego and that it why it was totally at the disposal of the divine Nature with nothing else to compete for dominance. God was the

person of the personality of Jesus.

The mystical union produced by the Eucharist, which is none other than the covenantal union promised



by God all through the Old Testament as well, is a deep fusion of this calibre. In such a union, the human person does not lose his/her human qualities – what is lost is the 'selfishness' of the Self... the insistence on 'I', 'My'... all that is opposed to God's free reign in one's life. While in the mystery of the Incarnation there was a total submission of the human to the divine by God's decree, as it were, here there is a free choice involved, a conscious letting-go of what one could legitimately possess (control over one's life), though with disastrous consequences. Because this letting-go depends on a free choice, it needs to be reiterated constantly until it becomes a habit; only then a certain amount of freedom and spontaneity is acquired.

Thus, a frequent and meaningful celebration of Eucharist becomes almost a necessity for a person desiring to live at this level of surrender to the Father. The Eucharistic celebration cannot afford to be tainted by any stain of routine, callousness, distraction and the like. Nevertheless such a celebration need not become dreary and draining – when done out of love it can be the most joyous experience possible. There is nothing more fulfilling than to be filled with God's own presence, even when it costs us dearly! And the cost is simply what is most harmful and detrimental to our total well-being. For the Self alienates us not only from God but also from our fellow human beings. The self-centred person is abhorrent in the eyes of all. What a difference when one is filled with God's loving presence!

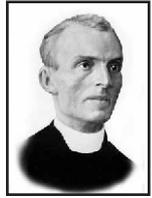
“The Eucharist must represent the principal almost exclusive interest, the habitual and frequent thought, the focal point of SSS religious.” [Meditation]

This is simply another way of saying that the Eucharist must be the centre of the life of every Blessed Sacrament religious. For this to happen, one would need to enter into the mind and heart of Fr. Eymard and perhaps trace the journey he made into the depths of his own being, till he reached the level of total and perpetual surrender of him-Self to Jesus and the Father. While for Fr. Eymard this meant a life-long journey, he wishes that his followers be able to do it in less time and with much less effort, learning as they do from his own experience. He means to show them the way!

However, one must grant that while learning the way theoretically from another person's experience might provide one with the various steps involved, what is there that will guarantee that the learner will bring to this effort the same zest, perseverance and totality of self-giving that the Founder himself had - and that too almost towards the end of his earthly life?! Besides, as we go through his life we see ever more clearly that Fr. Eymard was one of those specially chosen persons in whom God's grace was not in vain. Granted that the Father does choose even today several generous persons for similar favours, each person's spiritual journey is unique and unrepeatable. And so, we must be prepared to accept several differences in the two journeys at various levels.

The key elements nevertheless remain the same: a passion for keeping

love as the central and foundational reality of one's life, a training or schooling in the matter of love, an unrelenting pursuit of this central truth



and a frequent return to it when necessary. Presuming that such graces will be bestowed on Fr. Eymard's followers in generous measure, we SSS today could offer ourselves generously to its constant practice, relying on the Father's constant generosity and love to make it a reality for us too. We would need to find ways and means to make the Eucharist the central point of reference. We could ask e.g. 'how does this activity that I undertake connect with the Eucharist I celebrated earlier?'; 'in what way does it carry forward the "gift of self" that I made in my Eucharist?'; 'How does the Father's message of love throw light on this present difficult situation I am in?'

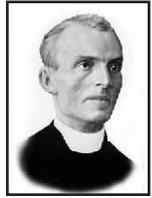
Launching into this kind of living can be a very adventurous prospect – because the Father will never allow himself to be outdone in generosity. Would we dare to give it an honest and generous try? Rather than impoverish us, such concentrating on the Eucharist is extremely fruitful and beneficial. The person with just one overpowering passion will truly do great things, whether it be on the spiritual level or otherwise. It is like the rays of the sun concentrated on one point – it will even burn a piece of paper placed at that point! The problem seems to be that often we are not satisfied with just one iron in the fire – we like to have several irons going simultaneously as this keeps us sufficiently busy – yet distracted?!?

