

***“Adoration cannot be well done without communion.” [ ]***

In the 70s and 80s of the twentieth century Prayer had perhaps fallen into disuse almost throughout the Church. Many suggested that rather than waste time in prayer it would be far better to utilise the same amount of time in serving the poor and needy! It is not difficult to see that an hour spent in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament would be practically time wasted if it did not transform the person praying at least in a small measure! Our prayer is not directed to merely giving glory to God by using beautiful words, phrases and hymns. God's one desire is that we be filled with his love and become his instruments engaged in sharing this love with others. That is what it means to worship God in spirit and in truth, as Jesus recommended it (Jn 4:23). God does not need our empty phrases, rather he seeks our hearts and lives! He wants to send us out as apostles of his love.

Thus, the key element of our prayer is love the amount of love we bring to bear on our communion with God. Love puts us into effective contact with God in his Word and in the Sacrament of his love. But as Jesus himself told us, we cannot say we love God if we do not at the same time reach out in love to our needy neighbour. Further, he reminded us that the neighbour is anyone around us who is in need it is when we extend ourselves and our service to these needy persons that we truly love God. “As long as you did it to one of the least of my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt. 25:40).

Underneath the dichotomy between prayer and Christian action that we see in

the lives of many Christians is perhaps the incomplete understanding that says, 'Jesus is truly and really present only in the form of the Sacred Bread.'



As a matter of fact, Vatican II and other writings of the Holy Father inform us that Jesus is really present in seven different ways: 1) Eucharist 2) The Word 3) The Sacraments 4) The Church [where two or three...] 5) The poor [what you do ...] 6) Each individual baptized [he who eats my flesh ....] 7) The hierarchy [he who listens to you ...]. The point being made here is that Jesus is equally and really present in any and all of these modes. The presence is the same, only the manner and form of being present changes. And in this, Jesus too follows the pattern of interpersonal interactions that we see among human beings.

Thus no one can say that our 'communion' with Jesus stops with or is found exclusively in the Eucharist or Prayer before the Sacrament. It is renewed there, but must continue all through the day as we commune with the same Jesus present to us in other ways, especially in human persons. And so our prayer must transform our lives... that is the ultimate test of the effectiveness of our prayer, that we become more Christ-like in our dealings with others and particularly that we are able to accept the Cross in our lives joyfully. Prayer and life must be linked: we take our life to prayer and take our prayer flows back into life.

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***“The Eucharist was instituted in the form of nourishment.”***

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It is interesting to reflect that when choosing to give himself to us totally, permanently and unconditionally, Jesus chose to do that in the form of nourishment. This choice has several lessons for us. First of all, it acknowledges our utter helplessness when it comes to doing anything that will bring us into closer communion with the Father. Even with all the helps given to Israel, the chosen race, down the centuries, most of them remained strangers to the God who loved them immensely. Paul gives further witness that no matter how much we try, we still remain enmeshed in the web of sin. Only God could rescue us from this desperate situation (Rom 7:14-25).

Secondly, it reminds us that the very purpose of Jesus remaining among us is that he may enter into the very fabric of our lives. He wants to relate to us as persons and that too through a deep interpersonal relationship of love. Just as the food we consume becomes part of our very being in such a way that once digested it can no longer be distinguished from our flesh and blood, so Jesus wishes to be the heart of our heart and the life of our lives! He desires to inspire our every thought and desire, to accompany its unfolding and to see it through to a successful end. Thus, he would be able to guide us unfailingly towards our heavenly kingdom and ultimate union with the Father.

We notice further that in the question of nourishment, living creatures surrender their lives to permit human

beings to continue living. Although they do not do this consciously and freely, yet there is a kind of surrender involved in every plant or animal that ends up being served on our dining tables. But when a human being (and much more when God himself does this) freely and lovingly surrenders himself to be our nourishment, to be totally lost, as it were, in the one who consumes him that speaks of tremendous love! Once we understand this, we find ourselves wanting to respond to such love with an equally total self-giving love. We would never be able to come up to the level of Christ's total self-gift, nevertheless the more generous we are with him in allowing him to become part of our lives, or in making him the centre of our lives, the more would be our gratitude and love.



Our communing with Jesus should take us further to the point where we too freely and lovingly become nourishment for others. We do this through our words of praise, encouragement, recognition, forgiveness, gratitude and so on, thus putting new life into another. When we can genuinely do this for one another, then we could say that our Eucharist is really working out the transformation it is meant to produce. This approach would be obligatory especially for parents towards their children, for teachers and formators towards their charges, to those in authority towards their subjects. But the Eucharist goes further in that it challenges every single person to give to others as much as s/he has received. It produces an attitude of selfless giving, rather than endorse a self-centred approach in us.

***“Prayer is the mystic ladder, which reaches to heaven.” [ ]***

The reference here is obviously to Jacob's ladder reaching from earth to heaven (Gen 28:12-22). Fr. Eymard often compared himself to Jacob who was always on the move. It was on one such journey, as he fled from Esau whose inheritance he had deviously deprived him of, that God nevertheless showed that he would care for and protect him all through his journeys. In this very fact lies a mystery that God should assure protection to one who was really unjust towards his own brother and that too quite deliberately and wilfully. It brings out the truth, however, that our sinfulness does not disqualify us from receiving and enjoying God's love. Rather it is this unconditional love that shakes us out of our self-centredness, making us realize, as if with a jolt, how much God really loves us.

Prayer can also be seen as a ladder leading us to heaven in the sense that as we genuinely engage in prayer, the most important result or effect of our prayer is that it makes us more self-less and God-centred. It provides us with a deep experience of God and once our hearts and minds are filled with his love, nothing else can attract us as much. In the context of God's love for us, everything else becomes relatively unimportant. Paul expresses it this way, “if God is for us, who can be against us... (Rom 8:31-39). However, it is only genuine prayer that produces this effect in us, and it generally takes quite some time for the difference to be noticed.

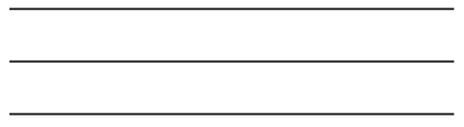
That Fr. Eymard himself experienced this phenomenon in his life

is beyond a doubt. His passionate adherence to God's will in all circumstances, but especially in the founding of the Congregation speaks



volumes of his closeness to God stemming from his total surrender of himself to the Father. Besides, he was always conscious of the fact that he had been chosen for some great work which the Lord had in mind; his great ambition always was to do something special for God. A person with this kind of conviction about his destiny cannot but be close to God, especially in times of prayer, so that prayer does become a ladder leading one to God.

Even though we have referred to this theme several times, it is worth repeating because of its fundamental importance. The higher one climbs a ladder, the further one leaves behind what is on the ground. Similarly, the higher we wish to climb in our relationship with God the more will we have to leave the Self behind. Dying to oneself, losing oneself, taking up our cross each day of our following of Christ are the indispensable conditions for our being able to climb the ladder of prayer. Prayer is undoubtedly the ladder that reaches to heaven. Now it is one thing to have the ladder touching both earth and heaven, but quite another thing to say that we are able to use that ladder to ascend closer to God. For that, the dying to Self becomes a principle we cannot dispense with.



***“Prayer is the golden chain,  
which binds us to God.” [ ]***

This is yet another simile Fr. Eymard uses to explain the meaning and importance of prayer. In the atmosphere of which we live today when so many of our lay faithful are keenly interested in growing in prayer, these similes of Fr. Eymard would be a great help, provided of course, we do make good use of these helps ourselves. Here Fr. Eymard compares prayer to a chain which binds us to God. For any binding to be effective and useful, there must be the guarantee that the chord will not snap or break. The work of a chain is precisely to keep the two elements firmly together and that is what prayer does for us. If we ask ourselves why this is so, it is because prayer invites us to be totally open to the Father and his love. It precludes any conscious obstacles being placed, particularly the greatest of obstacles which is the Self. So, if our prayer is genuine, it not only makes us more selfless, but also keeps us united with God effectively.

Secondly, this union is available not just during the prayer itself. Prayer forges such a deep bond that it keeps us bound to God all through the day. The power behind such binding is precisely the love that suffuses our prayer. We often notice in ordinary living that after we have spent some quality time with a loved one, we find ourselves 'talking to', sharing with the loved one long after s/he has departed! Our entire day seems to be suffused with the presence of the loved one. And the same happens in prayer when it is genuine.

It will be noticed here that we speak of prayer which is different from a mere recitation of formulae. Unfortunately, most Christians are quite at home reciting prayers rather than with praying from the heart. They somehow feel that the prayers composed by others are better and more pleasing to the Father than the faltering words that pour out from our own loving hearts. And yet, there is nothing the Father would appreciate more than to hear us speak what is in our hearts, even if our grammar and syntax go all haywire. He reads our hearts and not so much the literal words we use.



