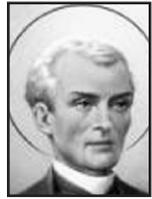


***“The gift of self requires that each person allow the Holy Spirit to actualize in himself, insofar as possible and in a real, not simply metaphorical sense, Jesus' self-emptying. Such a union is achieved through grace, prayer and supremely through the Eucharist.”*** [Reflection on Eymard's insight]



that the Spirit will offer us many opportunities during the day in which we can live out our self-giving. So, it is obvious that unless we seriously and

consciously mean this Gift of Self in this area, we will not substantiate our decision made during the Eucharist.

As in the case of Jesus himself, Calvary must follow the Cenacle/Gethsemane For Jesus Calvary was simply the actualization of his submission to the Father expressed so poignantly in the Garden. We notice also that having surrendered himself lovingly in his prayer, Jesus never once went back on his commitment during the Passion and death; he remained true to his gift right to the bitter end leaving us an example of how our Eucharistic celebration should flow into our daily living, with fidelity and love.

Fr. Eymard is quick to remind us that such a continuing gift of self is precisely the result of God's grace; he also reminds us that we need to re-affirm our gift in the context of prayer outside the celebration. It begins consciously at the Eucharist, is deepened purposefully during our prayer before the Sacrament and finally is lived out energetically during our actual daily commitments.

We are all aware that a mere routine celebration of Eucharist will produce none of its transforming effect in our lives. The core of the Eucharist is the self-giving of Jesus (as expressed so forcefully in the Gethsemane scene 'Not my will but yours be done, Father!'). At each Eucharist we unite our own little surrender to this loving surrender of Jesus and present it to the Father. For our surrender to be effective, it needs to be an area (in which the Self still predominates) which is consciously chosen and placed on the altar together with the bread and wine. Presenting merely the elements of bread and wine (without including in them our own consciously packed surrender) would render those gifts merely symbolical or metaphorical and empty.

The test of whether our self-giving is real or metaphorical will be seen as we seek to live out our Eucharist. If our self-gift has genuinely come from the heart, then we would be aware of this area of surrender all through the day. We would re-affirm our decision to die to Self in this area at every available opportunity. Thus, the effects of an effective Eucharist endure all through the day. In fact our prayer during the Eucharist is precisely

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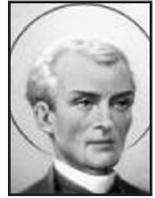
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***“A human person must become so docile to the prompting of the Spirit, entirely keeping his free will, that it can be said that Christ 'acts' in him, bringing about an extension of the Incarnation. A person who lives this gift of self is a true adorer.” [ ]***

Fr. Eymard further reminds us that the Gift of Self is not something we make by fits and starts, when we feel like it or when the going is good. It needs to become a permanent attitude of mind and heart. Jesus will either take a complete possession of our innermost selves or he will be pushed out inch by inch by the Self that predominates. In other words, there can be no half measures in this regard. Jesus reminded the one who would follow him but on his own terms, that “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God” (Lk 9:62).

Fr. Eymard spoke of this total self-giving in terms of the Vow of Personality which he was inspired to make at the end of the Great Retreat in Rome. He said of himself: “I wish to be for Jesus what Jesus himself was for the Father”, meaning thereby that just as Jesus placed himself totally at the disposal of the Father with regard to the work of redemption and was always obedient to his word, so Fr. Eymard wished to be totally in the hands of Jesus to do as he pleased and bring about the kingdom of his love (through the Eucharist). The question he constantly put to Jesus was: “What would you have me do, Lord?” a phrase borrowed from St. Paul who first uttered it when he was struck down on the

road to Damascus. It is thus that Fr. Eymard saw his own life as being an extension of the Incarnation and he envisaged the same for all this followers.



Anyone who has tried out this spiritual regimen knows how difficult it can be. Taken to its extreme, it implies that we are completely selfless, with nothing left for the Self in us. This is far easier to say than to practice and that too for a long period of time. Nevertheless, realizing that we do not struggle all by ourselves in this enterprise, but that it is the Spirit that moves us along, that it is his project and not ours alone, we can embark upon it with confidence and hope, relying always on the Lord's strength. Even when we do find ourselves progressing, this approach ensures that the credit is always (almost automatically) given to the Lord and not to oneself. Thus the SSS grows from strength to strength and works effectively to further God's kingdom of love.

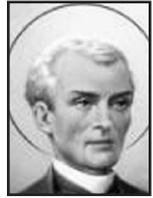
The ideal that underlies the above statement presumes a complete take-over by Jesus so much so that the person automatically responds with surrender in each and every situation. There is in fact no great struggle that has to be faced, because the decision has been made consciously, freely, lovingly and wholeheartedly. It is when the heart and mind are divided that one experiences a struggle, one side warring with the other. But when the person freely chooses the situation in which 'it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me' the self-giving is evidently total and effective.

***“The soul of such a person is the true Cenacle and his life becomes the perfect “adoration” offered to the Father.” [ ]***

This quote follows on from the previous one and the meaning is obvious. For when one belongs entirely to the Lord, then evidently the person is a true Cenacle where Jesus abides. Now, granted that such a person is a true Cenacle where the ideal of human life lived in communion with God (Covenant) is a reality, how does s/he become the perfect adorer whose very life itself is perfect adoration offered to the Father? We recall, first of all, that 'what the Father wants is people who worship him in spirit and in truth' (Jn 4:23-24). In other words, God is never satisfied with mere external worship ('This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me' - Mt 15:8). Several times in the Old Testament we see God reminding his people through the prophets that he is not at all pleased with sacrifices of animals, but that he delights in a pure and contrite heart! (Ps 50:12-14).

God seeks a throbbing, pulsating relationship with people, a bond in which they acknowledge and appreciate his marvelous qualities and allow him to shower all his chosen blessings on them. Ps. 81 says: “O that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways! Then I would quickly subdue their enemies, and turn my hand against their foes... I would feed you with the finest of the wheat, and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you” (Ps 81:13-16). One can well imagine how painful such a situation is where God waits eagerly to

shower his blessings on his chosen ones, while they stubbornly refuse because they are immersed in their own plans and schemes. Add to all this, the fact that



it is only God who knows what is best for us and what will make us truly happy and contented!

Such is the mystery of human 'free-will' and so when a person freely and lovingly turns him/herself over to God allowing the Spirit to do with him/her whatever he wills, would not this make God perfectly 'happy'? We must never imagine that when we make God happy that adds something to his inner life God is happy in himself, but it gives him great fulfillment when we achieve the very goal he has set for us fullness of life in him. “I have come that you may have life and have it in abundance (Jn 10:10).

Thus to live a life of perfect adoration we don't need to 'do' anything special except 'be' the kind of person God wants us to be, letting God be the God of our lives. It is when we obey his call lovingly fulfilling all that he commands us that we show forth the glory of God, somewhat like the rest of creation that glorifies God simply by being what God meant each creature to be! The only difference is that with the rest of creation, there is no freedom involved in their response they 'do' things instinctively; but in our case, we function best when ours is a free, loving choice and this is where the catch lies. Can we choose to allow God to be the master of our lives?

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(2<sup>nd</sup> Cent Birth Anniversary of Fr. Eymard)

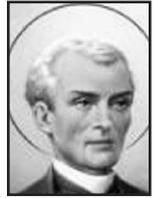
***“The dimension of interiority is very important; it is the quality of interior life that gives value to exterior activity.” [ ]***

This statement of Fr. Eymard hardly needs any justification. To use the words of the Gospel: “Listen and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles...But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile” (Mt 15:10-12, 18-21). Thus it is that what is within and comes from the heart is far more important than what is manifested outwardly. The same applies to our obedience of God's commands, as when Jesus says: “But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Mt 5:28-29).

If the rule applies negatively, it should also apply positively. It is not just the actions that we do externally but the intention with which we do them that counts in the sight of God. The Almighty who dwells within sees what goes on in the heart and that is what he values. Thus our 'good desires' in themselves can be very valuable especially when we cannot give full expression to what our heart wants because of our innate limitations. God seeks what is within: “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt

offerings” (Hos. 6:6-7).

