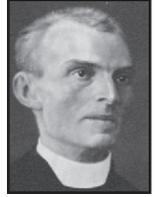


“God's love is the rain of the rainbow.” []

In the book of Genesis, soon after the flood, God promised Noah that he would never again destroy mankind with a flood (Gen. 8:21), and the sign and guarantee of that promise was the rainbow that can be seen no sooner the sun appears after a shower of rain. Even when we see the rainbow today we are reminded of the fidelity of God to his promises. While God does ask us for obedience as a return for his marvellous love for us, yet even when we fail and turn away from him, he remains faithful to his side of the deal. Thus several times in dealing with the Israelites, God remembered his covenant and blessed Israel in spite of the repeated unfaithfulness. To take just one example, 'As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit' (Zech 9:11). Thus, the rainbow becomes for all generations a sign of hope and confidence in God.

The rainbow assures us of God's faithful love, not only as a distant possibility, but as an actual fact. That is what we see in Fr. Eymard's statement above, that God's love is the rain of the rainbow, God's love actually showered on us generously. Like the rain, God's love is productive and fruitful. In Isaiah 55 we read, 'For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent

it' (10-12). We see in Nature that not long after a few showers of rain, the dry parched land begins to sprout little shoots of green grass. The same should



happen in our spiritual lives, but unfortunately, in this matter our free-will comes into play. Unless we are faithful to our part, which is obedience, we could possibly remain dry and barren.

Nevertheless, God's love remains powerful and will produce what it says. While our free response of obedience is absolutely necessary, God's love is so marvellous that it would take almost a super-human effort to resist its sweet attractions. Like the rain it softens the soil and, as it were, coaxes the earth to yield the vegetation it is capable of producing. After receiving the showers of his love on us repeatedly and unremittingly it would take a real hard-hearted person to resist and continue to be unresponsive. Even an Augustine who was so bent on clinging to his self-centred life and kept responding with, 'I love you, Lord, but not yet...' eventually succumbed crying out, 'Late have I loved you, Lord!' In resisting, it is ourselves that we harm, but the positive side of even this tragedy is that we have the opportunity to witness the unbelievable fidelity of God's love. The greater our resistance the greater the evidence of God's love given to us!

“To love God is the substance of life, for both time and eternity.”

[]

We are told in the book of Genesis that God fashioned mankind into his own image and likeness. Later in the Gospels we are reminded that God is love: 'Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another' (1 Jn 4:8-11). From this it follows that the very substance of our lives is love, just as it is the core of God's being. In practice this means that a human being can be fully human only when he lives in love; anything else would go against the grain and end up in self-destruction. Scripture gives us a powerful example of how a person who deliberately closes his life to love finds that his very character and personality gradually deteriorate till he becomes even worse than an animal.

The First book of Samuel shows us how God chose Saul to be the first king of Israel. He stood head and shoulders above all the rest in Israel, and before he could take up the post, God even gave him a new heart, (1 Sam. 10:9) promising Saul his guiding presence. Yet, somehow Saul refused to accept God's choice of him on the grounds that he was only a Benjaminite (9:21) and his own family the least of the tribe, hence unworthy of such a great calling. While we can easily understand Saul's reluctance to be the first King of Israel, yet the repeated

assurances of God given through the prophet Samuel should have seen him through. But somehow he was obdurate, and even though he accepted the post eventually, he never really trusted God.



Before the very first battle he fought, he was impatient at the delay of Samuel to arrive and commence the sacrifice; he took it upon himself to offer the sacrifice. Later when the Philistines threatened Israelite sovereignty with the challenge of Goliath he gratefully seized upon the generous offer of David to take up the challenge. But when David was victorious and all the people praised him even more than they praised Saul, the latter became jealous of David and sought to kill him. He even attempted on the life of his own son, Jonathan simply because he was a good friend of David and supported him. Eventually he ended up attempting suicide, something strictly forbidden to the Jews. But even this he could not do successfully and finally had to request an Amalekite soldier to finish him off. What a tragic end to the one whom God chose as the first Israelite king! God certainly had made no mistake, but it was Saul's stubbornness that brought about his ultimate ruin.

Thus, when a human being chooses to live in love and according to God's plans, he opts for the best ambience in which to become fully human and fully alive. Besides, this love we speak of is primarily God's own gift to us; all we have to do is live it at the expense, of course, of our egos and self-centredness, and this is what makes it so difficult at times!

“May Jesus be adored, loved and served, the rest is nothing.”

[]

Given the fact that human beings are endowed with intelligence and free-will, or as Ps 8 puts it, 'with glory and honour you crowned him, made him little less than a god, put all things under his feet', and they are commanded to 'subdue the earth' (Gen 1:28-30), one could expect great and marvellous deeds from human beings all down the centuries. Yet, it is far easier to subdue even the fiercest animal or to face the ravages of Nature like storms and earthquakes, than to subdue man's own innate potential for evil. Our self-centredness can lead us to ruthlessly bring about untold sufferings on our fellow human beings as we have seen in the Nazi holocaust in the last century to take just one glaring example.

But when a person is able to control his/her own ego and allow love to flower in its place, we meet with one of the best examples of God's creation. While no human being is perfect in all ways, yet when love reigns in one's heart, somehow all instinctively realize that God is present in such a person. And in every age God does raise up such generous and magnanimous persons who serve as a beacon of light to others.

Scripture tells us that one cannot say that one loves God whom one cannot see when one does not love one's neighbour whom one can see. And so, when we can love our fellow human beings as our own brothers and sisters, loving the invisible God is not a great hurdle. But Fr. Eymard seems to go further: he invites us to be 'specialists' as it were, in this matter of loving God, and although he doesn't

explicitly mention it, it also includes loving our fellow human beings as well. 'All the rest is nothing!' he exclaims. In other words, it is far better to spend our



time and energies in loving our neighbour than in building great monuments or in exploring new territories. However, even this can be meaningful when done for the sake of others, or together with a deep love for others.

The great mountain climber Sir Edmund Hilary who scaled the highest peaks of Mt Everest will probably be remembered not so much for this great feat as for his concern and care of the poor and needy in different parts of the world. Similarly Alfred Nobel is remembered today more for the Nobel prizes he instituted than for the invention of dynamite which when used wrongly can bring about untold damage and suffering to millions of people.

Fr. Eymard's prayer and wish is that many more will recognize the greatness and value of loving God and his Son Jesus whom he sent, of submitting our lives to his control so that he can guide them into paths that will benefit the whole of mankind. All the great inventors and discoverers like Thomas Edison who produced the light bulb are a blessing to humanity, inviting all of us to follow in their steps and spend our lives in being as perfect reflections of God's love as we possibly can.

“The love of Jesus is stronger than your sorrows.” []

It is said that if you hold a very tiny grain of sand close enough to your eye while closing the other eye, that tiny grain of sand will block out your vision completely; you will be able to see nothing in front of you! But if you place that same tiny grain of sand at a distance of about two feet from your eye, you will see the grain and everything around it as well. The lesson is simply that everything when seen in the right perspective is beautiful and meaningful. Applying this lesson to our sufferings, we notice that when we focus exclusively on our pains and worries, they seem to become much larger than they actually are. They not only occupy all our time and energy, but they tend to drag a lot of others into the picture as well. Blown out of proportion, they overwhelm us leaving us with a feeling of helplessness.