Prayer, Fr. Eymard tells us, is the golden chain it is something precious, valuable, rare and hard to come by and that is what makes it all the more important. For our prayer to be a golden chain it must be the expression of our hearts filled with love. And since love is a living reality, it must be constantly growing through our greater and greater discovery of God's own love for us personally. It is when we personally experience God's love, especially when his love surprises us that we more readily respond in love. When our prayer is made predominantly out of love, and not out of a sense of duty or convenience it would most effectively bind us to God. We would be not only close to God, but literally one with him. As Paul said, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). We need to make the best use of this chain of prayer to maintain a constant union with God every moment of the day.

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***“Prayer is the life of our hearts, strength for our souls, and the measure of our graces and perfection.” [ ]***

Generally, at the start of our spiritual lives, prayer is undertaken more out of sense of duty, or at most as a necessary prescription for growing in the spiritual life. It forms part of our daily religious time-table. However, if a person brings to his/her prayer a generous and enthusiastic heart then the Lord himself draws such a person with bonds of a sense of sweetness in prayer. The person literally 'delights' in prayer, enjoys every moment of it and cannot have enough of it. S/he would like to spend as much time as possible in prayer.

After the initial period of sweetness, there follows a time of dryness when everything seems positively distasteful and tiresome. The former sweetness just vanishes and being physically present for the entire hour or period of prayer becomes a real challenge. This is the way in which the person's sincerity and faith are tested. If the person can hang on through this period, trusting that God is still close, this passage as though through a dark tunnel will come to an end and the bright light will dawn once again. It is in this time that prayer becomes the life of our hearts and the strength of our souls. We undertake it not so much because of what we get out of it, but more because in and through it we wish to give of ourselves to God.

All further growth becomes somehow the measure of the graces God showers on us. The reason for this is that as we grow in prayer, the 'work' that we do becomes less and less. Rather now we

allow God a greater free hand in our lives. Ours now is to cooperate and collaborate with all that the Lord has planned and does for us. God wants to fill us



with his love and once he meets with a docile and humble person, there is no saying what he will do with such a person. As long as the person guards against the re-entry and enthronement of the Self, s/he will move from strength to strength in personal union with God. Prayer will gradually become more and more silent, less wordy and showy, more also a matter of the heart rather than of the head and lips. A greater and greater self-effacement will be noticeable in the life of such a person and simultaneously whatever the person does will seem to prosper because it is now no longer the person alone who does it, but God and s/he act together.

The person also becomes more alive and sensitive to the stirrings of God's Spirit in his/her life. S/he picks up the message with greater confidence and responds with ever greater enthusiasm and alacrity. Thus, the quality or level of our prayer becomes the measure of the graces we have been receiving and the 'perfection' the Lord is working out in us. However, it is important also that the person be watchful and alert to the attempts of the Self to creep in. Where the Self is consciously entertained the process will either stop or begin reversing. For in the spiritual life, if one is not moving forward, one is actually moving backward one cannot remain stationary in one's relationship with God!

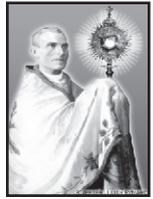
***“To pray is to glorify the infinite goodness of God.” [ ]***

The very fact that a person spends time in prayer freely, lovingly and joyously is a sign that grace is at work in that person's life. As Jesus said, 'No one can come to me unless he is drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. (Jn 6:44). Growth in prayer is not something one can achieve on one's own steam, as it were; it is primarily the triumph of God's grace over selfishness and egoism. Thus, the mere fact that a person engages in prayer regularly, faithfully, lovingly and persistently signals the triumph of grace and brings glory to God.

Prayer is one of the great legacies that Judaism has left to us in the Church. The entire Old Testament and particularly the psalms are a living testimony to the depth of relationship that existed between the Chosen People and Yahweh. And yet, even among them were some who allowed this relationship between God and them to be vitiated by the Self. Jesus himself warns us against the prayer of the Pharisees and their likes, 'they love to say long prayers ... do not be like them (Mt 6:1-6). The parable of the Pharisee and the publican is another example that comes to mind (Lk 18:11-14). Evidently such prayers of people who focus largely on themselves cannot bring glory to God.

There is another sense in which our prayer brings glory to God. When this prayer is made by a person in desperate need, a need in which no one else can come to his help, and the Lord answers his/her prayer, then it becomes clear that the answer came from God alone. And so, to God alone goes the glory. Thus, when

we make our prayer out of a deep awareness of our utter helplessness, that prayer would most likely be answered and also give the honour and glory to



God. Further, when God's answer is totally out of proportion to our efforts, our fidelity, our love and so on, and he continues to bless us in spite of our failings, this generosity of God's love brings him great glory.

Glory is the essential goodness of a person seen in action. Thus when a star footballer excels on the football field and shoots what seems like an impossible goal, we are given an insight into his skill with the ball; seeing this skill in action as he shoots the miracle goal, we 'glorify' him. However, when we see the same person struggling to score at basketball or at golf, we do not witness his glory nor do we give glory to him. So, before we really glorify God, we need to witness his specialty in action. And what is God's specialty? It is simply that he stoops down to raise the lowly from the dung heap and places him/her among princes. When we see this kind of a gesture from God, we instinctively glorify him. We bring to mind in our prayer all the marvellous deeds of the Lord that we have noticed during the day and sing a hymn of praise, or glory to God. Each Eucharist also invites us several times to glorify God, as in the “Glory to God in the highest”, the “Holy, Holy”, the Doxology and the Great Amen.

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***“I lay down as a principle that the grace of the Society is a grace of prayer, and that we ought to be distinguished from all other religious groups. This is your grace.” [To SSS, August 1867]***

These are words with which Fr. Eymard highlighted the speciality of the Blessed Sacrament Congregation that he was inspired to establish. The statement tells us that every Blessed Sacrament religious is meant to excel in the art of prayer, not because he is a genius at it, but simply because this is the grace, the special gift that is given him on entering the Society! Fr. Eymard was deeply conscious of the fact that his little group of religious were people specially chosen by God. He had worked closely with at least four other eminent persons towards establishing a Congregation exclusively dedicated to the Eucharist. All the others were distinguished in some way or other; at least two were already founders of a congregation. Another was an eminent Bishop at the Vatican, and here was this humble Marist priest Fr. Eymard who was finally chosen to be the one who founded the much-needed Society dedicated primarily to the Eucharist.

For Fr. Eymard this was a clear sign that God had a very special design for this little group; theirs was not to be a mere service of reparation, but a service of being disciples and apostles of the love of God enshrined in this great Sacrament of love. Theirs was a special task and hence he was convinced that they would be offered the special graces needed to fulfil this task.

Further, considering the nature of

the task allotted to them, namely, to make the love of God visible for all people, a superhuman task requiring the special impetus of God's grace, he



realized that they would achieve their goal not so much by active apostolate alone, but primarily through prayer, or better through action supported by prayer. Thus, for the Blessed Sacrament religious his/her very prayer is an apostolate. Besides obtaining the graces and helps s/he needed to enlighten others about God's love, his very prayer would bring about the spread of God's love in himself and others. The Lord in his goodness wishes to shower these graces on all, but he needs enthusiastic people with a large heart to receive them abundantly and act as channels sharing them with others.

In our times when people are more drawn to apostolic activity as opposed to prayer and contemplation, it is worth reminding ourselves that the prayer of Blessed Sacrament religious has a double efficacy: it draws the religious themselves into the inner circle of God's chosen friends, and at the same time spills out on to others whom the Lord invites to experience that love. Thus, through their very prayer, SSS religious contribute to spreading the kingdom of love and peace. In practice this means that the key elements like Silence, Solitude and Surrender would need to be carefully cultivated and fostered!

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***“The gift of self is the supreme act of surrender.” [ ]***

All spiritual authors acknowledge that the core element, in fact, the very foundation of effective prayer is the total and loving surrender we make of ourselves into God's hands: 'Silence, solitude and surrender are the key ingredients of effective prayer!' This expression is particularly meaningful to the Blessed Sacrament religious as the initials they carry after their name are precisely s.s.s. As a matter of fact, if one follows the steps of the normal growth experienced in prayer, one would find that after a given period of attraction, one's prayer almost automatically begins to get less and less wordy and self-directed. There is less of mental work, and more affectivity, inner activity of the heart the feelings are engaged much more easily and effectively. This lessening of mental activity itself is a kind of surrender in the sense that the one praying seeks less and less to control the flow of prayer; s/he allows the Spirit to direct all activity in prayer.

The second level is that of solitude and to some extent we can say that even this element is largely provided by the Lord himself. The religious finds him/herself less intensely attached to things which before were almost indispensable. Once s/he begins to descend to the level of the heart, the 'taste' and desire for God becomes more intense. This gradually makes all other attractions relatively less important. Besides, when we realize that we do not really have to do all the controlling and directing, but that the Spirit does a much better job when we allow him full freedom, we find ourselves in a far deeper solitude. We now dwell

more in the cave of the heart than in the head and intellect.