Unfortunately, the way of the world is just the opposite: here only the externals seem to matter. Thus, if a person is dressed in a 'Raymond' suit, he is regarded as being the 'perfect man', or when he uses Cherry Blossom shoe polish he is assured of getting through in the job interview! The great heroes of youth today are those highly skilled in some form or other; Hollywood or Bollywood celebrities become the models for these youngsters, irrespective of the character or values these models espouse! Unreflectively, these are the standards that are then applied even to the spiritual life, with disastrous consequences. Even in religious life today any kind of behaviour seems to be tolerable, as long as one is not caught publicly!



Gospel and kingdom values, however, are those that are cultivated deep within, changing one's very personality making it to be like that of Jesus, God's only Son. In the celebration of Eucharist too, what really matters is not the beautiful singing or the inspiring homily delivered, the correctness of the ritual gestures or the faithful adherence to the text of the Missal what counts is the depth of love and meaningful attention brought to bear on all that is done. And this is further manifested in appropriate Christ-like behaviour all through the day, particularly when no one watches.

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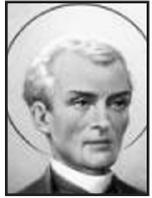
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(Fr. Eymard's Baptism day 1811)

***“I would give up everything for the sake of priests.”*** [S 2]



Sacrament religious who would look after sick and aged priests. Even though such a foundation never really materialized, yet his intense reverence for

One of the great dreams of Fr. Eymard was that he would have the privilege of becoming a priest even if for only one day! This shows his tremendous admiration for and appreciation of the priesthood. He saw in a priest the very image of Jesus himself. Further, after having struggled for several years to become a priest and having lived the life of a diocesan priest for about five years, he understood their hardships and difficulties even better. Often isolated and over-burdened, they struggled on valiantly caring for the flock entrusted to their care.

priests made him ready to serve them personally in whatever capacity he could.

Today, Blessed Sacrament Fathers serve priests who are in trouble offering them shelter, support and help in their ministry whenever needed. Further, they are always available for Confessions and other spiritual service. This trait has been outstanding in the lives of Bl. Sacrament religious all over the world. Many SSS communities are well sought-out havens for diocesan priests especially those in trouble. Our RoL has one special number in which we read:

One of the ways in which he showed his tremendous respect for priests was to place himself totally at their service, no matter what inconvenience that caused him personally. While he would never allow himself to be disturbed when at prayer for any reason whatsoever, there was one exception to this rule and that was if it was a priest who needed his time and attention. That is what led him to say: “I would give up everything for the sake of priests.”

“We seek to share with them (priests)

a life of faith, prayer and friendship and exchange pastoral plans and experiences.

We place ourselves at their service by offering hospitality, animation and formation,

encouraged in this by the example of Father Eymard

who used to say, “I would leave everything for priests.” (RoL No. 44)

His great appreciation of the priesthood made him to value every single priest he came across and he was prepared to assist them whatever their need. He prized particularly elderly and sick priests realizing that in their infirmity, when they could not serve as before, they would be cared for less by their flock. And hence he desired to establish a community of Blessed

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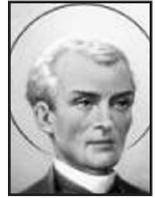
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***“To please God means to love what he loves, to will what he wills.” [ ]***

Fr. Eymard's outstanding contribution to the Church and world of his times was his insistence on love as the central Christian reality. His appreciation of the role of love in Christian life stands out like a ray of sunshine amidst the thick darkness of a sin-scarred world. However, for Fr. Eymard, love was not just a feeling or passing desire. As St. John and St. Paul, his two favourite scriptural authors, stressed repeatedly: “We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us - and we ought to lay down our lives for one another” (1 Jn 3:16) and again: “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 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. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us” (1 Jn 4:7-13).

John further reminds us that our love must not be a matter of words only but should consist of concrete actions, particularly our obedience to the Father: “Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action” (1 Jn 3:18-19). In the Gospels Jesus admonishes his disciples: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (Jn 14:15). St. Peter Julian seemed to

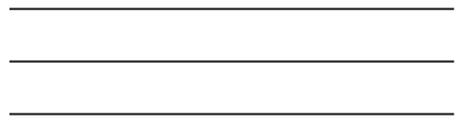
have seen this connection between love and obedience very clearly and in his own personal life what was uppermost in his mind was always total



obedience, no matter what the cost.

Even when he was almost sure that it was God's calling that he start the Blessed Sacrament Society, and after he had even obtained dispensation to leave the Marist Congregation he still sought a confirmation in the verdict of the Archbishop of Paris. He resolved that he would take the Archbishop's word as final: If he accepted Fr. Eymard's proposal for a new congregation and invited him into his archdiocese, that would be a definitive sign of God's will and he would embrace it, no matter what the difficulties. And this is what he did when Archbishop Sibour of Paris welcomed him with open arms. And we can be pretty sure that had the Archbishop not accepted Fr. Eymard's project he would have joyfully returned to his humble post among the Marists no matter how deep the humiliation or sense of failure.

Fr. Eymard thus sought to please God not so much in words but in deeds, actions done out of loving obedience to God's will. In this way he was assured that whatever he did would not only have the blessing of God but would also prove to be apostolically fruitful and enduring. Only that kind of a project was worth working on, as far as he was concerned.

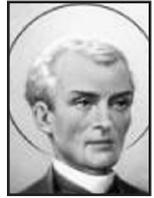


**“Love the good Lord dearly, the rest is nothing.” [ ]**

It is no secret that Fr. Eymard's greatness lay in his discovery of Love as the central reality of all Christian living. But what is more important is that for Fr. Eymard, Love was not just a passing attraction, something he wished to cash in on, for the sake of popularity or distinctiveness. His was a deep insight born of personal struggle, somewhat like the discovery of Paul that Christ was the centre of all his following 'Who will save me from this wretched situation .... Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ' (Rom 7:24-25). Paul's realization was that even before he could ask for God's intervention in his wretched situation, God had already worked out a solution through the mission of Jesus. And that is what made him eternally grateful to the Father and to Jesus.

Further, Fr. Eymard's insistence is that the love we speak of should be something real and meaningful, not mere empty words. It must stand the test of obedience especially in difficult circumstances, as St. John pointed out. Our love should flower out into obedience, a submission that is made even in the face of great difficulties and suffering. The best picture that comes to mind is that of Jesus himself who prayed earnestly in the Garden of Gethsemane that the cup of suffering should pass him by. Nevertheless, he insisted that things should be as the Father desired. This readiness to sacrifice all shows the depth of Christ's love for the Father. Similarly our love both for God and for our brethren should be able to stand the test of obedience and fraternal service. Only

then would it be worth something.



For Fr. Eymard everything outside the Father's will was really worth nothing. Great edifices, deep spiritual insights or whatever just cannot compare with a tiny submission to the Father out of love. Further, he seems to indicate that this love should, if possible, extend even to the feeling level. Love the good Lord *dearly*, he suggests! Now while feelings are not generally within our control, yet we should pay attention to emotions also because these are what give power and force to a decision and to life in general. Without a passionate attachment to the Father and his kingdom, our lives would lack that fire which characterized Fr. Eymard all through his life. He could never settle for a lukewarm or half-hearted service of the Lord. For him it was either all or nothing! And he wished to see the same quality in all his followers. Such a totally committed life is a rare spectacle indeed, a special grace offered to and accepted by a handful of persons in every generation!

Fr. Eymard's wish and dream was that among these handful of generous persons, most would be SSS, those who had tasted the Father's love in and through Jesus. And in this bi-centenary year of his birth, seeking to realize this dream of his would be even more desirable, meaningful and challenging! Could that be our gift of gratitude to our founder on the occasion of the remembrance of his birth?!