In a paraphrase of Ps. 32 we read, 'The faithful and the faithless both suffer the uncertainties and insecurities of this life, but the child of God can depend always on the love of his Father. It is for this reason that there is light even in the midst of darkness, incomprehensible joy in the midst of sorrow and we can find a measure of happiness and well-being regardless of the circumstances that surround us (Leslie Brandt, *Psalms Now*, p. 52).

When we feel we are being overwhelmed by our crosses, it is time to counter-balance them with some other truths which Jesus has placed before us. We need to recall sentences like, 'I have loved you with an everlasting love'... (Jer. 31:3) 'You are mine,' (Is 43:1) 'every hair

of your head has been numbered and not one falls without your Father permitting it,' (Lk. 21:18) 'do not be afraid, you are worth much more than many sparrows...' (Mt. 10:29). While undergoing the cross if we can remember that Jesus too carried a heavy burden all the way to Calvary and finally died on it like a criminal, we soon realize that our crosses are nothing in comparison and he did that while he was totally innocent of any crime! Further, while on the way to Calvary it was Simon of Cyrene who helped Jesus carry his cross, now it is Jesus who helps us carry ours. He will never abandon us in our crises.



This truth is further highlighted in the story of 'Footprints in the Sand' where we are told in the final sentences that if there is only set of footprints during times of trial, it is because in those difficult moments, "I was carrying you in my arms, and the footprints are mine, not yours!" When we look at our sufferings in the right perspective, we see in them an opportunity not only to experience God's special love for us, but also a chance for us to show our steadfast love for God. Love is proved only at some cost to ourselves; if there is no self-sacrifice involved, our love would not be worth much. The greater the self-sacrifice, the greater the love it manifests! So, in times of trial it is best not to focus on ourselves, but on the Lord and on others, on those suffering perhaps more than we are and then we could be of some help to them in their trials.

“When you move with God’s grace your work becomes so beautiful.” []



Today scientists are discovering more and more the immeasurable beauty of God’s creation, especially in the great big Universe the Lord has created. Whatever God does is exquisite and a reflection of his own infinite perfection and beauty. Take the human eye, for example: what marvellous power of adjustment it has that automatically enables it adjust to the amount of light there is, to the dust and pollutants in the air, to the strength of the nerves linking it with the brain and the result is that we are able to see the object perfectly in all its beautiful colours. The camera which is but a pale imitation of the human eye, needs so many miniscule parts to enable it to function to even one hundredth of the capacity of the human eye. So, we can say that everything God does is a work of art, filled with beauty and perfection.

undertake would be filled with God’s power and skill and end up becoming something marvellous and praise-worthy. While this is true of all that we do, it is

especially true of things in the spiritual realm. If we train ourselves to speak only when genuinely moved by God’s Spirit and in the way God would want us to speak, we can be sure that our words would be life-giving and inspiring, and in no way harmful to the other. As Paul says, ‘Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law’ (Rom 13:8).

What peace-filled communities would we not have if all of us could act on this principle, that whatever we do, we do it in union with the Lord who abides in us! Peter acting in union with Jesus was able to make the crippled beggar to walk perfectly: ‘In the name of Jesus I say to you, walk!’ (Acts 3:1-12). Later when people were gearing up to enthusiastically honour Peter and John, he immediately reminded them that it was in the name of Jesus that he had done the great deed, and not by some power of his own and so the praise was to be given to Jesus. When we act in unison with God our works become not only powerful but also beautiful, pleasant to see and experience and the praise goes to God alone!

It stands to reason then, that whatever we humans do will also be a work of art and perfect when we place ourselves totally in God’s hands and allow him to act in and through us. For this to happen at its highest, we would need to be totally divested of the Self, as was Mary even from the start when she uttered her *Fiat* and *Magnificat*. Mary was literally and perpetually a ‘handmaid of the Lord’ letting it be done to her according to the word of the Lord. And that is why whatever was done through Mary turned out to be a miracle, a ‘marvel in our eyes, indeed we were glad’ (Ps. 126).

If we too could be divested of the Self completely, then whatever we too

“Don't reflect so much in your meditation; it's better to make acts of virtue.” []

A simple common definition of prayer is that it is 'a loving heart-to-heart conversation with God.' It stands to reason then that the bulk of our prayer should consist of this loving conversation and not mere head-level reflection. For when we reflect, we are, as it were, engaged with ourselves mainly. Our attention is not so much on the one we are conversing with; we are engaged in understanding the truth or appreciating the message of a particular passage of Scripture. The reflection part is important in prayer and cannot be altogether avoided, because it provides us with the insights over which we later will converse with God. But, the thinking is merely the starting point and so one should not remain there for too long. In general, this principle would hold true of all prayer: the more heart and less head there is in it the better; the less Self there is, the more of prayer there is likely to be! Or again, the less thinking there is in our prayer, the more likely will it be filled with bursts of praise and thanks.

Unfortunately, we often spend a lot of time in reflection perhaps because this pleases our intellect; we seem to like to move from point to point making progress in our understanding of a particular truth. We fail to understand though, that this is not the purpose and goal of prayer. That kind of reflection would be alright outside of prayer, or even as a preparation for prayer. But the time set apart strictly for prayer should be spent in actual union with the Lord.

The acts spoken of here could be acts

of praise and thanksgiving, of petition and contrition, or of adoration and love, according to the situation. Here too it is more helpful to make these acts



spontaneously even if our language is not grammatically correct or elegant and bereft with idioms and beautiful phrases. What should be avoided at all costs is reciting prayers from a book. This may be tolerated for a beginner, but even then, not for long. The more we put ourselves into our prayer, the better the prayer is likely to be. God wants to commune with us and the language we use is only a means of achieving this union. High sounding phrases could often be a substitute for really putting our heart into our prayer, and they run the risk of being artificial and insincere. There is no objection to using a hymn or poem occasionally to express our feelings as long as we are careful to keep the focus very clearly on God.

As a person grows in the art of prayer, it will be noticed that the prayer becomes more and more silent; only a few words suffice. Now it is the heart that 'speaks' and the heart does not need many words to express itself adequately. Often merely a 'glance of love' is enough. Even a simple, uneducated person who loves much, can spend hours in very fruitful prayer of this kind. For such a person, time spent with his/her beloved simply flies, without one being aware of the passage of time!

“Holy Communion is the strength and grace of your spiritual life.” []

In Fr. Eymard's time more importance was given to the reception of Holy Communion than to the celebration of the Eucharist. Hence, it is not surprising that he sees the strength and grace of the spiritual life as coming from this Communion. With a better understanding of the Eucharist today, we realize and emphasize that what comes first is the Eucharistic celebration. It is here that the Father reminds us of his infinite love through the reading of the Scriptures. Next, he invites us into Covenant with him to which he expects a response. We give this answer in words as we re-affirm our faith in him and accept God as the centre of our lives. We then bring up the gifts of bread and wine as symbols of our self-offering and after these are transformed into Christ during the Eucharistic Prayer, we offer the 'acceptable sacrifice' (Christ's and ours together with his) to the Father.