However, while the first two elements are God's work and his gift to us, the third element of surrender is something that we have to do with a certain amount of effort. No matter how much the Spirit might invite or even coax us, ultimately it is our free, conscious act of the will that effects the surrender. This does not mean that this element will remain as a major block; the point being stressed is that the person has to consciously make this surrender as a gift freely and lovingly offered. The Spirit will not force us to surrender, though even when we fail, he continues to invite and attract us forward. When the person can be totally generous in making this surrender that is when prayer produces its best results. That is when we have an adorer fully at the disposal of the Master, ready to do whatever the Lord wishes.

Mary embodies this approach so beautifully in her life-response to the Father. We see it in operation in her response to the angel at the Annunciation scene in the Gospel, 'Let it be done to me according to your word.' And she remained faithful to this surrender all through her life, never once seeking to do her own will, especially if it seemed to go against what God wanted for her!

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***“The gift of self is true love, the only true love.” [ ]***

A person comes to the point of a total loving surrender only when s/he has tasted the sweetness of the Lord. Until that time, there would always be a certain amount of fear and doubt that persists. We see this even among the apostles after the resurrection of Jesus. Although they knew at one level that Jesus had risen and was now available in a totally different manner, yet 'some of them doubted!' (Mt 28:17). It is like a person descending a steep slope: while being confident at one level that he can make it safely, yet he feels the need to grasp the railing from time to time, just to ensure that everything works out smoothly. But when a person has experienced love, especially the kind of love that the Father has for us, over a period of time the inner fears disappear and the person is ready to make a total surrender with no conditions attached.

Thus, on the part of the person making the gift, the gift of self is the result of the experience of true love and also its expression. And when we come to think of it, the gift would have meaning and worth only when suffused with love. Without this love supporting it, the gift would not be totally free, and possibly could be taken back at a later date. But when given out of a conscious gesture of love, it would be hard to imagine the person ever taking it back. Rather, its intensity would keep growing from day to day and in proportion to the growth of the experience of God's love.

It is amazing what love can achieve in a person! It is the greatest force on earth. Among the hundred top love stories in China is the story of a Chinese

man who married a woman ten years his senior. Because of this, society criticized them and ill-treated them both in different ways. So they



left their village and went to live up a high mountain range, alone and undisturbed. But climbing down to obtain daily necessities soon became a real problem. So to make things easy for his wife, the young man began hand-carving steps along the slope of the mountain and the 6000 steps needed took him almost fifty years to complete. Today these same steps stand as a memorial of his love for his beloved wife. History provides us with several other such heroic examples.

True happiness and peace exist in a family or community when every single member practices this kind of self-surrender out of love. In such a family, each member can experience maximum growth in the essential qualities of human beings, especially self-sacrifice. Where it is missing, particularly in the lives of the parents and elders, it becomes almost impossible to inculcate it later in the offspring. In fact, they cannot even understand the meaning of surrender and see it rather as a negative trait, a sign of weakness than a memorial of strong genuine love.

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**“Do everything for God in union with Jesus and Mary.” [ ]**

Once we really taste God's love and he becomes the centre of our lives, then almost naturally we begin to do everything for God. How does one know that one has really made God the centre of one's life? There are several valuable signs that indicate this to us. One of them is that we find ourselves in constant and continual conversation or communion with the Lord. There is nothing that we do or say that happens without at least a moment's pause to find out what the Lord would want in such a situation. And this inner conversation is not something forced or artificial it comes naturally precisely because the centre of one's life is the Lord.

Another valuable sign is that the person who has really and truly made God the centre remains always enveloped in a deep peace and joy. When adversities and setbacks throw everything in one's life out of gear, the person may be ruffled and upset, but only for a short while. Pretty soon s/he regains his/her inner composure because s/he knows that God is in charge and He will not allow anything to happen which is not for our good. It is like travelling by car with a very experienced driver at the wheel. The passengers feel safe as long as this person drives and even when something untoward occurs, the sense of confidence is not lost.

A further important sign is that we find ourselves very reluctant to do or say anything which we know is against the mind of the Lord. We do not want to hurt him or go against his wishes even in the slightest matter. This is done not out of

fear of punishment or a sense of duty, but rather out of love. On the contrary, the preoccupation is with acting to the best of one's ability because it is what



the Lord would like. In other words, his will, good pleasure and earnest wishes are placed before our own comfort, convenience and the like. Love always implies self-sacrifice even in small matters.

Yet another sign could be that when Jesus is the centre of our lives he is never too far away. He becomes part of everything we attempt all through the day; every project, every activity is done with him alongside us. We develop a kind of partnership with the Lord. Such a person is readily adaptable to every situation, he doesn't always seek what suits him best, though s/he is not afraid to ask for things when they are needed. Basically s/he is a confident, balanced and fulfilled sort of person.

Now when we come to the point of living in this way together with Jesus and Mary, we could say that we have reached the ideal Fr. Eymard suggests that we aim at. Evidently this calls for a fair degree of closeness to Jesus and Mary and at the same time, a reasonably serious death to Self even in small things. Once the fear of losing what we hold as precious goes out of our lives, then all this becomes a lot easier.

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***“My heart has always belonged to Jesus.” [ ]***

Although Fr. Eymard came from a family with a fairly religious background, yet he seems to have outstripped the rest of the family in his following of God. The above statement about his heart always belonging to God is true in the sense that even from a very tender age, things of the Spirit held a great attraction for him. It is fondly reported that he was found missing one evening and after much search high and low, he was eventually discovered perched on a high stool with his ear to the tabernacle behind the high altar. When asked what he was doing there, he candidly retorted, 'I can hear Jesus better from here.' This incident indicates his love for matters spiritual even while a mere child.

Keenly desirous of receiving Holy Communion as a young child but not allowed to according to the customs of the times, he would eagerly accompany his sister Marianne to Church for the Eucharist. After she received communion he would hold his head close to her heart and say, 'I can now hear his heartbeat better, more clearly!' Jesus was truly the passion of his life which revolved purely around Jesus and his work.

He did experience the allurements of temptation as any other human being would and sometimes succumbed to it. But no sooner did he realize his wrongdoing than he would seek to undo it, no matter what the cost. The incident about him stealing a feather from a shop to be able to imitate the great Napoleon is a case in mind. Similarly all through his life he retained his little foibles like the use of snuff, but was always ready to drop

it or curtail it if that was the will of his Master.

As he grew older and even as a priest, he pictured God asking of him to give him his heart, 'My child, give me your heart!' (Prov. 23:26). He understood that it is not material gifts or things that the Lord desires of his children, but their very lives symbolized by the heart. And so, he always sought to give his all, the very best he was capable of. For the Lord he would do anything, and for his Lord and Master nothing was fitting except the very best. Material discomforts or deprivations did not matter for him as long as he could be close to Jesus. His physical sufferings were at times demanding but we rarely find him complaining about what he had to endure. Rather he would make light of his sufferings and continue at his task as if nothing had happened.



Perhaps the climax of his belonging to Jesus came when during the Rome retreat he felt the intense desire of being for Jesus what Jesus is to the Father. He certainly realized at this stage that Jesus' relationship to the Father involved a total self-giving and that is what he aimed at in the vow of personality that he took in the course of this retreat. Though he had barely three years in which to live this vow, yet we can say that it crowns all his efforts to truly belong to Jesus. 'All for Jesus, nothing for Self' sums up his approach in this matter.

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***“The awareness of God is the loving attention, a filial desire to please him.” [ ]***

We saw in the last reflection that Jesus was truly the centre of the entire life of Fr. Eymard. And one of the characteristics of this total devotion to Jesus is the constant awareness of his presence and love. Undoubtedly, God is always present to us just as he is present everywhere. But this presence becomes personal when we attend to it, interact with the Lord or converse with him frequently. People wishing to grow in the spiritual life have always focused on developing the art of attending to God's presence even when engaged in all kinds of other mundane duties. Thus, Brother Lawrence was able to commune with God even while attending to his kitchen duties; other great saints brought this awareness into several other spheres of life with equal ease and comfort.

However, it is not merely a question of being aware of God's presence but of engaging it in a loving manner, of communing lovingly with the Lord present to us. At the start, this 'presence' of the Lord is found 'out there' either in the tabernacle or in some holy shrine or place of pilgrimage. But as one grows in the spiritual life, gradually this presence becomes more interiorized, and is localized within oneself, so that the person is able to commune with the Lord all through the day and night. The external presence in the Tabernacle serves only to deepen and sharpen the awareness of the presence within. Nevertheless, we must always remember that such a deep loving awareness is the result of God's special grace. Yet, these

graces are given to people who appreciate God's presence and who work to make it more real and dynamic.



And basically this work consists of divesting oneself of the Self with its constant demands to boost its own image and strength. Once a person has learnt the art of dying to oneself, almost instinctively the awareness of the Lord's presence begins to grow in prominence and intensity. Another way of saying the same is that the person becomes meticulous in obeying God's will, not wishing to displease God in even the slightest matter. This obedience does not stem from fear of punishment or from a sense of strict duty but is an expression of filial love.