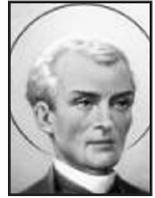
***“The Cross is love's struggle and its glory.” [ ]***

We are all familiar with the fact that in the period in which Fr. Eymard lived, tremendous importance was given to corporal penances and to asceticism in general. Against this background Fr. Eymard insisted on love as more important than suffering or reparation. Yet, he was sharp enough to see the profound link between love and the cross. For Fr. Eymard it was the Cross that was more important, not just suffering for the sake of suffering: it had to be accepted as part of God's will for us! It was love that led Jesus to accept the Cross in his life and that too as an expression of God's will: “Not my will, but yours be done, Father” he prayed repeatedly in the Garden. St. John it is who links love to obedience in his Gospel, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (Jn 14:15). And obedience to the Father was the only inspiration for Jesus to accept his passion and death.

As we scrutinize human behaviour we see that genuine and deep love makes every level of suffering palatable. Does not a mother, out of the natural love she has for her child, accept to keep awake the entire night beside the bed of her sick child and yet get back to work the next day as if she had a peaceful rest the previous night? Loyalty, patriotism and similar virtues enable young people to undergo untold suffering for the sake of their country!

Yet, Fr. Eymard was able to see also the positive side of the Cross which is the glory of love. The Cross highlights the beauty and grandeur of love because it enables the human spirit to rise to such

magnificent heights, usually inaccessible to motivation stemming from duty, obligation and fear. In fact the greater the suffering involved in a



given project, the greater the love that shines through, if and when love is the motivating factor. Such a love heals, it puts new life into even a dying person, it invigorates and renews! Only such a love could bring back even the most hardened sinner. It was precisely this kind of love that Peter saw in the eyes of Jesus as their gaze met on that fateful night of the Passion. It proved to be a wake-up call for Peter and was the source of a series of deep inner paradigm-shifts in his life, enabling him later to be the 'rock' he was chosen to be. Similarly it was the cross that brought all the great saints right through the Church's history, like Catherine of Sienna and a host of others, so close to their Lord and Master.

After tasting the love of God ever more deeply in the Cenacle within, Fr. Eymard was ready for any kind and amount of personal suffering nothing would ever be too great for him; he was now strong enough to take everything in his stride: physical suffering, rejection by others, insults and injuries from even those close to him, difficulties regarding vocations and training them adequately, financial and other setbacks the list is almost endless. Yet Fr. Eymard was now able to see the glory of love in these crosses he carried so cheerfully! In fact, he was grateful for these difficulties and perhaps even asked for more.



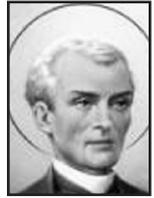
***“You love the solitude, and you do well.” [ ]***

This is spiritual advice that Fr. Eymard offers to one of his directees. And yet his own spiritual life was a constant see-saw between time (and perhaps days) spent in contemplating and enjoying the love of God, and time spent in hectic activity working to spread the fire of God's love everywhere. Even in the Rome Retreat he recalls this movement from one extreme to the other as one of his predominant faults and seeks a remedy for it. His great appreciation of the life of solitude stands out as a light amidst the numerous tasks he had committed himself to.

Fr. Eymard was deeply conscious to two important realities around him: the indifference of the vast majority of people to the very truths and gifts of God that could bring lasting peace and joy to people, and the restless, frantic and futile self-directed search for happiness. Against this background, he not only realized what the real solution to all these problems was, but also experienced the truth of it in his own life. Hence, he could not but be on fire with an immense desire to spread the message of love. And because so few people believed in this marvelous remedy and were prepared to pay the price to incorporate it in their own personal lives, so few who were prepared to be apostles of this love he went out of his way to do all he possibly could to make up for the lack of prophets and witnesses of the Eucharist.

Nevertheless, he was too spiritual a person to overlook the fact that this mission he had embarked upon was really God's work and that he was only a chosen

instrument in God's hands! Hence the most fruitful approach would be to 'wait on the Lord' and simply follow the leads he gives, all of which called for



silence and solitude. He longed for this solitude himself because he was convinced from experience that this is the only approach that brings beneficial and lasting results. Thus, he was literally torn between the two directions.

In this situation, it would be but natural for him to appreciate deeply the desire someone else had for solitude and silence, of being like clay in the potter's hands and he would certainly encourage anyone who showed even a little liking for this approach. If Fr. Eymard lived in our day he would possibly be all the more insistent on this solitude, seeing the incessant activity in which the entire world spins around today. People do not seem to appreciate even a little silence: mobiles, walkmans, CD players and the rest all seek to fill the emptiness that is within, but only succeed in estranging us from our real selves even more. Blessed, indeed, is the one who has trained him/herself to appreciate and love true solitude and ensure that there is at least a modicum of deep silence in his/her life each day. To reach the desired level of solitude one would need consistent and regular practice, determination and perseverance yet the results justify all the pain involved in the efforts we make.

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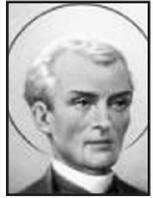
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**“Remember that love is stronger than death.” [ ]**



Most people would agree with this statement at least theoretically but happy is the one who has experienced its truth from personal experience. The reason for this is that practically all the love one experiences here on earth is frail human love which cannot rise to such heights because it is basically conditional. To love in this manner requires great inner emotional strength. A person can have this depth of love only because it has been gifted to him/her or because s/he has gone through great suffering him/herself. Such a person would have been tested in the crucible of suffering over a fairly long period of time, and that too not just once, but over and over again. Only then would s/he realize that love is indeed stronger than death!

Such persons may be broken in body but are strong and whole in spirit. They have somehow touched the depths of their humanity and been able to discern from that vantage point the elements that make for true peace and joy. They are in touch with their own frailty and brokenness and have been able to come to terms with it. They do not feel the need to prove themselves to anyone, especially in order to win their love. They are deeply conscious that they possess this love at the very core of their being. This was the situation of Fr Eymard after the Rome retreat there was practically nothing that anyone could deprive him of; he was completely detached and had truly surrendered his all.

Not only does such a person experience the greatest depth of love him/herself, but is also able to give such

love to others, even to those who least deserve it. And when such love is shared with another person, the receiver is transformed and in some

measure is empowered to pass it on to others. That is how the fire of God's love is transmitted and spread throughout the world. The price, therefore, is that the chosen instrument should be ready to be emptied of all Self through life's crosses.

In general, those chosen to be instruments at this depth are really few and are besides, rather privileged persons. But since it is only this kind of love that truly transforms others, the Lord will ensure that in every age and place there will always be found a sufficient number of such persons who radiate this kind of love and make a difference wherever they are. In our own day, Mother Teresa would undoubtedly be a glowing example of such heroic love that is truly stronger than death. These chosen persons only serve to remind us all lesser mortals that it is possible to love even to that depth! Realizing the value and importance of such people, Fr. Eymard wished that at least some of his directees (and perhaps many more of his own SSS followers) would be able to rise to the height of accepting such a gift from the Father.

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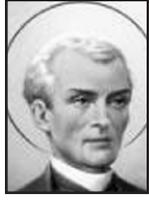
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**“Love is contemplative by nature.” [ ]**



St John reminds us that “we love because he first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19). In other words, we would never be able to know what true love is unless God had first showered his unconditional and infinite love upon us. It is this love that we relish and appreciate at greater and greater depths, that eventually leads us to reach out to others, sharing it with them as generously as we ourselves have received it. The New Testament also reminds us that true love must always be a matter of action and not just of words alone. That is because it is very easy to say that one loves the test of love, however, is always the crucible of suffering and sacrifice of the self that we are prepared to make for the other. Action thus proves the genuineness and depth of our love.

software has been installed, as it were, all that is needed is a suitable occasion and the appropriate stimulus - and the inner response will be instantly forthcoming.

When others see this 'fruit' emerging so effortlessly, it might seem as if it is the result of tremendous human effort. In fact, it is nothing more than the fruit of regular contemplation in which one remains silent and still in the presence of the Lord while he 'operates' on our inner selves. More positive results are achieved in prayer when we can remain silent and still than by a multiplicity of actions. The more time and stillness we can offer him, the greater will be the transformation that he can and will achieve within us. And that is why it is true that all those entrusted with tremendously challenging works need long hours of contemplation to render their works fruitful and pleasing to God; by relying on their own human strength they will not be able to go very far.