It is only in this context of the Covenant that we then join in the Eucharistic meal of love. We first recall our Christian identity as we recite the Lord's Prayer and after some preparation we share in the bread broken and the Cup shared. While it is true that this sharing does bring us strength, it does not happen mechanically or magically. We are invited to enter into an interpersonal communion with the Lord which implies at least a little conscious realization of the depths of his love for us and an exchange of our love for him.

Today we would see Holy Communion not so much as strength

given to me personally to live a good Christian life, but we regard it as an empowering of the whole Church through a deeper union with Jesus so that we



may go out and fulfil our mission during the day. A Christian is primarily a missionary sent by Jesus, just as Jesus was sent by the Father! His mission is to be salt of the earth, light of the world and leaven in the dough, wherever s/he is placed and whatever be his/her occupation or profession. We carry out this mission not as individuals cut off from Christ, depending on our own resources, as it were. Rather, it the Lord who works out the mission with us as his instruments. So, all we need to do is remain close to him and take our orders, hour by hour, from him who is the Lord and Master. He assures us that all that we need to fulfil this mission will be provided us in good time and in appropriate measure.

We are like the people to whom the vineyard has been leased out (Mt. 20:33-41). Before leasing it out the owner prepares the soil, erects a fence all round it, builds a watch-tower, even plants the shoots and then hands it over to us. Our work is comparatively very little, yet important and necessary for a plentiful harvest. At harvest time, we are expected to hand over his share of the produce in good time. In our case, the produce will be the number of people with whom we have shared the good news and thus brought into the kingdom, teaching them all that the Lord has taught us. We notice that all this involves far more activity on our part than a mere passive reception of communion!

“Little trials always turn to good.” []

We could take this observation of Fr. Eymard a lot further in the sense that all trials turn to our good. St. Paul reminds us that for those who love God, everything works for their good (Rom 8:28). We shall briefly review the blessings that accrue from the little crosses the Lord sends us each day. First of all, each set-back or cross reminds us of our innate weakness and the need to remain closely united with the Lord. As Jesus said, 'I am the vine and you are the branches... without me you can do nothing... unless the branch remains united with the vine it cannot produce any fruit... My Father is the vinedresser... he prunes every branch that produces fruit, so that it may produce even more (Jn 15:1-7). We often notice that when everything goes well with us, we tend to forget God and our need of him. So these trials help bring us back to the right path.

Secondly, while the Lord does send us trials, he never abandons us in our difficulties. But the help he offers us is meant to be passed on to others when we see them struggling with their difficulties. Paul admonishes us, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God' (2 Cor 1:3-4). Thus our sufferings help us to understand the need of our neighbour and encourage us to reach out to them. 'Do unto others what you would have them do to you' (Mt. 7:12) is a very valuable rule to follow in such situations.

Thirdly, each trial comes to us with a message indicating what we can learn from it. When we take the time and trouble to discover what that



message is and what we can learn from it, we are better prepared for the future. Thus, we keep growing in all ways into Christ, which ultimately is the goal of our life here on earth. Further, our trials generally come from the people around us, from their lack of concern, forgetfulness or sometimes even sheer malice. While we realize painfully how much harm is done by them not correcting such attitudes in themselves, we are reminded that we too have our own faults and failures which correspondingly bring pain to others. We become more sensitive to our habits and behaviour, especially those aspects that have an impact on others. Here we invoke the other side of the dictum given above: 'Do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you!'

And finally our trials and sufferings contribute to 'make up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ' (Col. 1:24) for the redemption of the world. Through our suffering we share in the work of redemption. We also realize that we are here on a journey. It is only when we reach our Father's home that we will be rid of all suffering. So, we are encouraged to long for the 'Promised Land' and to make every effort to get there. We remember too that no one gets to heaven alone (or even to hell, for that matter) we always take others with us. And so, we work to get as many as possible to understand the redemptive value of suffering and benefit from it.

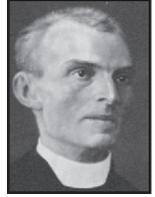
“Love of Jesus is like fire, we must place ourselves close to the fire to feel it.” []

To appreciate this observation of Fr. Eymard we need to recall that we feel the need of warmth only when we are caught out in the cold. The colder the surroundings, the more we draw near to the fire, if there is one. When we experience our innate helplessness, our brokenness and inability to handle difficult situations we appreciate the strength and power of Christ, our Saviour. St Paul expresses this powerfully when he writes, '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! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin' (Rom 7:22-25).

A desperately hungry person appreciates the food that is given him, even if it be not to his liking and taste; a drowning person will clutch at any straw in the hope of preventing his drowning. Thus, only when we have experienced what it means to live without love, or with the wrong kind of love - that is when the love of Jesus becomes like a fire, inviting us to relax in its warmth. “Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If one offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned” (Song

of Solomon 8:6-7).

We are invited to feel the fire of Christ's (God's) love in each Eucharist we celebrate. The readings, while showing us how God



dealt with different people in a variety of situations in the past, assure us that he will treat us in exactly the same manner today, ie with infinite and unconditional love. If we can consciously work to discover these qualities of God's love in each reading we listen to, be it in the Liturgy or outside, we would certainly feel the fire of this love and be attracted to it much more than we are to all other kinds of love. The trouble, of course, is that we do not often look for God's qualities when listening to the readings of Scripture; we seem to enjoy focussing more on ourselves and what we need to do to respond to whatever is said in the reading. This certainly needs to be done too, but it must come after we have picked out God's qualities.

To do this work successfully, we would need to listen 'with the heart' which is something quite different from listening 'with the head.' When we listen with the intellect alone, we look for ideas, for meaning and aim primarily at understanding, but listening with the heart puts us in touch with feelings and it brings about a communion between two hearts and minds these are the real elements that bring warmth to our cold hearts. And the best part is that once we have tasted this love and have learnt how to come in contact with it, we will not give it up for anything else in the world!

“Everything comes when we need it.” []



Irrespective of the context in which Fr. Eymard would have made this remark, there is a lot of truth in it, if we are able to understand what it implies. When God created the world, he definitely had a certain plan about how to go about doing this mighty work. Some authors call this the 'intention' or God, others refer to it as 'the vision' he had for the Universe. Whatever the name we use, the idea is that things do not unfold in this world just haphazardly, but follow a certain plan which God followed in his work of creation. Basically the plan is 'to bring all things together under Christ' in unity, fellowship, love and peace (Eph. 2:1-22).

So, when a person quite consciously and purposefully aligns him/herself with this plan of God, the experience is that everything falls into its proper place almost effortlessly. One meets the right kind of persons, finds the most suitable materials or sources from where what is most needed can be obtained, discovers the best way to achieve it literally everything falls into place like a jigsaw puzzle. When we see this happening we should not attribute it to our capacity to organize things, or for remembering details and things read or done in the past... nor to chance or sheer good luck. It is simply the underlying plan of God that is being fulfilled. St. Paul put it this way, 'We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose' (Rom 8:28).

The important thing then is to see that we are perfectly aligned with God's plan. The only thing that interferes with

God's work is the Self, and so the more energetically we work to eliminate the self, or better, the more we entrust this destructive Self into the hand of God who is

ultimately in charge of everything, the easier it is for everything to come together at the right time and in the right place.