Several changes take place in the person's life indicating that s/he is being more and more caught up with God. The person begins to appreciate silence a lot more, almost instinctively s/he withdraws from unnecessary external frivolity, finds a greater delight in reading the Scriptures and in prayer, and is able to undertake great sacrifices and bear humiliations for the sake of God/others. But all this done in a very natural and unostentatious manner; there is no drawing attention to oneself in any of the activities one undertakes.

When a person gets to this level, a certain inner spiritual power or presence radiates from him to anyone who is able to perceive it. His words and actions become more powerful and effective because in a very real sense it is 'no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me'.

(Foundation of Congregation  
1856)

***“An act of self-giving is more pleasing to him than all the apostolate in the world.” [ ]***

There is nothing that God would want more from us than a total and loving self-giving that allows him full freedom to do with us as he pleases. And, of course, the one thing that God was to do in us is fill us with all his good gifts so that, 'seeing your good works they will give glory to your father in heaven' (Mt 5:14-16). God is totally selfless in his giving, and there is never any ulterior motive when he invites his children to enter into deep communion with him. God too, like any of us, is more pleased with a sincere interpersonal relationship with us than with any of the things we might do for him.

Unfortunately, most people think the other way round: that the things we do for God/others would please them more than the time we spend in loving communion with them. And beyond a doubt, it is always easier to do something for another than to **be** someone for the other. Parents often fall into this trap with regard to their children. Rather than spend quality time with their children they prefer to load them with a variety of gifts; especially when children are demanding of their attention they try to pacify them with things gifted in plenty. When we do something for another, we are still the ones in control of the entire situation. But to **be** for others implies a great vulnerability on our part, we are challenged to place ourselves totally in the hands of the other allowing him/her to do whatever s/he wants with us, and that

can be frightening at times.

The most difficult prospect for a person is to lose control over his/her own life. Normally, we do not let go of our control



over our lives even for a moment, for fear that things will go haywire and then it will be difficult for us to regain control. And yet, when dealing with God, placing ourselves totally into his hands should be the most pleasant thing we could ever do because we believe that God cannot want anything for our harm; whatever he wills and does is always for our welfare and good (see Jer. 29:11-12). Yet, dealing with God is, in a certain sense, dealing with the unknown and so there seems to always be some fear lurking in our relationship with God. Once we can overcome this fear and make a generous and total gift of ourselves to him, we soon realize that we are the ones to benefit most from this transaction.

For this self-giving to be beneficial, it must be free, loving and total. Giving of ourselves only partially doesn't help one bit, because in the final analysis we still remain in control. Secondly, our gift would not befit God because when he gives, he gives totally and unreservedly. When God gives us in such a lavish manner can we afford to be measuring and miserly in our giving? Further, when we make a total gift of ourselves, there is nothing left for the Self. But when we do a work of apostolate, there is still the chance that we take at least a part of the credit to ourselves, sometimes without our even being aware of it. Hence our self-giving is more pleasing to God than the apostolate we might do for him!

***“I want nothing but Christ and him crucified.” [ ]***

These are words taken from St. Paul who said, 'all I want is to know Christ and him crucified' (1 Cor 2:2). Paul, of course, knew like Fr. Eymard, that the Paschal Mystery is one reality comprising of the two complementary aspects - of dying and rising. One cannot have the first without the other. Generally most of us would choose to have the Resurrection because that is the more pleasant part. But in his wisdom St. Paul and Fr. Eymard too, chose the more difficult part because if one can be content with the harsher reality, the more pleasant one will pose no problems at all.

It is understood that Fr. Eymard here uses the word 'crucified' in a metaphorical sense. What actually is crucified and put to death is the egoistic Self in us and the truth here is that the more Self we have in our lives, the less room there is for God and vice versa. So, the more one wants to be filled with God, the more must one empty oneself of the Self. Now, whether we like it or not, each day the Lord in his goodness provides us with sufficient opportunities to be rid of the Self. Of course, most often we do not avail ourselves of these opportunities generously. So, consciously asking to be crucified with Christ has the advantage of forcing us to first of all receive the crosses which the Father designs for and sends us each day, and over and above that to accept all those we consciously choose for ourselves too.

With regard to accepting crosses gracefully and redemptively, experience shows that it is generally the beginning of

the process that is the most painful and frightening. Once we have more or less got into the habit of facing our crosses together with Christ, and also of keeping our focus on the positive side, the prospect of accepting our crosses becomes less threatening. In fact, we could even come to the point of wanting and anticipating them with eager longing, not out of any sadistic instinct, but because we now realize the role of the Cross in our relationship with Christ.



Besides, once we have made the connection in our minds that each cross that comes our way brings with it some special blessing, we get conditioned somewhat like Pavlov's dogs in the experiment he conducted. Each time a bell was rung the dogs were given something to eat. Thus after several days of such repeated experiences, the bell was rung but no food was given. Now, it was noticed that the moment the dogs heard the bell, they began salivating as they looked forward to the choice morsel of food they used to get when the bell was rung. And the other way round too would be true: when given food, they would show that they were expecting to hear the bell. Thus, coming to our acceptance of the cross in our lives, the moment a cross appears, our minds will first go to the blessing that accompanies it. And even if that cross is a heavy one, we would welcome it joyfully because of the blessing that inevitably will follow it. Thus, keeping our eyes on the positive side, and also remembering always the unflinching fidelity of the Lord enables us to carry our crosses joyfully and thus participate in the redemption of the world that is continuing.

***“My boast, my strength, my whole life is in Christ Jesus, without him, I am only myself.”***

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Such an expression can only come from a person who has seen from personal experience that without Jesus as the centre of our lives we are worth nothing and we remain full of sorrow and disappointment. Jesus himself had warned of this when he said in the context of the Last Supper, 'I am the vine, you are the branches ... cut off from me you can do nothing... such branches wither and die... they are cut off and thrown into the fire. (Jn. 15:1-6). St. Paul was a person who experienced this truth in a very experiential manner and so he wrote in his letter to the Romans, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate... I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do... For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom 7:15 - 8:1).

It would be worth spending a little time on Fr. Eymard's first expression: Jesus is my boast. That should be the feeling of every Christian after the Resurrection experience. We place ourselves alongside the disciples during the Passion of Jesus and feel what they felt: a total disappointment and hopelessness because all they had dreamt

about their Lord and Master now lay shattered in a million pieces. They just could not imagine what their future was going to be like? But then came



Easter morning with the news of the Resurrection filtering in. At first they did not know what to make of it, but as the truth of the event began to sink in, they found themselves enlivened with a new surge of life.

It is as if a favourite Indian athlete who is slated to be the winner of the Olympic race, competing in a given race has held the lead from the very start. But then, suddenly through a stroke of bad luck, he trips and falls. Before he can get back to his feet and take up the chase, several others have gone ahead of him and he is unable to regain the lead till well into the last lap. With bated breath all wait to see the outcome: will he make it to the finishing line ahead of the others or not!?! He tries desperately, but so do the others who are keen on maintaining their ascendance. However, imagine that at the very last step, our man makes a final desperate attempt and manages to touch the finishing line first. What would be the response of the entire Indian contingent who witnesses the event? They would spontaneously burst into tremendous and prolonged applause their hero did not let them down, after all! That is a picture of what the apostles would have felt on that first Easter morning when they heard that Jesus was alive. When we say that Christ is our boast, we mean that he will never let us down. Our lives are entrusted into the hands of the right and competent person and we are safe: 'And for this reason I am not ashamed... I am confident...' (2 Tim 1:12)

***“To become Christ-like, it is necessary to die to oneself and to self-seeking.” [ ]***

The Father generously and consistently calls every person to be incorporated into Christ, his Son. However, he reminds us that 'no one can serve two masters... (Mt. 6:24). In practice this means, therefore, that if we wish to have Christ and be fully immersed in his life, we have to let go of our own Egos as completely as possible. It is the Ego that demands of us that we be totally independent of everyone around us because it feels that in this way its greatness will be revealed and acknowledged. At times with a view to obtaining this solitary glory, the Ego can deliberately alienate everyone around itself, even those who genuinely love us and want our good. The fatal result is that in the end we find ourselves totally alone, with nothing but the Self to fall back on. And that Self cannot offer us anything worthwhile.

The tactics that the Ego uses to maintain its supremacy is fear. The first thing we are afraid of is that if we submit or surrender to another (and much more to God) we will lose our control over our lives and that we will end up becoming non-entities. This is the challenge we face in every love relationship too: each partner has his/her own idea of his/her own greatness and each sees the other as some kind of a threat to that greatness. And so, instead of their two lives blending into one far better and richer whole, they end up as two islands at war with each other. And the sad ending of this state of affairs is that both lose in the bargain.

What enables a person to surrender into the hands of another, even if that other is God, is trust. And this trust grows slowly and imperceptibly when each person in the relationship recognizes and acknowledges the good qualities of the other. Often this recognition emerges and grows unconsciously. Somehow the person senses that the other is favourable, is not against, is not really a threat to one's existence and growth and bit by cautious bit, the person lets down his/her guard, allowing the other to enter in only then a loving communion becomes possible.