“As long as we do not have for the Eucharist a passionate love, we do not do anything for God. (...) Have a Eucharistic passion (...) He who is loved ought to love (...) love involves an exaggeration. To exaggerate is to go beyond the law (...) When this becomes your habitual thought, your wellbeing, your constant desire, you will have this passion...”
 [Monthly Retreat, October 1867]

What distinguishes SSS religious from all other religious and even lay faithful is their passion for the Eucharist, a passion that easily leads them to 'exaggeration,' for to exaggerate, says Fr. Eymard, is to go beyond the law... beyond what seems appropriate and reasonable, beyond what most others would do. In fact just as a good Jesuit constantly seeks the 'magis' (the greater glory of God) in almost everything he does, so should the SSS stand out for his outstanding generosity in loving in all the aspects that characterize this great virtue (1 Cor 13:1-13).

Thus, his passion is to forgive not only seventy times seven, as the Gospel seems to recommend, but even beyond that. He allows himself to be broken and consumed by the other who takes advantage of his kindness and mercy. And the same for his availability and service, his readiness even to die for the sake of the other. And this 'other' is not just the one who responds well to us, or is good to us, but whomever God places within the sphere of our love! And often,

these will be the really 'unlovable ones' by the world's standards!



This is not just a utopian ideal which is to be attained by gritting one's

teeth and sticking to it, come what may – it is rather a gift of the Father, promised and offered to all those who generously accept to follow the SSS call. The Father never chooses or calls and sends on mission without equipping the person with the 'charism' and other skills required. And so we can count on God's fidelity that as SSS called to live the Eucharist to the fullest we have already been granted the gift of a real passion for the Eucharist. So, the entire question boils down to how, in concrete terms, do we realize this passion for making the Eucharist the centre of our lives.

A simile might help. We are told that even child prodigies regarding a musical talent say for the piano, need to practice and go through rigorous training for nothing less than six to seven hours a day without fail and that too for several years, if they wish to bring to fruition the gift that is theirs. In our case too, believing in the gift we have received, we would need to launch out into the deep and keep at it, using every available opportunity to let the Eucharist and its values shine through all that we think, will or say. Soon this will become a 'marvel in our eyes – it is the Lord's doing, and indeed we were glad!' (Ps. 126). The efforts we make in the direction of love will bring untold blessings on all around us! For where there is love, there God abides.

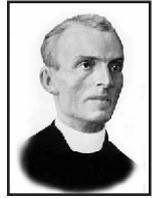
“The Cenacle is the symbol of personal union with God and fraternal solidarity with people, which are fruits of the Eucharist.” []

We are all aware that towards the end of his life, the Cenacle at Jerusalem became the one thing desired, not only for Fr. Eymard but for all his followers as well. They tried hard to obtain this edifice, first through the efforts of Fr. de Cuers, and when these failed, Fr. Eymard was deputed to use his influence to procure this boon for the SSS family. After several weeks of intense effort and repeated trips to the Vatican offices in Rome, Fr. Eymard sensed that the Lord was offering him and his followers something far more precious: he ended up discovering 'the interior cenacle' in the heart of every human person but especially within himself.

This interior meeting place is something more permanent, far more easily accessible whenever needed, within our own grasp and control and what is best, hidden from the eyes of all others, allowing us a far more intimate communion with the God of our life. The greatest commandment Jesus tells us is that we love God with a passionate love and our neighbour as well... the same love branching out in two directions which in reality overlap.

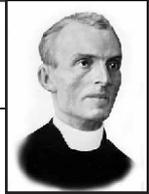
Our odyssey of love begins with the Father as St. John tells us: “In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 Jn 4:10-11). Paul will make this even clearer adding: “But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for

us” (Rom 5:8-9). Unworthy though we are, God takes the initiative to love us, pouring out his love into us through his Holy Spirit. But love is not a commodity easily available in the market; it is rather a personal relationship with another. And so, the 'place' where this great interchange of love occurs is the Cenacle, the core of our being where God the Father, Son and Spirit dwell within us.



Filled with this love and enriched by it, the Father then offers us opportunities throughout the day to share that love with others. And this too would come easily through the power of God's Spirit if we are but able to curb our own self-centredness, our fears of losing something that is precious, our desire to prove ourselves better or more worthy than others, our memories of past hurts, our ambitions and aspirations – in short our very selves. Here again, it is not something we 'must' do, but rather a path along which we allow God's Spirit to lead us. The key point seems to be the belief that this is truly the path to 'eternal life', God's own life shared with us abundantly! It embraces both God and fellow human beings in equal proportion. The Rich Young Man was told by Jesus to go, sell all that he had, give it to the poor and come follow Jesus! In favouring the poor, the young man would have benefited others around him, and by following Jesus, he would have found for himself the eternal life that he so ardently desired!