An example from Fr Eymard's life may help. He had been trying desperately to enter the Seminary at Grenoble in order to become a priest. But for this he needed a letter of recommendation from the Parish Priest who was hostile towards young Eymard. So, he decided to go without it and see what happens. Before entering the Seminary he dropped in at the Church which wasn't far away for a visit. And whom does he meet there but Bishop de Mazenod to whom he explained his plight. The Bishop offered to come personally and explain matters to the Rector the upshot of it all was that Eymard was accepted as a seminarian without any recommendation letter!

Many people have such experiences in their lives, even today. And that is not because they are particularly holy or great saints. The important thing is that what we desire must be in line with God's will only then can we expect everything to fall in place as Fr. Eymard suggests. In fact, often we don't need to do anything much to bring this about, not even to pray it just happens because in his goodness, God wants the best for us, his beloved children.

“The truth of Jesus resembles the light.” []

Jesus reminds us forcefully, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life” (Jn 8:12). And again a little later in the Gospel he repeated, “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light” (Jn 12:35-36). Jesus is the light because he lives in the very presence of the Father and in him he sees the fullness of truth. And while 'the law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known' (Jn 1:17-18).

It is helpful to remind ourselves that the light does not create things around us. It simply shows us what is there present already. When a person enters a dark room, s/he does not easily see the furniture that is already in the room; in fact, s/he might even feel that the room is empty and devoid of all furniture. Yet, the moment the light is switched on, s/he sees whatever is present in the room. Similarly, the truth that Jesus reveals to us shows us who we really are in God's sight: his precious, beloved children! Unfortunately, most people find it difficult to believe this because all *they* see is their faults, weaknesses and limitations their real beauty remains hidden under this pile of 'rubbish.' And, taking this rubbish to be the 'truth' they go

through life condemning themselves and end up in even greater trouble!



If we wish to live by the light that Jesus provides for us, we must live by his words: “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (Jn 8:31-33). We will not experience the power of these words of Jesus until we begin to put them into practice. We need to constantly remind ourselves that we are God's beloved children, that he is madly in love with us, constantly pleading that we but give him a chance to shower his blessings on us. In Ps. 81 God laments “O Israel, if you would but listen to me! Open your mouth wide and I will fill it. But my people did not listen to my voice; Israel would not submit to me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels. O that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways! (8-13).

God's truth does at times sound stranger than fiction and his love for us seems to be unbelievable. Yet, if we can hold on to the truth, we are the ones who stand to gain always. The light shows us both what is good and what is bad; if we can focus on the good, there is no need to fear the light! However, knowing the truth alone is not enough, we need to live by this truth and realize its full potential. And when we practice what the truth teaches us, we find that it becomes all the more easy to understand the further truths that come our way. And thus, we move from strength to strength unto the very fullness of God!

“What is better or more beautiful than the Eucharist?” []

Even though in his times, Fr. Eymard did not have all the benefits of the Vatican II Council and reform, he had a fairly deep grasp of what the Eucharist means in the life of a committed Christian. For him, Eucharist was not merely the Real Presence of Jesus in the sacred host, or Jesus truly dwelling in our Tabernacles all over the world. More than that, it was the Celebration in which God invites us to share his very life and love. Fr. Eymard certainly could not have used the vocabulary that we use today, words and concepts like Covenant, Paschal Mystery, Berrakah and so on, but for him the Eucharist was the mystery of God's infinite love made available for us.

In fact, it is such a great mystery that we would never be able to fathom its depths completely in our lifetime. Even when we concentrate on just one aspect at a time, we can barely assimilate all that it offers us and also demands of us. Fr. Eymard often returns to the theme of the 'banquet' aware that it is here that we are spiritually nourished and equipped to carry out our mission of spreading knowledge and experience of God's love. The liturgy of the Word was for him, not merely a part of the Eucharist, but the very beginning of our communion with the Lord. Further, the sacramental communion was a real meeting of two persons in loving communication. It is not surprising that several of his deepest insights and even inspirations regarding the founding of the Blessed Sacrament Congregation were received during the 'Thanksgiving' after celebrating Eucharist.

Further, during his Great Retreat of

Rome in 1865, he had the privilege of discovering a real treasure the Interior Cenacle, wherein Christ dwells with us all through the day. This again was not



just a passing insight received once in the fervour of a retreat and then forgotten or only haphazardly utilized. He fostered this awareness of the inner presence in a way that made a real difference in his behaviour. From then on, his relationship with his confreres, his ability to accept all kinds of suffering, both physical and emotional was truly phenomenal. Earlier, his joy was simply to be able to have his living room as close to the Chapel as possible. In fact, when he did get a room with a window opening out into the sanctuary of the Chapel, he was delighted, even though it offered very little other comforts.

From 1865 on, it did not matter where he lived, or where he went, for he carried his divine Master with him everywhere. He communed with him throughout the day and so we can imagine what the depth of his communion with the Lord was during the Eucharistic celebration itself. He would take no decision without first consulting his Master, make no move without seeking his divine pleasure. In fact, it was truly the Covenant lived God and he became one person, as it were. He always wanted to be for Jesus, what Jesus himself was to the Father, totally available and at the service of the Lord. And so, when he observes that there is nothing more beautiful than the Eucharist, he surely knew what he was talking about. What he would wish most for his followers is that they too discover this great treasure no matter what the price!

“Blessed is the one who has nothing and clings to nothing.”

[]

Perhaps another important truth that Fr. Eymard realized deeply was the havoc that the Self plays in the spiritual life. He realized from his personal experience that no matter how careful a person was, the Self could very cleverly insinuate itself and vitiate even the noblest of spiritual enterprises. And that is why he sought always to divest himself of the Self, as soon as he discovered any of its crafty manoeuvres in his life. He was particularly aware that one of the most subtle moves of the Self is to make a person cling to external, material possessions in the belief that these give the person status, meaning and value.

Even as a young priest, he would often give away food, clothing and even other essentials to the poor who, he always maintained, were more in need than himself. In fact, as long as his sisters looked after his material needs as the caretakers of his rectory, they hid many of these possessions so that he would not give them away to the first needy person who came his way. Later, as a religious he was even more generous with the poor and needy, seeking literally to cling to nothing and allow no material possessions to come in his way. Even so, he would often chide himself for his attachment to little things like the use of snuff that he relished but even this was relinquished some time before his death.

However, it is important to note that mere stripping oneself of such material possessions does not necessarily imply that one is close to God. This is only one side of the coin and a pretty negative one

too. The other side, communion with God, does not come automatically but needs careful cultivation which is what Fr. Eymard did. Nevertheless, he did experience the freedom that comes from not being attached to material things. He was never fastidious about the food he ate, nor about his external appearance. As part of this approach, he ensured that he kept himself usefully occupied with a thousand different projects seeking always to give of his best to the Lord whom he had been called to serve.



After founding the Congregation, one of his biggest disappointments was to notice how some of those who applied to join the newly founded group were more interested in feathering their own nests rather than on furthering the kingdom of God's love and peace. Often, even the novices he trained did not come up to his expectations. His main desire, however, was that they should place no obstacles to their growth in the spiritual life! His earnest desire was that they should attain the highest level of communion with the Father, as that was the ultimate goal and purpose even of the Eucharist in which Jesus gifted himself to us so generously. It is worth noting that when he started the Blessed Sacrament Congregation, all he had with him was a knife and spoon and a paltry sum of a few francs yet he possessed an interior joy that no one could take away from him! Even later on, there weren't too many things that he could boast of having he had trained himself to do without quite a number of things others would have thought essential.