Over the years beginning already with his childhood, Fr. Eymard learnt to trust the Lord and not himself. Over several experiences he realized that Jesus is not only for us, but is totally on our side. He will not allow even a hair of our heads to fall without a good reason. He is prepared to even lay down his life for each one of us. And so, Fr. Eymard was able to hand over his entire life into Christ's hands, and seeing how marvellously Jesus does lead and guide us towards fullness of life in the Father's kingdom, he could rightfully acknowledge Jesus as his boast, his shield and refuge. For such a person, dying to oneself is a relatively easy undertaking. In every situation he consults the Lord and does only what he conveys as being God's will. It did not matter to Fr. Eymard that others considered him to be a failure especially when everything seemed to go wrong after establishing the Society. Putting his trust entirely in the Lord, he struggled on valiantly till the end. His relentless dying to self enabled him to become as much like Christ as possible!

***“O my God, when will you occupy this heart, which was made for you, which craves for you.” [ ]***



One thing that every adorer will experience sooner or later is that one can never get sufficiently close to the Lord. One reason for this feeling is that the closer we get to the Light who is Jesus, the more clearly we see our own faults and limitations and these tend to increase the sense of distance from him. Often Jesus allows some of these faults, even glaring ones, to remain in our lives because they help to keep us humble and not get elated with our successes or blessings. And not too infrequently, he will allow others to know about our weaknesses, and perhaps even speak about them to others a prospect that all of us dread and would not want for anything in the world!

It is in this frame of mind that we need to keep reminding ourselves that Jesus loves us as we are and that our faults and failings do not make the slightest difference to his love for us. Even our repeated failings do not make him withdraw his love from us, as long as we cling to him in faith. It is when we are deeply and painfully conscious of our limitations that we need to ask Jesus to make up for what is lacking and wanting in us and he will do it in his own marvellous way.

Nevertheless, it is good to keep longing and pleading that Jesus take over our lives, no matter what the cost. Some day our prayer will be heard but perhaps without even our knowing it. Our being conscious of the intimate union could be a

danger in that we could glory in it, or imperceptibly take credit for the growth which would then automatically make us lose it. It is far

better to remain humble, conscious of how much we still lack, but with a deep faith that he will one day take us totally to himself. When others point out our failings perhaps even publicly or maybe ridicule us for them before others, if we find that we are not hurt by this or do not feel the urge to hit back or to take revenge, that we basically agree with them regarding our limitations and would want to take these limitations to the Lord to be compensated by him that would be a reasonably good sign that we are close to the Lord. We need to praise and thank him for this, as it is purely his gift.

In our prayer during this period, we continue longing for a total consuming union with the Lord and wait patiently and hopefully for the day when he will respond to our longing. Even if this takes years, we should not get discouraged and give up; there will be sufficient others signs to remind us that we are close to him and in his goodness he will grant our desires in his own time and in his own way. It is helpful to ensure during this time that we do not consciously reject any crosses the Lord sends our way, as these could be valuable preparations for a deeper union with him.

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***“Christian suffering is the purgatory of the faithful soul.”***

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It is helpful to note in the statement above the reference to 'Christian' suffering and not just to suffering alone, which can sometimes crush a person beyond his/her ability to rise again. In practical terms, we could say that Christian suffering is suffering that has a meaning and a purpose for the person asked to carry that cross. When the suffering 'fits into' the Christian pattern of one's thinking, that suffering can be beneficial and helpful in that it purifies us of the traces of Ego that still remain within us.

Unchristian approaches towards suffering would include looking at it as a punishment God sends us because of our sins. God does not punish us for our wrongdoing; rather it is we who punish ourselves. It is true that often God does allow us to fall even grievously because it is only then that our eyes are opened and that we turn to him humbly and trustfully. However, suffering seen as punishment is perhaps the easiest explanation of why we have to suffer, though certainly not the most encouraging one. While God is just and has placed certain unbreakable laws within the fabric of our being, yet Scripture seems to highlight God as the one who saves us from ourselves and our sins. This simply means that when we fall into trouble because of our own stupidity and short-sightedness, it is God who is the first one to come to our rescue. He now not only heals us but also helps us learn the lesson included in that experience and this will help us for the future.

If suffering is not a punishment for sin inflicted by God, much less is it the result of the sins of a past life. Reincarnation again is another plausible



explanation for the existence of suffering in our world. Yet it doesn't make sense when we place it alongside the sufferings of Jesus himself. Basically, we can say that suffering is the natural consequence of our being limited human beings. Quite often our sufferings are of our own making, but more often than not, they also stem from the limitations and shortcomings of those around us. Yet, the primary cause of suffering is our limitedness as human beings.

Further, we often notice that it is precisely those who are conscientiously striving to live up to the commandments of the Lord who are called to suffer most. In such circumstances, we come to realize that besides being part of our human situation, sufferings can also be purifying in that they decrease the Self in us and this is always a very helpful and positive result. The less Self there is in our lives the more clearly are we able to experience God's presence and love. So, we could almost say that the more suffering we experience, the greater are the chances that we are or will be close to God.

However, we need to recall what St. Peter says, 'For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval' (1 Pt 2:19-20).

***“God is mine and all for me.”***

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While on the surface this statement might seem to be highly self-centred, nevertheless it expresses the simple yet important truth that God has made us precisely for such a close, intimate communion with him. The fact that God created us human beings with intelligence and free-will seems to indicate that he wants to enter into a free and loving relationship with us. In the Scriptures, this is called Covenant and is something the Lord constantly invites us to.

It is interesting to note how God draws us into Covenant with him, as is described in the book of Exodus. It is always he who takes the first step and offers us the possibility of entering into communion with him. Seeing us struggling in our problems or as victims of oppression by others, God intervenes as our “goel” a Hebrew term which refers to a blood relative whose bounden duty it is to come to the aid of the suffering or oppressed one. God's intervention is always a saving action he acts on our behalf, pulls us out of the fire, as it were, and then invites us to reflect on the experience. His question to us is: 'Have you seen how much I love and what I have done for you?' (Ex. 19:3-5).

Once we realize from experience, (especially as we reflect on how we were rescued, at times without us lifting even a finger to help ourselves), that God is for us, literally 'all for us' that is when we accept the possibility of entrusting ourselves totally into his hands. We seek such a total union and perhaps go even further, expressing our readiness for it. Yet, there is still a long process to be gone

through. The fears, doubts, anxieties especially in terms of our own survival and growth, have to be overcome and this can happen through



several painful experiences in which our faith is tested; yet in these very experiences we see for ourselves that God still loves us immensely. This part of the journey most often takes the shape of a 'broken-arrow', three steps forward and two backward, another two forward and one backward and so on. It is in this halting and faltering manner that we progress until we one day are fully convinced that God is for us, and so no one can be against us and more, that no one can block our total coming to him.

Yet when we believe God is all ours and is all for us, that does not exclude others; it certainly does not mean that God will not give to others what he has given us, or even that he will give them less. No, God is big enough to love all his children limitlessly and his infinite love for us does not come in the way of his loving others, every single one of his beloved children. Rather than make us jealous or exclusivist in our attitude, our heart opens even wider to include all peoples and share with them this great treasure and blessing that is ours. We would want God to love all people as much as he loves us... and as much as possible we share our experiences so that many more may come to love him and experience his love as we do. True love is never self-centred and exclusivist; in fact, the more genuine love we have experienced, the more selfless we become. Then we find that we want to share our love and our loved One with everyone, if possible.

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

This is yet another masterly piece of advice coming from Fr. Eymard, gleaned no doubt from his own personal efforts to belong totally to Jesus and also from his experience with directing others along the path of spiritual communion with God. There are numberless voices all around us telling us in different ways. 'you are good' while others will contradict them saying, 'you are good for nothing!' Generally people see in us a sort of reflection of themselves, or rather they are struck by the qualities in us which they themselves possess; besides each one sees with a partial vision, and so s/he observes only a part of me. If I base my life and my reactions on these multi-sided and partial opinions of others, I would probably go mad, because each goes in a different direction, and none of them really approach anywhere near the whole truth about myself. Against this background it is easy to see that only God's vision of me would be the correct one, first because he is my Creator, he knows me inside out (see Ps. 138/139), and secondly because he sees the total picture. Thirdly, when God speaks to me about myself, he has nothing to gain from hiding the truth, so he is the only One who will give me an unbiased picture of myself.

What does God see in me? First of all, he sees me as his beloved child. He says to me, as he said to Jesus, 'This is my beloved son (daughter) in whom I am well pleased' (Mk. 1:12). This does not mean that God does not see my limitations and faults, it simply means that these do not constitute the 'real' me as he created me. When a mother lovingly picks up her dirty child who has just come in from the front yard where he had been playing in the mud, she sees first not the dirt all over the child, but

the child who happens to be dirty. She lovingly proceeds to clean him/her up, even though she knows that within minutes s/he will be out in the mud again and will come back equally full of dirt! She doesn't get angry with the child for being what it is at present, dirty - but sees what the child can be with a little help from her! That is what God thinks of me - I am his beloved child, no matter how weak and frail I may be!