Now all this does not in any way contradict what Fr. Eymard says about love being essentially contemplative by nature. He is dealing here with how a person comes to acquire such transforming love. Undoubtedly it is God the Father who pours out his love on us through his Spirit abiding within us (Rom 5:5). But the Spirit, although resident in us, will not force us to venture out in love. He inspires us and it is to the extent that we 'contemplate' the presence, the nature and the effects of this marvelous love of the Father that we are inspired to allow that love to flow through our hearts and lives. The more we drink in God's marvelous ways of loving us as we contemplate it in deep silence and stillness, the more we begin to want to walk in his ways of love. This contemplation is like programming the computer of our inner selves. Once the

Fr. Eymard's comment that love is contemplative by nature and yet active in its expression is true indeed! For a complete picture, both these aspects need to be held in dynamic tension with each other a task which no mortal can achieve successfully without God's intervention and without long hours of patient and persevering practice!

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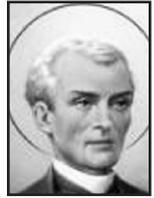
***“Love is nothing but exaggeration.” [ ]***

From our personal experience we would all be aware that it is very easy to say the words, “I love you!” But the test of true love will always be action and self-sacrifice. We are perhaps familiar with the story of the lover who writes a passionate letter to his beloved: “Out of love for you, I would climb the highest mountain, swim across the broadest ocean, fight the fiercest beast, cross the hottest blazing deserts . . .” and he went on in this poetic fashion filling several pages. He had almost sealed the letter before dispatching it when he suddenly remembered something and so added a postscript: “I shall come to see you this Friday evening, *if it doesn't rain!*” The man who vowed that he would swim across the broadest ocean couldn't brave a simple shower of rain!

While this example is easily recognized as ridiculous, we may not ourselves see the incongruence of our own behaviour especially in our response of love to God. We too often profess our love for Christ, claiming that we would do anything for him, especially after receiving the Lord in Holy Communion. But if at the very next moment, a difficulty unexpectedly comes our way, we might catch ourselves grumbling and looking for ways to dodge it.

True love not only gives of one's best, but also seeks to offer the maximum. Love never says 'that's enough!' And that is why in every genuine love relationship, one cannot but spot the exaggeration though it does not appear so to the one who loves. For him/her, these excesses appear as only natural and fitting, given

the intensity of love and devotion present. Fr. Eymard suggests that it is only love at this almost feverish pitch that will achieve marvels in our



lives. Most of us, humble mortals, would probably cringe at this suggestion, but we need only remember that the love we speak of in relationship with God, is the love which he himself pours out generously into our hearts through his Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5).

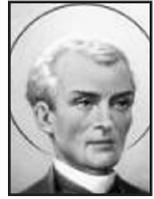
All we need do, therefore, is to be open to receive all that the Lord in his goodness offers us. One thing that could block our openness and receptivity is our self-centredness which expresses itself in terms of pride, fear, anxiety, a certain calculative spirit, a give-to-get approach and so on. Once we rid ourselves of all such expressions of pan-scale love or self-centredness, we would often surprise ourselves with the generosity that God's Spirit can evoke in us. Why not give him a fair chance and see for ourselves? It is helpful to remember that in this matter nothing will happen unless we take the step, under the impulse of God's guiding Spirit. He provides us with numerous opportunities to do this, some simple and easy, others more difficult and daunting we need to be alert to pick up these suggestions of his and then courageous enough to act on them. It often takes only a few efforts with a touch of success perhaps, to make us taste the beauty of such self-giving love. From then on, it will more likely be a much more effortless journey!

***“Well, love continues to grow in its gifts and in its feelings.” [ ]***

While what was said in the previous reflection is perfectly true, viz. that God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, it nevertheless remains true also that love, like any other virtue in our lives, entails a process of growth with its inevitable 'broken-arrow' path: three steps forward and maybe two backwards! Our progress along this road is painfully slow because ridding oneself of the Self is no easy matter! We see that Jesus himself took three full years training his disciples personally and yet at the end of the period, they had very little to show by way of genuine progress. Of course, there were elements and stray occasions of great generosity as when Thomas suggested to the group: “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (Jn 11:16-17), or of courage inspired by love as when during the arrest of Jesus Peter drew out his sword and struck the High Priest's servant cutting off his ear (Mt 26:51-54). But putting aside these few flash-in-the-pan examples, the majority of the apostles had to inch forward, step by painful step!

For most of us, this will be the normal pattern of our progress too. However, one thing that could help speed up the progress somewhat is a careful and attentive listening to God's Word. But only if each time the Scriptures are proclaimed we focus on the qualities of God revealed in the event and ponder over the marvelous ways in which he manifests his love for us, would we feel our hearts warmed and the expression of our loving response deepened. It is not surprising that Fr. Eymard commented that “a priest who lets a day pass without

reading the Scripture has lost his day.” He has lost a golden opportunity to grow in the love of God by doing what is in his power, while leaving the rest to God. Another way would be to see God's qualities reflected in the persons around us their kindness, readiness to forgive, to help us in our needs, their thoughtfulness and so on. As we notice these qualities in others we spend a few moments savouring them in our minds if we can make this approach one of the 'favourites' on our mental computer, what a difference would it not make!?



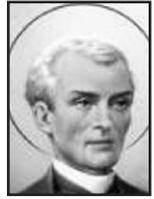
Being forgetful by nature and generally superficial in most of our relationships, especially in the fast-moving world in which we live today, we would need several instances of being struck forcefully by God's tremendous love for us before we begin to think habitually along the lines of love. When we consistently practice this approach, our love not only for God but also for all his creatures, will certainly grow in intensity and in the creativity of its expressions! Another valuable help we could use with great profit would be a 'support group' that thinks along similar lines and helps us with their own personal experiences. It would be wonderful if during this bi-centenary year, some SSS communities would establish such groups among themselves and also with lay participants, so as to be able to interiorize and capitalize on this suggestion of Fr. Eymard. That would be a very concrete and practical tribute to the Founder!

***“Belong entirely to God through love, entirely to your neighbor through a gracious charity, entirely to the divine Eucharist by the offering and sacrifice of your whole self.”*** [To Mrs. Stephanie Gourd, October, 1859]

Even though in his day the concept of Covenant that God desires to enter into with the whole of mankind was not known or attended to, Fr. Eymard, through the hours spent in prayer, was able to discover that this is the one thing that makes life meaningful. He would not have used the term 'covenant' yet the concept is certainly there! In fact, we could say in our day, especially after Vatican II, that this is the primary intention God had in mind when creating us human beings in his own image and likeness that we enter into this deep and total love relationship with him freely and consciously. With a proper use of our intelligence, we are to discover the richness of God's love as much as we possibly can, and with our faculty of free-will we are to choose that level of love relationship and live it. “I shall be your God and you shall be My people!” is God's way of expressing this relationship in the Scriptures.

Deep within the very being of each person, therefore, there is an insatiable urge to belong totally to God. Paul stresses the fact that “We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's” (Rom 14:7-8). Yet, at the same time, paradoxically, there is the deep fear and caution lest belonging to him we

should lose control over our own lives. This is the illusion that makes us cling to the Self, even when we fully realize that all that the Self can bring us is more



misery and pain. It is no wonder, then, that right from the beginning of his preaching, Jesus exhorted his disciples to 'lose yourself... unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies... he who does not leave father and mother... and even his own self, cannot be my disciple' (Mt. 10:37; 19:5; Jn. 12:24). Not satisfied with this frequent teaching, Jesus also left us the supreme example of his own life, summed up so powerfully in the hymn: “although he was equal to God, he did not count equality with God as something to be grasped; he emptied himself...becoming obedient... unto death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:5-11). This total self-emptying of Jesus brought him an ineffable union with the Father: 'And therefore God raised him up... giving him a name that is above all names ...'

In characteristic fashion, Fr. Eymard however, goes further. Whether we like it or not, we do belong totally to God. What he adds is that we re-affirm this consciously and out of love. For it is love that makes the difference and puts an almost infinite value on our self-giving! And he has expressed elsewhere several times that love necessarily involves an exaggeration. He also captures the double aspect of love: if genuine it must extend equally to God and to neighbour, linking it all with the Eucharist and a total self-giving in loving sacrifice!