“Life has no charm or power except through the divine Eucharist.” []

A statement like this could come only for a person who has tasted the deeper delights of the Eucharist, particularly the fidelity of God to his promises. After all, every human being seeks peace and happiness, and above all personal fulfilment in life. But at the same time, every person realizes that he cannot achieve this all by himself. The Christian paradox is precisely that the more one loses oneself for God's sake and for the sake of his kingdom, the more one gains in life. It is only in giving that we receive, in forgiving that we are pardoned and in dying that we are born to eternal life as St. Francis of Assisi observed in his meaningful prayer for peace.

Unfortunately, it is really difficult to accept this truth merely on the authority of someone else, no matter how highly placed that person be! In spite of hearing it enunciated several times and in different ways, one still feels one could attain the fullness of life apart from God's plan and will. And so, people set off in different directions searching for their fulfilment in diverse situations, only to return to the starting point, frustrated, empty and disillusioned. Happy the person who discovers his error early in life so that he can at least enjoy the remaining part of it, based on the personal wisdom he has attained. Perhaps the best Gospel example in this regard, is the story of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32).

No matter how much his father persuaded him not to set off on that perilous plan of his, perilous that is, to his real values and deeper inner life, he just

would not heed his father's wisdom and experience. Not long after leaving his father's house, having experienced life's disappointments and



hollow pleasures for himself, he soon woke up to the truth that 'even my father's hired servants get better food to eat than I get in this wretched place. Yes, I shall arise, and return to my father. It is better to be a servant in my father's house than to live independently and experience such want!' The irony of life is that one does not often get a chance to begin all over again; or even that having seen the light one would have many more years to enjoy one's new-found freedom and happiness! More often than not, one has to live with the damage one has caused to oneself and has only oneself to blame for it.

Nevertheless, when dealing with God our loving Father, we can be sure that he will never reject us. Even a last minute, death-bed repentance is honoured and rewarded, like that of the repentant thief on Calvary. Truly wise is the person who has learnt how to choose what the Lord offers, even when it does not appear to be the best nor even the most promising. And yet, isn't it reasonable to think that the One who created us would know best what would bring us true fulfilment? The Eucharist through which Jesus is truly present in our lives is indeed the greatest teacher leading us to the fullness of life in every possible manner! But these riches will be ours when we decidedly move from mere celebration of Eucharist to living out its demands in daily life.

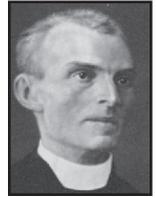
“For a Christian to love God means suffering for him.” []

In this statement of Fr. Eymard we touch again the mystery of love and of the Cross in our lives. In fact, the statement would be true even of love for another human person because love means giving of oneself totally to the other. It cannot function without a true dying to oneself, for love only begins to grow when the other becomes as significant or even more significant than oneself! Unless love brings a person down to the level of being ready even to wash the feet of the beloved and that too not just when one chooses to do so, but at all times, it cannot be termed as 'true love!'

Love essentially means giving, not just of gifts extrinsic to the person loving, but a real giving of one's very self of the lover, shared totally and unreservedly with the beloved. As Jesus himself showed us, the greatest sign of his love was his self-giving both to the Father in loving obedience and to his brethren in loving service, even to the extent of washing the feet of his disciples. And so, it is not surprising that for a Christian to say that he loves God or even wants to love God without a readiness to suffer for God's sake is a contradiction in terms.

Further, the suffering one encounters in the process of loving, whether it be God or even another human person, is not the kind of suffering one chooses for oneself. Generally, it will be precisely what one would never choose, except out of love. And it is the depth of love that one has for the beloved that makes this sacrifice possible and acceptable. In fact, where there is

genuine love, one does not even notice or count the cost it comes naturally. Which mother would not spend a sleepless night watching vigilantly at the



bedside of her sick child, taking this inconvenience in her stride, even when she knows that she has to work the whole of the next day at the office, attending to important duties? Her deep love for her child enables her to bear all the inconveniences implied in her motherhood, for the sake of her children, no matter what age they may have attained.

Another point worth noting is that our readiness to suffer for God's sake must be realized in our suffering for our brothers and sisters. God comes to us in the person of those around us and so it is in our day-to-day relationships with these people that we express our love for God. This is important to note, because a person might idealistically be ready to suffer for God, but not for the one closest to him! Some cannot see the contradiction involved in this approach and pride themselves on being very loving towards God but not towards their needy neighbour, even after hearing the words of Jesus, 'what you do to the least of my brethren, you do unto me!' And this self-sacrifice for others ought to begin in the home with regard to our own family members often it is more difficult to love those at home than those outside! The family members are generally taken for granted and treated with less respect and love.

“God’s mercy always seeks its favoured one.” []

When talking about God, it is good to remember that it is for our understanding and convenience that we separate the qualities we speak of regarding God. But in reality, God's love and mercy, his kindness and patience are all one and the same. So, in the sentence above, we could equally say that God's love always seeks its favoured one. However, even here we must remember that God does not seek us out because he stands to gain something from the encounter. God's nature is such that he is constantly giving, sharing of himself to all who are prepared to accept his love. So, if God pursues the ones he loves, it is because he wants to shower ever greater gifts on them. All he asks of us is that we be open to receive all that he wishes to bestow on us.

We recall here what Ps. 81 says in the form of a lament from God: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide and I will fill it. 'But my people did not listen to my voice; Israel would not submit to me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels. O that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways! Then I would quickly subdue their enemies, and turn my hand against their foes... I would feed you with the finest of the wheat, and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you” (Ps 81:10 - 82:1). Unfortunately, not realizing clearly that we are the ones who stand to gain from being open to God, we tend to ignore his advances only to realize much later that we have been the poorer for our negligence. God never forces us to

receive his good gifts he stands at the door of our lives and knocks, waiting patiently till we heed his presence. Yet, even in spite of our rejecting his



offers so often in the past, he will never strike us off his list of recipients. His faith in our goodness is unbelievable if we but had just a tiny fraction of his faith in us as we sought to respond to him how blessed would not our lives have been!

And what is more, when he approaches us on all subsequent occasions, he will never once bring up our past refusals against us. Each approach of his is as if it were for the first time - that much does he respect our freedom! Yet knowing that we are the ones who stand to gain, he will not deprive us of the chance to benefit. He knows of what stuff we are made, and how stupid we can be in spite of his repeated appeals and offers. Demonstrating this same love to the people of Israel, he adds: 'How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath' (Hos. 11:8-9).

There is one more thing the Lord would be happy to receive from us, though he will not make it a condition for his own generous giving to us, and that is that we treat our brethren in the same way as he treats us!