Secondly, God sees in me the potential of what I can be if I allow Jesus and his Spirit a free hand in my life. If a Saul could be changed into the dynamic and fiery Paul, if an Augustine could be transformed from a depraved sinner into a Bishop and eventually a saint of Mother Church, we too can rise to immense heights not by ourselves, of course, but by, in and through Christ. While, because of our limitedness we cannot see this glorious end-time picture of ourselves, God can - and so that is what he relates to when dealing with us.

Thirdly God sees not only the potential I have for growth in myself, but he also knows what a great instrument I could be in his loving hands once I really surrender myself to him. He could reach hundreds, maybe thousands of others through me and bring them also to experience his loving kindness. Thus, when God looks on me, he sees not so much my sinfulness, but the great potential that he himself has placed within me. He looks on me positively, with love and a hope for the future. I would be the first one to benefit by focussing more on what God thinks of me rather than on what other limited human beings think about me. This is the basic truth of my life! I am what I am in God's sight!

***“Come as you are and offer that self of yours to God.” [ ]***

Psychology today tells us that each person is composed of several facets; some would even say that we are composed of different 'selves': the real self, the false self, the imaginary self, the projected self and so on. Generally when interacting with others, we seek to 'project' the best picture of ourselves, even if deep down we know that this is not who we really are. We do this, of course, because we want to project a good image of ourselves and ensure that others accept us lovingly, even if their love is based on a wrong appreciation of us. All of us desperately want to be appreciated by others and so often we put on various 'masks' to impress them.

The unfortunate thing, of course, is that once we are habituated to putting on a false self-image when dealing with others, we are likely to follow the same procedure when dealing with God. In other words, when we are in his presence we pretend to be what we are really not! We come into his presence and present a very rosy picture of ourselves. Sometimes we are fully aware that this is not our real selves that we are projecting, at other times we don't even notice that we are merely play-acting before God. Now it should be clear to all that we cannot deceive God and so our putting on masks before him does not help us in the least. On the contrary by presenting a false self before the Lord, we are the first ones to miss out on his blessings. Our appearing before God with a false image and asking for his help is like asking a doctor to apply the medicine on the bandage covering the wound rather than

on the wound itself. Applying the medication to the bandage will not help cure the wound, but in fact, might even make it worse.

Every sensible doctor

will insist on removing the bandage completely first and then proceed to clean out the wound even if the process is painful. Then he will apply the right medicine directly on to the wound and once again bandage it up. This will ensure that we recover fast. This procedure is very important when we come into God's presence. Here, no amount of pretending will be of any avail. So, we come as we are, warts and all, and allow God to attend to our needs as he knows best. We don't make any suggestions to him, nor pick and choose from among the remedies he recommends. We trust him wholly and believe in his love for us. He wants the very best for us and all he asks of us is that we cooperate wholeheartedly with his plans for us.

So then, acknowledging that we are in need of healing, we bring our real, though ailing, self to the Lord and surrender that to him to be healed of our maladies. He is not shocked at seeing our faults and failings. He knows of what stuff we are made and is ever-ready to help us in our needs. Again our surrender will be beneficial provided that it is sincere and loving. Only that attitude will permit the Lord to do with us all that is needed to attain wholeness and that too permanently. In fact, he is the divine physician and delights in restoring us to full health, for that is why he came, 'that you may have life abundantly' (Jn 10:10).



***“Our Lord pursues me relentlessly and I have no peace until I reach a state of complete detachment from myself.” [ ]***

We know that whatever the Lord does, he always does thoroughly and perfectly. Being simple by nature, he has to put the whole of his being into whatever he does. God has no parts and so cannot give of himself in bits and pieces. Thus, when he gives, he gives completely, when he loves he loves totally and so on. When we are the recipients of God's actions they do seem extended in time, unfolding step by step, but from his point of view, it is given in one go and once and for all it is never taken back either. With this background, it is easy to understand what Fr. Eymard reports of his experience of Jesus that he pursues him relentlessly, never giving up no matter what his response is. And it is the same for us too. Francis Thomson has expressed this truth beautifully in his famous poem *The Hound of Heaven* where he describes the never-ending pursuit of the divine Master in search of him. At that point of time, he was an alcoholic and in a pretty bad shape. Nevertheless, no matter how much and how far he strayed, God was always there chasing after him, in search of the lost sheep until finally God wins and he, Francis, finds his way back to the Father's home.

It is true that God is madly in love with even the least of his human creatures. After all, doesn't he fashion each one consciously, tailor-made as it were, endowing each with precisely those gifts and talents, circumstances and opportunities, needed to fulfil his/her destiny in life? As we come out of God's

hands, we are potentially the best, the crown of his creation and if we continually follow his will, we will most assuredly become the kind of



wonderful creatures God had in mind from the very beginning. Of course, this process is totally true only in the case of Jesus, and possibly Mary too, but most of us interfere with God's design and intention for us when we choose to disobey him. The Self in us keeps interfering with God's plans and hence we turn out to be distorted and disfigured.

Fr. Eymard was one of those gifted persons who was able to discern, at least hazily, the wonderful plan God had for him, from his early childhood. And the one quality that stands out in his life is his relentless pursuit of God's will. Whenever he did fail in this matter, he hastily retraced his steps, surrendering himself as totally as he could. Realizing that the Self is the biggest enemy in this process, he worked at detachment and death to self with an equal vigour and attained remarkable heights by the time he came to found the Congregation.

As we review his life, we are encouraged to imitate him in stripping ourselves of the Self whenever and wherever we discover its ugly head. Most often we do this and quite effectively, yet our pursuit of detachment is perhaps not as wholehearted, sincere and tenacious as was that of Fr. Eymard. All the same, we will never reach the heights of communion with God unless we have mastered the art of dying to Self, and the good Lord will continue to pursue us too, constantly inviting us higher and higher up Mount Calvary and also to the top of the glorious Mount Thabor as well.

***“Live in the community, in the spirit of the life of Nazareth.” [ ]***

Since the Blessed Trinity is a community of three Persons, yet only one God, living in perfect unity, we who are fashioned in the image and likeness of the Trinity would need to live in a similar manner characterized by unity in diversity. Every single human being is born into a family and God has ensured that the new arrival is accepted and loved with bonds of familial love. There are innumerable exceptions to this rule, no doubt, yet basically God provides a family for every one of his creatures.

However, after the intrusion of sin generated by self-centredness, even within the close-knit confines of the family there are divisions and discriminations. As a matter of fact, we can say that there is no family on earth that perfectly reflects the love and acceptance of the Blessed Trinity. And so, God gave us the model and example of the Holy Family of Nazareth to keep alive this desire of perfect love and unity within the family.

Of course, we do not know much about the inner life of the family of Nazareth, yet as Jesus is the Son of God, Mary the one who responded magnanimously to God's call and Joseph is described in the Scriptures as 'a just man' - we can reasonably surmise that this family would reflect best the inner life of the Trinity! There one would see the perfect acceptance and self-giving of each member, the complete absence of self-centredness seeking anything for its own with the result that each member would find there the space needed for growth in all ways in the qualities God placed within

them.

Once reborn in Christ, the early Christians sought to live in communities consisting of persons from different families and



backgrounds with the same ideal of the Blessed Trinity before them. This would undoubtedly be a much more difficult prospect because here the natural ties of blood would be missing; nevertheless what was lacking on that level was made up by the love of Christ that bound them all together as one body. Describing the ideal Christian community, St Luke says, 'Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need' (Acts 4:32-35). The most striking sentence in this passage is, 'and there was not a needy person among them.' This early Christian community was the ideal for every religious community and Fr. Eymard recommends it to his religious as well.

In such a community, there is unity not uniformity. The members are not faultless, but when they do fail the others help the erring member to return to the ideal as quickly as possible. Yet, we need to remember always that this is the ideal towards which we strive. As our Rule of Life reminds us, 'divisions in community become the occasion for the triumph of grace....'

***“God has crowned Mary with glory and honour as the masterpiece of his love.” [ ]***

In his goodness God the Father always provides us with a concrete picture of what he desires us to become through the use of our intelligence and free-will. Thus, he sent us his only beloved Son in human form, and Jesus became totally like us in all things except sin. But in the case of Jesus one could always say that he was an ideal human being because he was the incarnate Son of God, and that since we are not we cannot be like Jesus! With this background in mind it seems that God gave us another model, this time a woman human like ourselves crowning her with glory and honour but he made her perfect from the very beginning showering all his love on her. And Mary responded generously by graciously accepting God's outpouring of love and sharing it lavishly with all who came into her life.

The qualities that the Father poured out on Mary are no different from those with which every human being is endowed. Ps 8 says, 'with glory and honour you crowned him, put all things under his feet' (8:5-6). And God continues to bless us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in and through Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:3-10). So, we could say that we have nothing less than what Mary was given - the main difference between Mary and us is that she responded generously and consistently while we are choosy and erratic in our response. Each time we choose Self rather than God, we vitiate and distort the image of God in us, detracting substantially from the glory bestowed on us.