“Religious communities must be cenacles, open and welcoming above all towards priests.” []



The ideal of living our lives at the greatest depth, that is, in the Cenacle of our hearts, is an ideal which Fr. Eymard proposes not only for individual SSS but also for our SSS communities as a group. This ideal is captured for us in these two numbers of our RoL:

“Our availability and our concern for sharing and fellowship manifest the presence of the Risen Lord.

We become witnesses of Christ by making ourselves servants of our brothers.

The Lord calls us to live his Passover day by day in this way.” (RoL – 7) and

“A community does not exist for its own sake,

but aims at being a setting for seeking God in order to reveal his love to people.

It shares the life of the human family and seeks to live the Gospel in all its dimensions...

We willingly welcome guests in areas set aside for this purpose.” (RoL – 10).

is that it does not exist among us! A difficult challenge indeed, yet realistic and practical – the touchstone of a genuine Eucharistic spirit among us.

What he seems to have in mind is that we somehow en flesh the meaning of the Father's love and acceptance offered to every human person. For most people, this love of the Father would be somewhat ethereal or mysterious unless en fleshed by us in a visible and tangible manner. For this to happen, our communities would need to excel in welcoming others and while they are with and among us, the main point the visitors should pick up is: 'See how these Christians (read SSS religious) love one another.' We cannot afford to display before outsiders any trace of back-biting, ridiculing or criticizing a confrere or his work; special mention has to be made of Superiors who generally are the target of such criticism in any community. The reason we do not display such behaviour

However, Fr. Eymard wanted that first preference be given to priests. He realized what a difference our warmth and hospitality could make to priests, especially diocesan priests who often suffer from loneliness and other difficulties. And over the years, this has truly been the special gift of SSS to every diocese in which we are planted: welcome and care of the priests who come to us! The love we offer to priests in need will undoubtedly have a ripple effect as they return and share the love they themselves have received with their own parishioners.

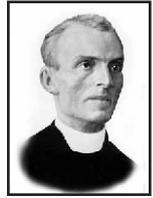
“Blessed are those who believe in love, believe in the Eucharist.”
 [Forty Hours Devotion at the Benedictines of the Most Blessed Sacrament, May 1868]

This statement of Fr. Eymard might not strike many of us today as being of tremendous importance. Yet, all we need do is recall the general spiritual atmosphere in which he lived. Love was the last thing people would have thought of – reparation, penitence, self-abnegation and the like came more readily to mind in thinking of one's spiritual endeavour. Against the background of the terribly negative self-image promoted among Christians, Fr. Eymard's approach is like a ray of bright sunshine and hope.

Especially when one shares the experience of St. Paul described in ch. 7 of Romans: “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (7:15-16)...“I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand” (7:18-22) ...“Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (7:24-25) - one realizes that there is no other way than to humbly and graciously accept God's gift of himself and of his loving forgiveness. That is when one comes to believe in the Eucharist as the answer to all the problems of humankind today!

Again, it is the depth of the personal struggle against the evil that is endemic in us and our perpetual failure when we rely only on our frail efforts that will reinforce this belief of ours. How marvelous is God's love – he knows that we will never

succeed as long as we try to be independent of him... he sees us falling repeatedly, yet he will never force us to accept his love. For, genuine love



cannot be forced, nor does it have meaning and power to transform when it is thrust upon another. It has to be given freely and accepted freely. Only in this way is the dignity and honour of the recipient maintained and safeguarded.

So God offers us his love and waits – once his 'hour' dawns, we will no longer hesitate to accept his love, even when it implies a total surrender of ourselves and our imagined strength to handle life by ourselves. This love bursts forth in an 'aha' experience the day we realize deeply and personally that “I am loved – no matter what!” Subsequent similar experiences gradually make our faith in God's love almost unshakeable. However, during this process of growth, it is beneficial to have a support group of like-minded persons who have already gone through the routine, as it were, and have come out victorious! From their own past experience they know what the pattern is likely to be and so are able to help the fledgling believer through to the end.

When Fr. Eymard stresses that this belief has to be rooted in the Eucharist, he is certainly not thinking of a routine, lifeless ceremony – which is what it is for most people today. One needs to make a conscious 'gift-of-self' each time and live out each day's gift!