“To love our neighbour is to establish the kingdom of our Lord.” []

In our attempt to understand this statement of Fr. Eymard, we would do well to realize that the term 'kingdom' when applied to God does not refer to any geographical territory over which he holds sway. It rather refers to the quality of relationship that exists between God and those who choose to respond positively to his invitation to enter into Covenant with him. That is why today most people prefer to use the expression 'reign' of God which indicates something much more personal. So, when God invites us to join with him in extending his reign among people, what he asks of us is to help the people around us to have a taste, an experience of God's love. Once this happens, then they themselves will respond to all further invitations the Lord offers them.

But then, here lies the catch. If we are to love people the way the Lord loves them, then our love for them would have to be unconditional, or at least as close to that as possible! People already have experience of conditional love, because that is all they get from anyone and everyone around them. They know what it is to be rejected when they fail another in their expectations; they also know what it means to live up to the demands of others without which no love would be extended to them. So, they don't need more of that kind of love. But when we can rise to the level of offering them unconditional love that will appear as something totally different making them sit up and appreciate the difference!

Yet, to be able to offer another that

kind of unconditional love, we ourselves would need to have experienced God's faithfulness very clearly in our lives. Unless we ourselves are emotionally



strong within, we would not be able to offer God's love to others, at least not consistently and on a long-term basis. As the other refuses to understand or to accept, we would feel personally hurt or offended and tend to withdraw because we cannot take such insults and rejection. But once we are secure in God's love then we don't need any support from the outside. He upholds us with his victorious right hand and so we can afford to take all kinds of affronts and set-backs in our stride. In fact, we might even go so far as to imitate God's own ways, in that we make fresh appeals of love to our rejecting brethren because that is the only way in which the kingdom of God can be established. In all these matters, it is not theory that will convince and win over people to the reign of God, but the force of our personal example at all times and in all kinds of circumstances. And it is precisely this kind of love, God's own love that is poured into our hearts at the time of our Baptism and all through our Christian lives. For God will not ask us to do something without first equipping us adequately for the task. So, we need not doubt God's help in time of need. Besides, he is the one who sends us out as his ambassadors, to his specially chosen ones whom he has already been preparing in different ways. In fact, this is the very reason God chose us as his disciples in the first place that we might assist him in spreading the Good News of his love for all people!

“The good Lord is rich and so is the Blessed Virgin.” []

No one needs to be told that the Lord God is rich and that he gives us abundantly whenever he chooses to bless us. His blessing is life itself and blessed is the person who opens himself to receive God's love as often as possible. As a matter of fact, God blesses us every moment of the day every breath of air we inhale is a blessing freely and lovingly bestowed on us. Most people would easily see that all the good things they possess are actually blessings from the Lord. However, many would find it difficult to understand how the negative things that happen to us are also equally blessings from God.

Most would understand the word 'talent' as meaning a positive blessing, art, skill or gift given them by the Lord. Yet, that is only a partial understanding of the term. Even the negative things that happen are an opportunity for someone to rise above his present level, to stretch a little and exercise the capacity he has to overcome this difficulty. Thus, if God did not provide us with opportunities in which we can overcome ourselves, we would have no experience of the higher level and consequently would never grow. So, deprivations, rejection, difficulties, being victimized or taken advantage of all of these can and should be seen as blessings, talents or opportunities from the Lord to open our hearts and lives even more.

God is rich towards us at every moment of our lives, and in every possible situation. In fact, we could say that nothing ever happens to us without God in some way permitting it to happen

to us... and that too for our good! God constantly pours out his love upon us in different ways and the ones who are close to him also behave in the same



manner. No wonder Fr. Eymard's comment that Mary too does the same. This is because Mary opened her heart to God so wide, that she is 'full of grace'. When Mary shares her grace/s with others, she does not have less because she has shared with others. Rather, the more she shares the more she is empty and ready to receive again from God. Like the Father, and sharing in his own attitude of self-emptying, Mary too showers blessings on all those loved by the Father.

However, in Mary's action we could add another dimension viz. that she is also on our side, enabling us welcome God's goodness without losing anything of the gift, even the crumbs, as it were. Mary did this in her own life, and would be only too happy to teach us how to respond in a similar manner. But it is to our advantage to be close to Mary to learn from her how to receive unfailingly and in turn to also share generously with those around us. For the measure in which we give to others, inevitably becomes the measure in which we receive also. Further, Mary keeps reminding us by her example that for all that we are blessed with, we have to ensure that the praise and thanks goes back to God, its source and origin. "The almighty has done great things for me... he has looked on the lowliness of his handmaid henceforth all generations will call me blessed!" (Lk. 1:46-55).

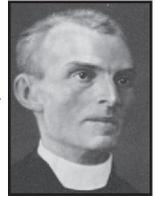
“To thank the Lord is the beginning of the graces of a Calvary of love and blessing.”

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Gratitude is one of the results of celebrating the Eucharist meaningfully each day. In fact, the word 'Eucharist' itself means thanksgiving and it is through the Eucharist that we give thanks to the Father for all his blessings given to us. Yet, when we bless God selflessly even though we are the recipients of his favours, that very action does something for us. It makes us more keenly conscious of our innate nature as creatures - empty, helpless, needing to be filled. It fills us with genuine humility making us accept our emptiness yet confident that as long as we come to him with open hearts he will never send us away empty, as we came.

Rather, the more genuinely we accept our weaknesses, the more God is drawn to pour out his blessings on us not just as regards quantity, but regarding quality as well. Thus one outpouring leads to the next and so on till we are filled to the very brim with all that God can and wants to share with us. His blessings open us to receive the gift of suffering, especially redemptive suffering together with Jesus; we find ourselves accepting the cross without grumbling or complaining, without seeking to cut corners or lighten our burdens. Further, we begin to open our hearts to others suffering around us and reach out to them with compassion and love. Like Jesus on the cross who prayed for others, we too learn to think of others who need our help. United with him we too become a source of blessing for others. We are able to

reach out to others even those we have never met before in our lives, people of other faiths, all sorts of people, people nevertheless who are loved



by the Father in his great desire to envelope every single human being in his love.

If we learn the gentle art of blessing in every situation through the Eucharist we celebrate, then this entire process will be complete in our lives. After all, each Eucharist invites us to bless and thank God 'always and everywhere,' because whatever we are and all that we have, everything comes from him who is the source of all blessing. And the greatest blessing we thank God for in the Eucharist is the gift of himself that Jesus made to us in obedience to the Father. This gift is made in symbolic form during the Eucharist, but is expressed in reality on Calvary. And so our blessing of God must also reach the Calvary of our lives in which we too pour out ourselves in selfless giving for the benefit of our neighbour.

When we can bless God in every situation, we will find that our crosses are much lighter and easier to bear, because in our very blessing of God we acknowledge that these crosses come from the Father and have some good purpose behind them. We might even sense that these crosses are beneficial to some of our brothers and sisters and enable them to open themselves to the saving love of the Father. Thus, our very attitude becomes selfless all through the day.

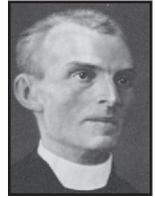
“The Good Lord never forsakes the poor man who is the object of so many prayers.” []

This statement of Fr. Eymard calls to mind the incident mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles when Peter was at Joppa and a Christian woman named Dorcas had died. All the widows stood beside Peter weeping and showed him the tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them (Acts 9:36-40). This gesture was their silent plea requesting Peter to do something and he took their request to heart. He put them all out of the room where the body of Dorcas was laid, and prayed earnestly over her, reviving her and restoring her to the community. Truly, the Lord does not forsake a poor unfortunate person who is the object of so many prayers.