However, from time to time and in every age, God does raise up heroic personages who respond to his call almost as generously and thoroughly



as Mary did. Fr. Eymard was one such person who continually made every effort possible to comply with God's will. He certainly had his human limitations, nevertheless, he responded in a heroic manner, inviting especially his SSS brethren to do the same. He also drew our attention to the supreme means of self-giving in the Eucharist and encouraged us to unite our little self-giving with that of Jesus and present it to the Father each day.

Fr. Eymard also left us the legacy of his filial and loving devotion to Mary. As a young priest he would do nothing without consulting Mary. He visited various Marian shrines not just in the spirit of popular devotion, but out of filial love and reverence for Mary. He put his heart and soul into the Third Order of Mary of which he was made the Animator, seeking to draw as many others as possible to imitate and follow Mary. For Fr. Eymard devotion to Mary was not so much a matter of reciting prayers, or of showering praises on Mary rather, he sought to respond to God's call as sincerely and wholeheartedly as Mary did. Also in his apostolate, he portrays something of the spirit and urgency with which Mary went with all haste to the hill country of Judah, to be of service of her cousin Elizabeth who was with child. Like Mary at Cana again, he sought to reach out to the needs of all around, especially the most neglected of his time, the rag-pickers of Paris, the prisoners and so on. In all this he shows us how Mary is truly the masterpiece of God's love.



What Fr. Eymard would be referring to here is the reception of Holy Communion at the Eucharist. Yet, he certainly would not have restricted its meaning only to this action, but would rather have extended it to anything and everything that prolongs and deepens this communion between the Lord and us. Human experience shows us that genuine and deep love for another person makes one extremely sensitive to every detail of the life of the beloved. Thus it is that love has a different way of seeing, or perceiving, of listening and so on, all dictated by this inner loving attachment to the person. So, if a person is imbued with a deep and personal love of Jesus, it is but natural that s/he begins to see, to understand, to contemplate and to savour the Lord in a new and different manner.

In Mark's gospel when the disciples ask Jesus to explain the parable of the sower to them, he says among other things, 'To you (those who belong to the inner circle of my love) has been given to know the secret of the kingdom of God but to those outside, everything comes in parables...' (Mk 4:10-11). So, for those who have chosen to respond to Christ's call to be his special friends, this savouring, contemplating and so on, become all the more important and demand more effort to achieve genuine communion with the Lord.

If Communion enables us to understand the Lord better and more deeply then it becomes all the more important to understand better what communion entails. The word 'Communion' is derived from two Latin

words and points to 'a common union'. For such a union to exist and develop, evidently both parties have to be ready to let go of something, even of the very core of their being. God, on his side, has given up almost everything except his Godhead when he came down to us as a man he has nothing more that he can and needs to give. So the ball now is in our court. The more we work at divesting ourselves of the Ego within us, the easier it becomes to attain some depth of communion with the Lord.



This losing of oneself needs to be done not out of a sense of duty or obligation but always out of love! Only then does it become truly effective. Once we can take our gaze off our own selves and focus a little more clearly on the Lord, we find that we discover so much more in him. God's ways are not our ways, and so each time we come to him, we have something new to discover and learn. Thus our relationship with him becomes quite an adventurous one, with something new always looming on the horizon. Our effort to divest ourselves of the Self purifies our vision, removes all the blocks that we ourselves tend to put on our way, it uproots all the weed-like obstacles that weaken our resolve in short the less Self we have in our day-to-day living, the more will we benefit from our communion.

Further, the deeper our communion with the Lord, the more personal and fruitful will be our communion with one another on the human level. There is something beautiful in every human person, and if we are able only to pick that out and relate to the person at that level, our communion would soon lead us to further discovery of great riches in that person.

***“Pray for a simple and pure faith in the Eucharist.” [ ]***

This simple piece of advice from Fr. Eymard presumes that faith is a gift given by God; it is not something that we can achieve on our own steam. Faith, as the Letter to the Hebrews tells us, 'is the assurance of things as yet unseen!' (Hebr. 11:1). It means that we acquire God's way of looking at reality all around us. The faith that we need with regard to the Eucharist is one which makes us accept that while we see a simple piece of broken bread, we accept that it is not just bread but the person of Jesus himself. We run into problems as long as we seek to know how this happens, and learned people all down the centuries have spent hours disputing about the different ways in which this can be adequately explained.

The simple and pure faith Fr. Eymard asks us to pray for leads us to relate to Jesus in the Eucharist as a person. And since he is the centre of our lives, we come to him with everything that concerns our life here on earth. He himself has told us, 'Come to me all you who are burdened, and I will give you rest.' Our faith in the Eucharistic person of Jesus grows inasmuch as we realize more and more deeply that Jesus today is not just 'someone up there' but is basically 'here-for-us.' The more we experience his companionship in even the smallest events of life, in the nitty-gritty of daily community living, the more does his presence become real and living for us.

Further, we gradually come to realize that Jesus 'present-for-us' is the only One who can bring us true peace and contentment no one else, nor anything else can take his place! And so, when in need, we instinctively turn to him with

our little problems... and soon realize that he does listen to us and come to our aid. After all, we are his, we belong to him and if it is apostolic problems we



have, then they are really his problems, not ours!

Our faith in Jesus present in the Eucharist, though, must be a quality that grows with time; it should get deeper and stronger day by day. One sign of this growth is that over a period of time, we begin to relate not just to the Lord present in the Tabernacle, but discover that same Jesus present in the core of our own being! Then we begin to relate to him present within us and also in other persons too. This, of course, calls for even deeper faith, because the faults and failings of people around us (and our own failings too) usually prevent us from seeing Jesus present in persons. Seeing Jesus in them enables us to see the good in them as much as we see the evil in them. However, we find that we don't react negatively to the wrong that we might discover in others ours becomes a more compassionate approach, like that of Jesus. We can rejoice in the good we see in ourselves and others and pray that all that is not so good in them may be transformed by God's powerful love. Thus, our faith in the Eucharistic presence leads to better community the Body of Christ, which is the Church and it is built on more solid foundations, on the real presence of Jesus in each baptized person and in the community gathered in his name.

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

Today even Psychology tells us that a human being rises to his/her highest potential not so much when s/he attains fulfilment of all his/her desires or goals, but rather when s/he is able to transcend her/himself. When a person can live for others rather than for oneself alone, that is a sign of maximum growth in a human being! The reason for this is that basically we are self-centred creatures who seek to secure ourselves, sometimes even at the expense of others. This, of course, happens because of our inner insecurities, and so generally people go through life seeking what is best for themselves only. If this good or blessing is also beneficial to others, so much the better, but first of all, it must suit oneself.

Jesus came to show us the way to real and lasting happiness and this way that he showed is the way of the Cross, the way of losing one's life for the sake of the brethren. Jesus not only taught this truth theoretically, but also lived it himself. On the night before he suffered, when he had gathered his disciples together round the table for the last time as he celebrated the Passover Meal, Jesus took a loaf of bread and having blessed it he broke of it and gave to his disciples saying, 'Take and eat, this is my body (myself) which is given for you.' Having made this gift of himself to his brethren to redeem them from their self-centredness, he then proceeded to the Passion and Death of the Cross on Calvary. Jesus died as he lived for others!

As he celebrated this Last Supper with his disciples, he gave them the Eucharistic command, 'Do this as a

memorial of me!' or as Paul put it, 'As often as you eat this bread and drink of this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes' (1 Cor 11: 26-32).



Now Jesus asked us to do this not just as a ritual in his memory. Rather, he desired that his followers too be ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of their brethren. What they do during the Eucharist would be only a symbolic offering which then would need to be substantiated in daily life. Just as Calvary followed the Cenacle, so must our actual dying for our brethren follow our ritual celebration of the Eucharist!

Unfortunately for many the Eucharist ends in the Church itself; rarely is it carried over into daily living. The reason for this is obvious: 'one would hardly die for a righteous person, though for a good man one may be prepared to die' (Rom 5:5-8). To sacrifice ourselves for others is not easy, nor is it our spontaneous choice at any time! It is only when we are caught up with the same love that burned in the heart of Christ that we would be ready to give up our lives for others. Nevertheless, Fr. Eymard reminds us that to aspire for such a life of self-sacrifice for the benefit of others is the noblest aspiration one could have. And there have been several who have actually died in that fashion, notably St. Maximillian Kolbe who literally took the place of another prisoner and died instead of him. The Eucharist does take us to superhuman heights.

***“Adoration cannot be well done without communion.” [ ]***

That Fr. Eymard should give this advice 150 years before Vatican II is remarkable indeed! Before Vatican II it was customary to make a clean break between the Eucharistic celebration and Prayer before the Sacrament, earlier called Adoration. In fact, Adoration was given much more importance than the Celebration which was often seen only as a backdrop or pre-requisite for obtaining the real presence. However, Vatican II has put things in right perspective. What comes first is the Celebration in which we join Jesus in his total, loving and obedient self-giving. But because the Celebration is an action which flows and cannot be stopped for contemplation, we go through it as one whole. Yet, in order to assimilate better what we have done and also to see its implications more clearly and live them out more energetically, we spend time, outside of the celebration, in prayer before the Sacrament.