***“Fix your mind on our Lord in the most Blessed Sacrament and ponder on his love.” [ ]***



While in the previous quote, Fr. Eymard links our self-giving with the Eucharist as sacrifice, in this quote he looks at yet another aspect of the Eucharist viz. the example of Jesus' own self-giving immortalized for our edification and imitation. It would not have occurred to Fr. Eymard that this is exactly what a 'proclamation' is intended to do such language was not available in his day. Yet after Vatican II we learn that a 'proclamation' is a communication (be it in words, action, song or any other medium of transmission) which, as it unfolds draws the listener into itself making him/her a part of the message given. Once this happens, the listener sees the message not just as his-story, something happening out there, but as 'my-story' the mystery of God's love and presence to me today! Once this happens a 'response' necessarily follows and generally this response involves the whole person such is the power of a proclamation!

followed up with an actual self-giving throughout the day. It is in this way that our pondering would flower out into fruitful imitation. After such a celebration we would have to say with St. Paul 'it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.'

If we conscientiously follow this way of celebrating Eucharist as proclamation day after day, we would almost automatically get into the habit of fixing our eyes on Jesus, asking at every step: 'What would you have me do, Lord?' Our obedient service for God's kingdom would be more spontaneous and packed with love thus rendering it much more effective in bringing about God's reign in our midst. Our love then would not be just in our minds and hearts, but would be manifested in action for the kingdom.

Again, in Fr. Eymard's time people did not make a clear distinction between the celebration of Eucharist and the 'Blessed Sacrament' or abiding presence. Nor would they have stopped to think that what is contained in the monstrance is a piece of broken bread coming precisely from the Eucharistic celebration! It is this 'brokenness' of Jesus preserved for us, that invites us to break of ourselves in self-giving love for the other. How can we pray before Jesus present in this form of brokenness without doing something about the areas in which we still tend to refuse to be broken in doing God's will?

During the Eucharist, therefore, when we hear of (liturgy of the Word) or witness the total self-giving of Jesus out of love (liturgy of the Bread) and allow this message to become part of our lives, we cannot but be faced with the question: 'Jesus loved me and gave himself up for me what do I have and want to give him in return'? And if at all we are serious about our participation in the Eucharist, we would have to translate our response into action, starting with a symbolic gesture during the Eucharist which then is

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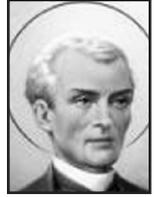
***“God has shared the life of man and his work and the bread of the poor.” [ ]***

When talking of the Covenant, it is customary to emphasize the truth that we ordinary mortals are invited to share intimately in God's life and love. However, we do not generally pause to consider the other side of this truth that God too totally shares our ordinary human condition. The Letter to the Hebrews brings this out so powerfully when it says: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:15-16).

Another aspect that we need to contemplate hard and long is that while we commit ourselves to share God's life in and through the Sacraments, God too commits himself to us and our welfare with equal seriousness and sincerity. The upshot of this mutual commitment is that we can never consider ourselves as being 'alone' or orphans as Jesus put it. God *has* to come to our help especially when we are in trouble because of his name. Already in Isaiah God had reminded his people, “Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands” (49:15-16).

While God shares the lot of all mankind, he is particularly near to the poor and broken-hearted, precisely because such people do not have anyone

to defend them and safeguard their rights! God becomes their *goel*, the blood relative whose bounden duty it is to come to the aid of the oppressed



and down-trodden. And while human relatives can sometimes forget us or even abandon us in our plight, God can never even be imagined as doing this. He is the ever faithful One. How energizing this thought is when we recall it at the right moment for there are times in the lives of all human beings when they feel paranoid, attacked on all sides and abandoned by everyone. Our Saviour is ever faithful to his commitment and will never forsake us in our time of need.

Every Christian is sent out into the world as a messenger and witness of this fidelity of God's love. But before we can proclaim it to others, we need to experience it ourselves so that we actually live what we proclaim. In particular, this is the challenge that every true 'adorer' takes up with love and courage. He is the first to overcome himself and the inner doubts and fears that well up from deep within. Schooled in this faithful love, his words bring strength and comfort to those who suffer unjustly, especially when they tend to forget or disregard God's words of assurance. The true adorer becomes a living Bible for all people to read in his very life God's fidelity is vindicated! His is a living message proclaimed to all who care to listen: 'let all those who have ears to hear, listen!' (Mk. 4:3-9).

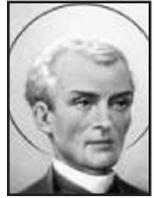
**“You are what you are in God's sight.” [ ]**

Today psychologists remind us that among the several basic requisites for a happy and meaningful life on earth is a healthy and positive self-image. And yet most people labour under heavy burdens placed upon them from early childhood impressing upon them that they are really 'no good'. Somehow we all seem to have got it into our heads that a person has to be 'perfect' before s/he can be acceptable, not only to God, but also to others around. And so, most people go through life carrying a great big mill-stone (of self-rejection) round their necks, hardly able to see anything good in themselves.

While this has been a perennial problem with people all down the centuries, it is perhaps only in our day that we have begun to identify this as one of the major yet unnecessary burdens we carry all through our lives. In this matter too, Fr. Eymard was perhaps well ahead of his times, reminding us that what we are in God's eyes is what really matters! Even the great pastoral theologian Henri Nouwen reveals how it took him several years to realize this truth - that he was more ready to believe all the voices around him telling him how bad or defective he was, rather than to listen to the one authentic voice of God reminding him: 'you are my beloved in whom I am well pleased!' It is only after he began to take these words of God seriously that he experienced a modicum of inner peace and contentment.

How does God really look on us and every person he created? It would not be too far wrong to say that God sees in us his own image and likeness, not so much

this image disfigured by our own negligence and sin, but rather the tremendous potential that he himself placed within our being, the potential that



he constantly seeks to realize in our lives, if only we allow him to mould us! Even when we come into his presence as sinners, his attention is drawn to our persons, to the 'who' we are rather than the 'how' we are.

It is like a mother who looks at her child who has been playing out in the garden covered with dirt as he enters the house. While she is fully aware of the dirt all over the child, she sees primarily her lovable child before her, and not so much the dirt! And drawn by her great love for the child, (and possibly its helplessness) she proceeds to clean it up, knowing all the while that perhaps within a few minutes the child could run out into the garden and dirty himself all over again. Rare would be the mother who would punish her little child for getting himself all dirty. Rather her implicit hope is that all the genuine love she repeatedly showers on the child will one day make him appreciate the advantages of being clean and tidy. Thus, in our relationship with the Father it is who we are in God's eyes that matters most, and when we can focus primarily on this there is every hope that we will become precisely what God sees in us!

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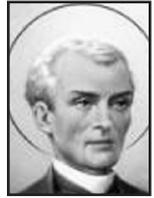
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***“Do everything to please God.”***  
**[Recommendation to a directee]**

This is but another way of saying, 'do everything according to the will of God' for this is the one thing that truly pleases the Father our obedience! The Gospels have several quotations that repeat this truth in slightly different ways. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven... On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?' Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.' ... Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock." (Mt 7:21-24)

Or again, "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Mt 12:50 - 13:1). Or again, "but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father" (Jn 14:31 - 15:1) ... "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me" (Jn 14:23-24). Just as obedience to the Father was central and the most important thing for Jesus, so was it for Fr. Eymard. He was literally like clay in the hands of a potter, allowing God to mould him into whatever kind of pot he wished.

Realizing the central importance of obedience in the life of a Christian and much more in the life of a true adorer, Fr. Eymard could not but give this



advice to his directee and to all who wished to follow in his footsteps. He sees obedience as the direct and first fruit of genuine love, as Jesus himself pointed out to his disciples. Love is manifested not so much in high sounding words as in the obedience offered especially in the difficult circumstances of life. He who is faithful in little things, Jesus warned us, will also be faithful in greater things. Again obedience is to be shown in all circumstances, and not only when it fits in with our way of thinking. It is specially valuable and pleasing to the Father when it also includes a 'dying to oneself' and to one's way of thinking. That is when we give to God the first and only place in our lives.