The foundation for this is, of course, what Jesus himself said, 'Where two or three or you agree on anything you ask, you will receive it from the Father' (Mt. 18:20). And that is because he assured us of his presence in such a united group. Besides, their unity in prayer is also a sincere and humble acknowledgement of their emptiness and powerlessness in such a situation. When the powerlessness of even one person is united with the infinite power of God, great things happen. How much more then, when an entire group of Christians pray in the way Jesus taught, with humility and sincerity, on behalf of a poor helpless person?!?

However, as we look around today at what happens among us, perhaps the question that would come to mind is, 'why do we not experience many more such situations where the prayer of people

produces marvellous and even miraculous results?' Could it be that people today are much more self-centred and egoistic in their approach? Would we



have to admit that people today do not have the time nor the inclination to lend their hearts and lives for the betterment of others who are in need? Certainly there are groups of people, particularly those who belong to the Charismatic Renewal, who do pray in small groups over the sick and needy. Yet, it is important to remember that for such prayer to be successful, it must be totally selfless every single person in the group would need to be empty of the Self! This is, no doubt, a big price to pay; yet one can well imagine the innumerable blessings that would accrue to those who are in need.

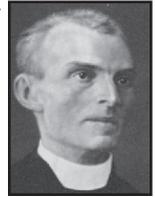
Ultimately, isn't this what the Church is called to be, a community of redeemed and redeeming people? All of us are called to share with others what we ourselves have been blessed with. And experience shows us that the more we bless others, the more we ourselves are blessed in return. Of course, our approach should not be that we bless others *in order to* be blessed in return. If we approach the matter in that way, we probably will not perceive its beneficial effects at all. Nevertheless, the fact remains that when we generously open our hearts to reach out to others in need whoever they may be, we will not go unrewarded when we ourselves are in need!

“Trust in the protection of the blessed Virgin in the infinite goodness of God.” []

God's love is undoubtedly a mystery to anyone who seeks to understand it rationally. His love can only be understood with faith, which starts off by saying, 'I do not understand, but if you, God, say so, it must be true!' The first aspect of the mystery is that there is no reason why God *should* love us at all, the way he does. He does not owe it to us to smother us with his love. Secondly, it is precisely his great and infinite love that makes him devise such marvellous means to reach every person in his love. He uses whoever is suitable as his instrument to convey his love in a fitting manner. Over a large part of Church history, and possibly over a certain period of each person's growth too, Mary has been a very powerful instrument drawing people to this experience of the Father's love. Her responses to God were near perfect because of the help of his infinite grace, and so she stands before us as a model to be imitated.

It is said that at the initial stages of one's spiritual life, a person is basically 'Mariological' in his/her approach to the Father. This is the well-known 'To Jesus through Mary' approach. Besides, historically it suited the theology of the times; it also fits the level of a person's spiritual maturity to see Mary as a 'mediatrix' intervening for her children before God who was then conceived of as a just and impartial Judge, somewhat distant and impersonal! However, as one comes to know and experience God better and better with the passage of time, especially through a more careful reading

and understanding of Sacred Scripture, this approach evolves into the next stage which is largely 'Christological' to the Father, through the Son! Now, Jesus becomes the Mediator with the Father. Finally once most of our self-imposed barriers have crumbled under the clear light of the Gospels properly understood and experienced, we enter into the third stage which is 'Trinitarian' to the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit! We are bold enough to approach the Father directly, but with and in the Son and Spirit.



It is important to note that there will always be some people who are at the Mariological stage, irrespective of what their physical age is, as it has a lot to do with the person's image of God! During this period, therefore, one needs to rely on the protection of Mary as a mother. Yet, Mary's deep love for God's beloved children will not allow her to spoil them or jeopardize their most intimate relationship with the Father. Thus, at Cana Mary tells the servants to 'do whatever he tells you.' Here, the servants had to make a fairly serious decision, viz. whether they would implement Christ's command, which to all intents and purposes looked pretty ridiculous. What they needed was 'wine' and not water and certainly not water poured into jars that were meant for ritual ablutions! We notice that there is no mention of the jars in which wine was usually stored. Where Christians are prepared to follow this advice of Mary, there is no reason to believe that they will miss out on all the blessings God has in store for them.

“Praise or blame, love or rejection all are nothing without God.” []

When God becomes the centre of our being, then everything that we go through, good or bad, is seen in the light of his love and goodness. Things, persons and events are seen and appear as good or bad when viewed from the human point of view. For God, there is nothing that is bad being goodness itself, there cannot be even the slightest trace of evil in him and in everything that he does. Now, as long as we, his children, live in intimate union with our Father, there is nothing that can be seen or taken as bad or evil. Even what might seem as evil when seen through our natural eyes, is really a blessing from God. If at all he has permitted that event to take place in our lives, the only reason he would have had to permit it is our good, proximate or remote.

Perhaps the point will be clearer if we take a concrete example. To most people in almost any circumstance, death is understood to be an evil thing because we see it as the end of our achievements here on earth. But for one who is close to God, it is a home-coming. At death, we return to the Father whom we have known so far only as in a mirror, dimly and vaguely. With death we shall see him 'face to face' with no intermediaries isn't that something to be happy about? So, while death does mean the end of our earthly existence and from that point of view, it could be seen as bad, yet seen from the proper perspective, it is a great grace. And the same can be applied to almost everything that forms part of our lives.

Fr. Eymard makes the application to praise or blame, love or rejection two situations that touch our earthly lives deeply. If one has experienced



rejection, especially from a loved one, then one understands how painful it can be; the deeper the love relationship that existed prior to the break the more painful the rejection. And the same can be said for blame especially when it is totally undeserved! The opposite of these two would fall in the category of pleasant experiences, yet even they have no real meaning or value unless seen from the perspective of God showering his love on us. When we bypass this perspective, we take these blessings to be our own achievement and this will lead to our downfall, sooner or later.

The safer attitude would be that of Job in the Old Testament when he declared: “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord”! (Job 1:21). Everything, therefore, has its proper place when it is fitted into God's scheme of things for us. The more we learn to live within that scheme the happier would we be all through our lives. So, it is best that we 'live and move and have our being' in him, (Acts 17:28) and then everything will be seen in the right and proper perspective! Then we will have learnt how to rise above both praise and blame and find our happiness in God alone for only when we are close to him will our perspective be the correct one!

“Go to God like rays go toward the sun.” []

In this expression of Fr. Eymard, it is clear that he sees God as the centre of his entire universe. So, it is from here, with God as the centre that everything emanates and also returns to the same centre. We too have come from God we are not the products of our own choice or making. We are 'the work of his hands, the sheep that belong to his pasture' (Ps 95:7). Hence it is that all through life, whatever we do, say or even think, should return to God as to the centre of our lives. And in fact, when God is truly our centre, everything does converge on him, almost automatically, because that is in the nature of things as God made them.