Further, it is required by the Church that exposition should be made on the same altar on which the Sacrifice had been offered, thus bringing out the almost organic link between Celebration and Prayer. Again, as we begin our prayer before the Sacrament, the first thing that should strike us as we gaze on the Sacred Host in the monstrance is that this is 'bread that was broken'. What we have in the Monstrance is not a whole piece of bread, but bread that was broken during the Eucharistic celebration. From this naturally flow questions like: 'Who broke this bread? When did he break it? Why did he break the bread and what did he say as he broke it? Are we ready to

break of ourselves as he did for the life of the world?' This is one way of linking the prayer we make with the celebration of Eucharist.



The point that Fr. Eymard makes is that when Adoration is separated from the celebration it lacks something essential. It overlooks the very purpose for which Jesus gave us the Eucharist. His main intention in giving us the Eucharist was not primarily that we might adore him present in our midst, but rather that we might 'do this as a memorial of me!' His desire is that we should join him in continuing the work of redemption by uniting our own little self-giving to the great act of his own self-giving. Apart from Jesus, our self-giving would have very little value. But when we unite our self-giving with his, it takes on the infinite value of Christ's own Sacrifice.

We need to show our gratitude and reverence to Jesus undoubtedly, yet this cannot be separated from the central act of his gift to us. Besides, the Sacrifice of Jesus at the Last Supper was simply the culmination of a whole life lived in unswerving obedience to the Father and this is what Jesus would have us continue in our lives. Hence, it is imperative that Celebration come first in our minds and hearts and then spill over, as it were, into heartfelt prayer made before the Sacrament. This prayer too is seen more in terms of us attending to Christ's message to us for the day (reading the signs) than of giving praise, adoration and thanksgiving to Jesus present there. The ultimate grand purpose of Jesus giving us the Eucharist is that we may continue the work of Redemption in his name.

***“I wish to do something great for the glory of God and for the salvation of my brethren.”***

[ ]

From early childhood Fr. Eymard nursed this great dream of his, 'I wish to do something great for the glory of God.' With that kind of a burning ambition in his mind, it is no wonder that he was always restless, seeking to give more and more. However, this reminds us that our real vocation is rarely fully visible at the start of our spiritual journey. It generally evolves as we go along, and is somehow linked with the generosity and abandon with which we take our first steps. As Jesus said, 'From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded. "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 12:48-50).

When God wishes to entrust a project to us, he first equips us with all that we would need to accomplish the task. Every single detail is taken care of meticulously: the family we are born in, the education we receive, the friends, teachers, and other circumstances even the suffering and setbacks we experience are all calculated to equip us for the task. Thus Moses' fault of killing the Egyptian was wrong, undoubtedly, yet in God's providence it led to his fleeing into the desert till he reached Midian. The route he took to get there was the very one he would use later to lead the Israelites out into freedom. Besides, as he traversed the desert this first time, he obtained first-

hand experience of what it meant to travel across desert land... all of which would have stood him in good stead later.



Further, God also provides us with the opportunities and helps needed to launch our God-given project. As we glance over his life, we see that Fr. Eymard discovered this Eucharistic vocation step by painful step over several years and criss-crossing paths. The golden thread that linked all these steps was his burning desire to do something great for God. Besides, the reason why Fr. Eymard desired to do something great was not that he would thus attain fame and renown, but rather that God's kingdom might come with greater clarity. He was very careful to ensure that it was God's will that he always pursued even a slight trace of the Self would have been sufficient to divert him from the right path chosen by God.

As we look back we can say Fr. Eymard did really do a great work for God. Today the Church reminds us that the Eucharist is the "source and summit of the life of the Church." It stands at the very heart of the Church's life and ministry. The quality of Eucharist we celebrate shapes the Church into being that particular kind of Church! And the Blessed Sacrament Congregation is the only congregation (including the Sisters, of course) focussed exclusively on the Eucharist. Most other congregations regard the Eucharist more as the means (providing strength) to achieve an extrinsic end they have in view. But for the Blessed Sacrament Congregation it is the entire Eucharistic mystery, in all its various facets that counts in itself.

***“In all things we should consider only the Eucharistic service of Jesus and esteem, love, and desire only the things that relate directly to the divine Eucharist.”***

[To Ms. Marguerite Guillot, December 1866]

In this piece of advice, as in so many other places in the writings of Fr. Eymard, we see him coming back to the central point of his beloved project service of Jesus in the Eucharist. All the rest is of secondary importance as far as he is concerned. He was convinced that the Good Lord would arrange for others to look after all other aspects of our faith and devotion. He had been entrusted with the task of making the Lord present in the Eucharist known and loved by all. Doing only that much would occupy him and all his associates who joined him in the new Society he started, all through their lives. The Eucharist was the central and deepest mystery of God's love present in our midst and no one could ever say that s/he has exhausted the entire riches and meaning of the Eucharist!

Wise and practical man that he was, Fr. Eymard was fully aware of the tendency in us human beings to leave aside the task entrusted to us and meddle with what someone else has been given to accomplish. This is because the grass in the neighbour's lawn always seems greener! But the tragedy in this approach is that we neither do what has been given to us nor accomplish what the other was supposed to do we miss out on both fronts, to the detriment of everyone. Besides the Eucharist being the central mystery of love contains the most important, appealing and satisfying

truths. Hence, those entrusted with this task have more than they can really cope with. Besides, in this particular area because of its centrality,



there are so many intricacies, that one would need to give to it one's exclusive attention lest one end up with only superficial results.

Further, in Fr. Eymard's time, love was the one thing most neglected, in fact almost unknown to most people and hence the need of extra attention to be given to it. No wonder he suggested to Ms. Guillot when dealing with the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament that they give their full attention to the Eucharist alone. For when dealing with the Eucharist there are at least three layers of work that needs to be done. First people have to be apprised of what the Eucharist is all about the mystery of God's infinite love for each human person. It needs to be understood in all its ramifications on the spiritual, psychological, doctrinal, social and emotional levels. Fr. Eymard insisted that the Eucharist contains the answer to all our human problems and while this is certainly true, one would need to 'dig out' or discover these remedial aspects with a fair amount of personal work.

This calls for a serious effort to oneself live out the demands of our Eucharistic celebration, growing each day in skill and dexterity in breaking of ourselves for others. For Jesus reminds us that it is not just those who say, 'Lord, Lord' who will enter the kingdom of God but those who do the will of the Father! (Mt. 7:21). And then finally one shares these riches with others these three levels entail a fairly comprehensive programme for one's whole life!

***“Great works are always founded on the soil of Calvary.” [ ]***

We could say that if anyone wishes to participate in the grand project that God is working out in our universe, s/he would need to be imbued with the original plan that is in God's mind. Jesus describes the plan in these terms: 'to draw all men together into God's kingdom - one big family of love!' To achieve this gathering together of all peoples of all ages and places, there could have been several ways but the one preferred by God seems to be the way of Calvary. For Jesus himself noted, 'And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself' (Jn 12:32). For Jesus, the great Redeemer of humankind, there was no other way. He himself tried asking the Father to take this cup away, but finally came to accept it joyously and gratefully, 'Let your will be done, not mine!' (Mt. 26:39).

If this was the situation with regard to Jesus himself, it is obvious that all other great works would need to follow the same pattern. They cannot be done except by pursuing God's plan and purpose. Thus we could say that when Thomas Edison declared that he hadn't failed five thousand times in his attempts to discover the electric bulb, but rather had discovered five thousand ways that would not succeed, he unwittingly was enunciating the same principle. Only when we work in unison with God's plan do we have some hope of succeeding. So finally, when we do succeed, we could truthfully say that it is not our genius or skill that brought us to the successful conclusion of our search, but rather that we finally managed to bring ourselves

into line with God's design and then things began to fall in place. So the final outcome is his success and not entirely ours; we have been only instruments in



God's hands and that too as the Gospels tell us, unprofitable servants at that.

The key element in the success of our enterprises, therefore, is selflessness. Calvary designates the ultimate in selfless giving because when Jesus hung on Calvary, there was hardly anyone who appreciated what he did, the magnanimity of his gift to us was lost to all, no one was present to say a word of thanks, none was there to assure him that they would follow the wonderful example he had given. And yet, Jesus carried on knowing that what he did was in fact in line with the Father's will and would one day be fruitful. That eventful day wasn't too far away for on Easter morning, the entire Universe was aglow with the promise of new life. Ever since then, the spirit of enterprise and of generous self-giving has never been able to be quenched by the evil surrounding it.

Calvary is truly the answer to all the great works done in the world, no matter what religion the author might profess. It is not religion that matters here, but rather whether one has caught the essence of all true self-giving which must accompany all great works which are done to last not a year or two but for centuries. The great Taj Mahal, the monument to love, is immortalized for several centuries already but it also proved to be the Calvary for many a worker indeed! We don't know whether they accepted their suffering and death consciously and joyously, but we could consider it as their gift to the world and to love!