The more pervasive our obedience, covering even the minute details of our life, the more pleasing are we in his sight. For this we would need to train ourselves to see Jesus present in every person around us. Further we would be helped if we could see God acting through the circumstances of our lives, even in the sufferings we are challenged to undergo. Then would he say of us what he said of Jesus, his Son: "This is my beloved son in whom I am well-pleased" (Mt 3:17).

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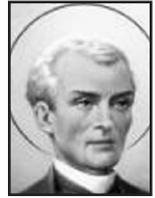
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***“Never work for the sake of success, but to fulfill the Holy will of God.”*** [Advice to directees]

This directive from Fr. Eymard would seem to go clean against everything the world tells us today. Deep in the heart of every person is the secret desire to be a great success, to become a celebrity if possible, to bask in the limelight of the world's acclaim, to dazzle people with our achievements and successes. It is not surprising that Fr. Eymard gives this advice to his directee because from his own experience he would have realized how this desire, if not checked and curbed at the right moment, can lead to endless problems. For one thing, the success which the world values, is often like a bottomless bucket one never seems to be satisfied with what one gets. In fact, the more one is recognized, the more recognition one wants. Besides, there is also the dread that someone else might do better than I and steal the limelight from me. And should someone overtake me, what would be my fate then? I'd probably be left abandoned on the shelf as one more 'has been', a show-piece in the museum of Life!

If it is not the world's acclaim that we are to seek, then what is it that will give us a deep sense of fulfillment? As St. Augustine has said, 'Our hearts were made for you, Lord, and they will always be restless until they rest in you!' Doing God's will to the best of our capacity is the one thing that will truly fill our hearts. One has to experience this in order to realize how true it is. Worldly acclaim while keeping us on cloud nine for a short

while inevitably gives way to a hollow feeling inside, which all of us desperately seek to avoid. But when we experience God's true peace and joy, the kind that



only he can give, that experience not only fills us but makes us desire to be more emptied of the Self, so that we can receive God in all his fullness. Once we taste God's love we take up his recommendation to lose the Self with great zeal and courage, even going to the extent to ask God for one solid humiliation each day to keep us close to him in all circumstances.

Jesus has reminded us: “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete” (Jn 15:11). He invites us to join him in keeping God's word perfectly so that we can experience the joy and peace which the world cannot give and the world cannot take away. If only we would allow God to fill us with his blessings: “O that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways! Then I would quickly subdue their enemies, and turn my hand against their foes... I would feed you with the finest of the wheat, and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you” (Ps 81:13-16). God wants the best for us, if only we give him a chance to shower his blessings on us by obeying his voice and doing his will perfectly! While this approach recommended by Fr. Eymard might not bring us immediate recognition, it will certainly bring us deep peace and contentment.

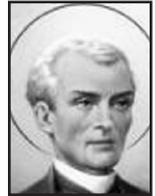
***“Find your enjoyment in God, not in human beings.” [ ]***

Joy is an essential element in our human living. Every single human being seeks to be completely happy and content, even though our experience is that no one can ever be perfectly blissful. There is always an element of dissatisfaction even in the most intense moments of joy, like the proverbial 'fly in the ointment' but it seems as if God himself has left that little incompleteness in our make-up for us to realize that we need to reach out ultimately to the perfect joy which only he can give and which he is in himself. As we have indicated in the previous quote from Fr. Eymard, Jesus shows us the way to perfect fulfillment, which is a selfless fulfillment of God's will at every moment. While this can be difficult at times, yet it is the only solution to our constant craving for more and more happiness.

Psychologists admonish us that 'happiness is an inside job' meaning thereby that happiness stems primarily from an inner attitude towards life; it cannot come from the outside, from wine, women and song, for example! It is the result of a firm conviction that God holds us in the palm of his hands and will never forget us because we are his beloved children no matter how errant we be! His love for us is so great that it moves him to send his only Son, Jesus, to help us get back to him and Jesus is so filled with love for us that he chooses to remain among us in the most marvelous sacrament of his love only divine love could have devised such a simple yet effective way of being with us.

Yet, how many today would not rather spend an hour before the TV

passively watching a serial than in actively giving a few minutes to the Lord, sitting at his feet listening to him, as Mary did! And did not Jesus comment that



'she has chosen the better part no one will take it away from her!' Strangely, while we are passive for long hours before the TV, when we do go to pray, we find it so difficult to be passive before the Lord! Further, Fr. Eymard does not recommend that we shun people, but reminds us that what makes intermingling with people productive is the fact that we discern God's presence in each of them. They certainly have their shortcomings, yet if we learn how to sift through these and pick out the few sterling qualities they possess, we could easily meet the God of our joy. The more adept we become in this art the more we would find ourselves enjoying God's presence and power all around us. Truly with Jacob we could then exclaim about our lives, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven" (Gen 28:17).

Again, when we relate to others filled with God's love, we may readily notice their shortcomings but these do not upset us; rather than blame or castigate them, we find we spontaneously choose to look on them with compassion and love, eager to reach out to them with God's healing love.

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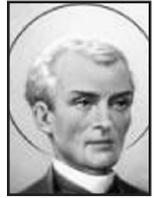
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**“God is always for order, truth and justice.” [ ]**



In the book of Genesis, God's work of creation is described in terms of bringing order out of chaos and when God had completed his handiwork of creation, 'he saw that everything was very good!' (Gen. 1:31). And so, we could say that God is never to be found in disorder and confusion but rather in order and peace, in truth and justice. All through the First Covenant, we find that again and again God intervenes through his prophets and leaders to bring about justice among people. Sometimes, the suffering of God's chosen people is interpreted in terms of them paying for their sins, getting a just punishment for their disobedience. But even here, God ensures that the nations chosen to inflict that punishment do not overstep their mandate. And if they do go beyond their instructions, God again intervenes and brings consolation and peace to his people. We see this very clearly in the oracles of Isaiah during the exile of Babylon.

redeeming presence. God will always be on the side of the oppressed, and even if justice seems to elude them for a long time, he will show his power and love in the end. Belief in this quality of God gave rise to the expression 'on the third day' which indicates the day when God will reverse an unjust or negative situation for the benefit of the entire people or nation/s. There could have been no greater injustice done to a person than the treatment given to Jesus when he was unjustly condemned and crucified as a blasphemer. But, 'God raised him up *on the third day* and made him sit at his right hand in his kingdom,' thus assuring every human person that no matter how ingeniously injustices are perpetrated against the helpless, in the end God will always right the wrong.

It is with this confidence that we need to work to establish justice, peace, harmony and goodwill in every situation. Our very celebration of Eucharist demands that we work for peace and justice everywhere. In general, this is a task that progresses very slowly and demands super-human faith precisely because it involves an overcoming of the selfishness and vested interests of people something most are loathe to relinquish easily. Yet, 'with God nothing is impossible!' (Mt. 19:26).

Two consequences follow from an acceptance of this truth: first that when we place ourselves on the side of order, justice, truth and love, we actually collaborate with God. Even though our efforts seem to be futile, if we can hang on in faith, we will find that in the end God prevails. 'Truth always prevails' this statement is vindicated time and again in the Bible and also in the lives of so many around us.

Secondly, where we ourselves are agents of falsehood, chaos and confusion in our surroundings, we cannot hope to experience God's closeness and

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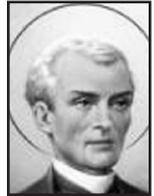
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***“God always draws his glory from personal sacrifice, from self-sacrifice.” [ ]***

It is said that there are only two realities that matter in the world God and Self. These are, as it were, mutually exclusive which means that the more Self there is in a given person, the less God can come into the picture and vice versa. God being our Creator not only knows what is best for us, but also desires to provide us with all his good gifts: “I shall be your God...” he assures us. But for this to happen, we need to 'make room' for him in our lives. And this can be done only through self-sacrifice, or a genuine 'dying to ourselves.' Whatever form this may take, the more conscientiously we seek to root out the Self, the more God can take over our lives and reveal his glory.

St. Irenaeus tells us that 'the glory of God is a person fully alive.' It is no wonder, therefore, that God sent his son Jesus so that we may have life and have it to the full (Jn 10:10) and Jesus not only told us about the necessity of dying to the Self, of carrying our Cross in obedience to the Father, but also gave us a very practical demonstration of it as he walked the way to Calvary and accepted his own death on a Cross, innocent though he was. Recognizing the pernicious influence of the Self in our day-to-day living, several great saints and masters of the spiritual life advice us to request God to give us one solid humiliation each day! The idea behind this suggestion is not that we need to be crushed, as it were, or that we indulge in sadism or masochism but that in this way the Self will not gain ascendancy in our lives. The flip side of

this is that the glory of God will be revealed more clearly in us, to the extent that the Self is eliminated.



Different persons do this emptying of Self in different ways. St. John Marie Vianney, for example, did it through extreme forms of fasting and bodily austerity. Others like St. Therese of the Child Jesus achieved the same result through humility and love in dealing with others, very especially with those for whom she felt a natural dislike. Each one would have his own special method of achieving this target, but there is no way around self-denial in our following of Jesus. The more generous we can be in this area, the more will we experience the power of God in our lives.

A further point worth keeping in mind is that "...God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord'" (1 Cor 1:27-31). This has been the pattern from ancient times and so there is no need to be afraid of following it it definitely leads to eternal life, in God's own time!

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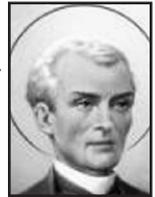
***“Have confidence in prayer; It is the unfailing power which God has given us.” [ ]***

For most Christians, prayer is largely a matter of asking things from God when no one else can help them in their need. A little reflection, however, will reveal that prayer is not meant to inform God about what happens to us, as if he does not already know everything! Nor is it a matter of 'twisting God's arm' to force him to give us what we desperately want, but which he knows is not for our good! Prayer is primarily a matter of disposing ourselves to accept God's will in our lives and obey his every word. Jesus has told us, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Mt 7:21). For as Jeremiah puts it, 'For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope' (Jer. 29:11).

God's designs are the best for us, but the Self is us, because of its limited vision and grasp, cannot always see eye to eye with God and hence resists. When we come before the Lord in prayer, what we ought to do is, first of all, to quieten ourselves sufficiently so that we can genuinely hear his message to us. If we are open and receptive, God will lead us through his Spirit to a complete acceptance of his will and the consequent blessings that he has in store for us. So, the gift of prayer is the Father's gift to ensure that we remain always open to his will for us.

Besides this fundamental aspect of prayer, there is also the prayer of thanks

and praise in which we praise God for the goodness we see in himself and in his dealings with us, or even his marvelous deeds as outlined in the



Scriptures. Several psalms are a good example of this kind of prayer. Nevertheless even here the ideal we aim at should be a totally selfless praise of God viz. that we praise God for his goodness in himself, and not because we are the beneficiaries of his goodness. This kind of prayer is yet another way we could work to eliminate (or forget/die to) the Self in our lives. For it needs great selflessness to be able to praise God even when we have not benefited from his goodness, or to praise him for blessing someone else instead of ourselves!

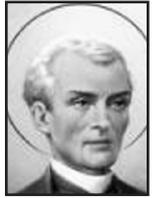
When we speak of prayer being a tremendous power, our first thought is that its power is directed towards changing God's will for us and aligning it to what we think is good for us. Rather, it is a power that works in the opposite direction. In fact, one of the most powerful means we have for changing ourselves (and not God) is genuine prayer made in union with Jesus, or as he himself has said, 'anything you ask in my name the Father will grant you!' To pray in the name of Jesus means to pray the way Jesus himself did in the Garden of Gethsemane 'not my will but yours be done, Father!' Prayer, then, is primarily and solely directed towards aligning ourselves with God's will in everything!

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**“God calls me today, tomorrow will be too late.”** [Fr. Eymard to his sisters Marianne and Nanette, 1837]



instrument so docile and dedicated, what would the Lord not be able to do!?

It is no wonder, therefore, that later when there were several other

eminent personages seeking to found a Eucharistic congregation, Fr. Eymard was the only one who succeeded in setting up one which has lasted to this day. This observation is not meant to pass a judgment on the others involved in similar projects, but to emphasize the truth that God does marvels with people who are totally surrendered into his hands, as Jesus was. He wants people who will not look back, once they have put their hand to the plough, who will not seek to bid farewell to their loved ones and only then proceed to answer his call. It is only those who display a certain 'madness' (Fr. Eymard called it 'exaggeration') in their manner and extent of loving who would really do great things for God and humanity.

This quotation is possibly the most familiar to every Blessed Sacrament religious since it is quoted so often and in varied situations. Fr. Eymard said these words to his sister Marianne who requested him to stay back just one day more before leaving the parish to join the Marists. Fr. Eymard's response shows that he placed God first in his life and would do anything for God, even ostensibly hurt his own near and dear ones. Possibly on that occasion he remembered the saying of Jesus, “whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me...” (Mt 10:37-38). Maybe also at the back of his mind was the fact that it took him such a long time and so much effort to get this permission from his Bishop that he did not want to risk missing out on it.

Often such recklessness stems from a deep realization of how much the Lord has done for me/us! The deeper the realization the more 'strange' the actions and decisions of such persons appear to us who are on the 'outside', as it were but that is because we do not share in the original deep experience of God that the other has had. Where there is deep love, nothing is impossible and nothing is too costly to surrender. Love makes all things possible and love never says 'enough'!

Another possible reason for this almost blunt refusal could have been that he feared his own feelings which could have got the better of him and suggest that he could easily stay back because of his loved ones. Whatever the reason be, it certainly shows his total openness to do God's will in his life, no matter what the cost, personal or otherwise a characteristic which shines all through his chequered life story. In any case, even if he had stayed back, one wonders what he would have done throughout that extra day at home: most likely he would have been restless giving himself neither to his sisters nor to the Lord! With an

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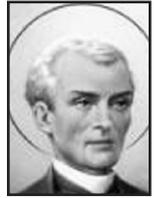
***“Eucharistic contemplation is more active than passive.” [ ]***

Fr. Eymard used to tell his religious often, 'The grace of the Society is a grace of prayer.' Interpreting this we could say that while for most other religious, prayer is a means to achieve the goal or charism of their particular congregation, for SSS religious prayer itself is their apostolate. While this statement emphasizes the importance and power of prayer when entered into with the very sentiments of Jesus as when he prayed in Gethsemane, it should not be set up in opposition to other apostolic activity, as if to say that SSS religious need not engage in any other apostolate because they concentrate on prayer itself.

From the very start Fr. Eymard was clear in his mind that his religious would not be pure contemplatives but would labour at least to bring as many as possible to Jesus Hostia, in the Eucharist. The First Communion of adults was one of his specific aims, and possibly the one thing that obtained for him the acceptance and recognition of his great Eucharistic project. So, when Fr. Eymard suggests that our Eucharistic contemplation should not be just passive, he could mean at least two things: first that our prayer should be packed with action, reaching out with Christ's love to every single human being in need. SSS were not to engage in prayer merely for their own benefit their attitude would have to be thoroughly apostolic and universal!

Secondly, the closeness to Jesus acquired through regular and prolonged prayer was meant to set them on fire with God's love so that they would then

transmit this fire to the four corners of Paris and later all through France. That this is his mind can be seen from his own personal living of the gift of prayer.



While Fr. Eymard did spend a fair amount of time in prayer and enjoyed every moment of it, yet he engaged in all kinds of apostolic activity. When he could not go out to people, he would at least seek to reach them through letters. The majority of his extant letters of some importance fill up no less than five volumes. One could well imagine how his intensely apostolic spirit would have functioned in an IT age with the use of facilities like the internet, i-pods, mobiles and the like!

Perhaps way ahead of his times, Fr. Eymard had grasped the truth the Eucharist is given us not so much as a reward for being good or virtuous, but primarily as the dynamic presence of Jesus whose heart continues to throb with the burning desire of making the Father's love known and experienced by every single human being. Our prayer should make us one with this sentiment and desire of Jesus. Whatever time we spend in prayer should energize us sufficiently to go out to the very ends of the earth with the message of his love! For us then, the time we spend in prayer is like topping up the petrol tank of our car at the start of the day so that we have enough fuel for all the traveling we might do during the day. We do it with a very apostolic purpose in mind, and not just for our own personal satisfaction or pleasure!

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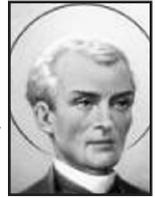
***“In communion Jesus comes to us, abides in us, unites himself to us.” [ ]***

In the first place what strikes us in this statement is that Fr. Eymard places the initiative entirely with the Lord and not with ourselves. In other words, it is not because we choose that we receive Jesus in Holy Communion, but rather that he chooses to come to us. Secondly Jesus comes to us not for our own sakes personally, as if all that he wanted was simply to be with us and enjoy our company. Rather, his burning desire is to enlist us in the great work of redemption of winning people over to a life of free, loving communion with the Father and with one another. And so we could say that as long as this goal is yet to be achieved, the purpose of the Eucharist and our communion with the Lord will not be complete.

Unfortunately, in the centuries following on this gift of Jesus to us in the Cenacle, the emphasis has shifted considerably from apostolic mission to personal sanctification and consolation. We need only look at the kinds of prayers people are encouraged to pray after reception of the Sacred Host in Eucharistic communion shockingly enough, the emphasis is almost entirely on I/Me/My... Even the great prayer of St. Francis 'Make me an instrument of your peace...' is often prayed so mournfully and lethargically that one wonders how many opportunities the 'pray-er' would energetically seize to make him/herself an effective instrument of peace in the neighbourhood that day!

Why has our spirituality become so largely introverted? Could it be that we have not yet grasped the real meaning of

being a Christian? As the Liturgy (see Eucharistic Prayer IV) clearly indicates, a Christian is one who lives not for himself but for others. He is deeply



convinced of the gift that the Father offers him/her in Christ chosen to go and bear fruit in plenty, fruit that will last! (Jn 15:16). Now this fruit that is expected of us is not the virtues that we seem to concentrate on acquiring, but rather the number of 'sheep' that we will have brought into or back to the one fold of Jesus! A Christian is primarily a witness (and that too by the force of his life-style), to the truth that Jesus does make a difference in the life of anyone who surrenders him/herself unreservedly into his hands.

A cursory glance over the entire world today will convince us of how dynamically apostolic we Christians are! Recent statistics show us that one out of every four persons in the world is a muslim a rapid increase that has taken place only in the last hundred years or so. Whereas the Christian community is decreasing in number! The reason is that in actual practice, it is only a very small percentage of Christians who take the missionary dimension of their lives seriously and are ready to pay a price for it. In general the mistaken idea of most people is that being a Christian means primarily something done for/to us rather than something that we do for others!

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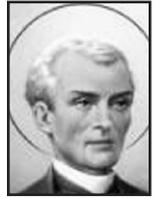
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***“To form the human person is really the triumph of the Eucharist.”*** [Conference]

This quote from the writings of Fr. Eymard once again shows his tremendously forward thinking approach regarding the Eucharist. Most Christians would first of all limit the transforming action of the Eucharist to a change brought about in the 'soul' little realizing that the distinction between 'soul' and 'body' is simply a construct of the mind (taken from Greek philosophy) to help us understand and explain why and how a human being is different/superior to an animal. Innocuous as this might seem, it has tragic consequences in our practical living. For one thing, most Christians are concerned mainly about their 'spiritual' lives, growing in virtue, gaining access to heaven and the like, leaving the betterment of the 'world' to others most of whom are least interested in bettering it; the concern of people in general seems to be to make the most use of its benefits for oneself!

A Christian should have a more holistic approach in this matter. We are human beings (and not a composite of 'body' and 'soul') and our one concern is to make this world a better place to live in for all, for every single human person, so that all can live as brothers and sisters, children of the one Father in heaven! Almost every religion speaks of the dignity of the human person, and more precisely that God dwells in the cave of the human heart and life he is to be found not so much in shrines and temples as in human lives, especially of those struggling to eke out an existence against heavy odds but following the dictates of

their conscience in loving fidelity to his word. Most others would see life only as a 'free-for-all' opportunity to get the maximum blessings out of



it for oneself, with absolutely no reference to others who suffer injustices, poverty and hardships.

By contrast, a Christian is a 'community person' concerned about and working for the uplift of the maximum number of one's brothers and sisters. S/he recognizes that the blessings s/he has received are given not for his/her personal benefit alone, but are meant to be shared with others. S/he realizes that a Christian does not 'go to heaven' alone, all by him/herself. S/he has to take others along, and the more s/he can take the better! It is these whom s/he sends ahead of him/her that will welcome him/her into the Father's glory when his/her day and time draw near. We could say that in his Providence, God has appointed a certain number of persons who will be reached only by me and by no one else it is these he will bring into my life in some way or other. If I work to benefit just these persons I will have accomplished my mission on earth. When each one takes care of his appointed number, the entire human family will have been covered!

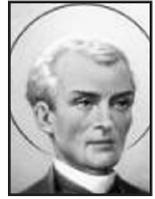
Would that each Eucharist we celebrate and partake of energizes us to spread God's kingdom far and wide, not focusing only on our own personal benefits and blessings. Each Eucharist must make us more other-centred and less self-centred! Jesus invites us to repeat and live out his self-giving: 'This is my body (life) given for you take and eat... it

***“The Eucharist is the noblest aspiration of our heart.” [ ]***

Evidently this quote uses the word *Eucharist* not so much to refer to the ceremony of the Eucharist as to the essence of all that it stands for. Seen from the point of view of Christ, the Eucharist is simply the 'making present again' of the total, generous self-giving of Jesus in obedience to the Father and out of love for his brethren, all of us sinners! It was love that led Jesus to the Cross. In this noble gesture, Jesus broke the bread symbolizing the total breaking of his very life for the sake of his brethren... and then he actually gave of himself on the Cross. And to his disciples he said: (You) do this in memory of me!

Self-preservation is the instinctive reaction of every human being in a moment of crisis. Our natural tendency is to save our lives at all cost, be it a physical threat we face, a social rejection or humiliation or a moral indictment. And often to preserve our lives we would go to any lengths, even to telling lies, to blaming or framing others for our faults or even to ruthlessly eliminating all incriminating evidence be they things or even persons! Against such an instinctive background of self-concern, the example of Jesus is stupendous: that knowingly and willingly he accepted to be falsely accused and condemned, he chose to let the poison of sin pass through himself so as to cleanse the whole of humankind of its destructive power. And when he had done this in his own life, he invited his followers: 'do this as a memorial of me!' to keep alive this selfless thrust towards real life until the end of time.

Thus, the Eucharist invites and challenges us to rise to heights of nobility in which at the first level we freely choose to pay for our own sins. At another and higher level, we show



ourselves ready to accept suffering and death for someone else's faults and failings people who we may not even know in life. All this would be great if we did accept actual physical death in these circumstances. But what is perhaps even greater is that we can accept a piece-meal death, by inches as it were, in which rejection, blame and the like have become our daily bread. Great statesmen like Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and the like have shown us that this is not just an ideal rarely realizable. Sharing in the Eucharist transforms every Christian into this kind of a redeeming hero in that it provides us with the strength of his grace: 'do not be afraid; I am with you even to the end of the world!'

The Eucharist may not make us 'unsung heroes' who have done great and heroic deeds for their brethren, but God never is outdone in generosity: in his eyes every little effort is recorded and rewarded! However, this will be true only when we view the Eucharist not so much as a means for us to obtain something from God, but rather as an opportunity to give of ourselves to the Lord and to his brethren who are in need! May we first of all grasp this thrust of the Eucharist and then have the strength to rise to these heights in the circumstances of our daily living.