But when out of a sense of our own greatness or self-importance, we make ourselves the centre of our universe then we soon begin to notice that the entire order established by God is inverted and everything is thrown out of gear. That is when we experience confusion, loss of direction, a sense or feeling that things are out of control in our lives and that something needs to be done to correct the situation. Even when we approach God in prayer in such a distorted situation, our prayer would hardly reach God, as it cannot make its way to him as rays of the sun return to their origin. No wonder then, that our prayer cannot be heard and answered and we are left to our own resources.

When we find ourselves in a situation like this, the only thing we can and should do is to check on our basic orientation with questions like, 'What place do I give to God, in my life? How eager and ready am I to listen to his voice

and obey his word? Towards whom do I direct the praise regarding a job well done?' Some serious soul-searching may reveal to us that God, far from



being the centre of our lives, has practically no place in our lives, for we have consciously or otherwise enthroned the Self in his place. Unless this basic flaw is corrected, the confusion and distortion will continue in our lives. Rather than run to this Shrine or the other, or recite this particular novena or prayer, we would need to first sit down and correct what is basically a wrong orientation and then possibly everything will begin to be well for us.

If we might use a simple example to understand this point: if I, who am no real expert or mechanic open up an alarm clock with the intention of cleaning it, but then replace the parts in the wrong sequence, could I expect the clock to mark time correctly, or sound the alarm at the proper time? No amount of oiling and polishing the exterior will make it function properly. I would need to take it to someone who knows the inner workings of a clock and he would be able to set things right. But if I intend to use the clock for showing the correct time, I would have to henceforth observe the laws which make it work and not impose on it the order that I think is best. Similarly for our relationship with God unless and until he really is the centre of our lives, we cannot expect great things to happen in our lives. As Jesus put it, 'Seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness and all the rest will be added unto you' (Mt. 6:33).

“God wants us to be his company.” []

In the Gospel of St. Mark we read, 'He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons. So he appointed the twelve' (Mk 3:13-16). This last part is sometimes translated as 'they were to be his *companions*' meaning thereby that they were to form part of his 'company.' Mark then seems to indicate clearly precisely what Fr. Eymard writes in this short sentence, that God intends us to be part of the inner circle of his close friends. Today, of course, those who are familiar with the concept of 'Covenant' know that this is the very purpose for which God created us human beings, endowing us with intelligence and free-will, that we might freely choose to belong to him in this close intimate union called Covenant.

The very essence of Covenant is that we live out its demands which in the Bible are expressed as, 'I shall be your God and you shall be my people.' We are to entrust everything that we can possibly call our own into the loving hands of God, to be used according to his plan and purpose. At no point of time are we to dictate to him what he should do with our lives or any part of it. We surrender totally all control over the details of our lives. Now evidently, this becomes possible only if we have absolute faith in the Lord's love for us.

However, the transaction is not merely one-sided. Just as much as we entrust our 'all' into God's hands, so does he entrust his all into our hands. He too

says to us, 'all that is mine is yours!' Didn't he prove this when he sent his only Son to be our Saviour? God did not put any terms and conditions when sending



Jesus into our midst. Even when we chose to treat Jesus as a blasphemer and criminal and sentenced him to death on a cross, God did not intervene but respected our freedom to do with him as we pleased. He kept his promise to be totally ours. If we could only respect and honour our side of the deal as marvellously as God does, what a difference it would make.

However, coming back to Fr. Eymard and his statement, what he tells us precisely that God wishes us to belong to this inner circle of his close friends, in which there is mutual love and trust, where we share our lives totally with one another, in which there is 'give and take.' Now this kind of intimate sharing is to take place not just after we die, in heaven as it were; rather, our heaven begins already now, the moment we accept to belong totally to God. This ideally happens at the time of our Baptism, but since most of us were baptized when very young, it should happen at some later point when we consciously renew this commitment of ours. In his goodness, the Lord provides us with the right opportunity at the right time the problem seems to arise when we fail to keep our side of the covenantal bond, when we decide that we want to be masters of our own destiny and not allow God a free hand in our lives. But if like Abraham, Mary and all the great saints we can live out our self-offering day after day, then we have nothing to worry about God will take care of our needs! So, all we need to do is to belong to his company!

“I suffer and I hope... I am like someone at sea who has only a plank to cling to and who abandons himself to the mercy of the wind with full trust in the goodness of God.” (Found in reflections written by Fr. Eymard at Chaintre - 1855).



facing insuperable odds even when all he wished to do was implement what God himself had commanded him to do. In this situation, he realized the need of a total trust in the Master whose unworthy servant he was. The work was the Master's and he would see it to completion as and when he chose to. The plank that Fr. Eymard refers to is none other than the faith he brought to bear on the situation. Clinging to the inner inspiration he had received he moved forward with his eyes fixed on the Lord and little by little the difficulties cleared up like a misty cloud once the sun rises.

These reflections date to the time when Fr. Eymard was frantically at work establishing the newly founded Congregation. He left no stone unturned in his effort to respond adequately to the call he had received several times and quite clearly, that he should be the chosen one to start such a Congregation. But, as usually happens with all of God's work, the moment the chosen instrument applies his hand to the plough, a host of difficulties arise, which while testing his/her faith, makes the going very difficult indeed. We see this fairly clearly in Ex. 4:24-26 where we are told that as Moses set out on his journey back to Egypt, he found himself battling with God who sought to kill him. The night indicates the darkness in which Moses finds himself, not being able to understand what really is happening. Hadn't he accepted wholeheartedly to do what God bid him do, after all the excuses he had earlier tried to offer to wriggle out of this assignment? Why then was God apparently sabotaging the whole venture?

The entire episode seems so simple once it has passed and the light has dawned clearly. But while the process unfolds, it can be quite demanding and distressing for the chosen instrument, as there is mighty little s/he can hold on to with absolute certainty except the fact that it is God's will and that he will see it through. No other human person is able to help in this situation since that person is not really part of the project. Quite often even prayer does not bring much light or consolation as the Lord seems to be hidden or unavailable. Nevertheless, if the instrument can hold on in sheer faith and selfless love, then there is every assurance that the project will succeed, because it is God's work and the instrument has not placed obstacles or interfered with it.

Commentators, while admitting the mysteriousness of this encounter tell us that it possibly has something to do with the Self surreptitiously creeping in. At the end of the struggle Moses admits the supremacy of God, expressed through the circumcision of his son. Fr. Eymard too was aware of the need of total selflessness in starting this project. He finds himself

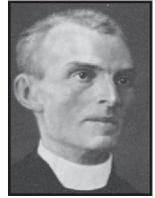
“Up till now the sun of the Eucharist had not yet dawned. But the full richness of the Eucharist is unfolding before us. It is truly amazing; we perceive a single ray, what will it be like later?” (PJE 1867)

The date given above indicates that Fr. Eymard has already been at work in the Congregation for more than ten years; he certainly would not have known that he would be granted just about a year more to work on the project. The early years of the Congregation were certainly a disappointment for Fr. Eymard because it didn't really seem to pick up dramatically, although the need for such a Congregation was great. His faith which was his strength all along stood him in good stead especially through these initial years. He could see clearly the richness of the Eucharist even if perhaps his companions did not quite see the same as he saw.

Fr. Eymard was humble enough to realize that even though he was able to appreciate a lot of the richness of the Eucharist, it was still merely like a ray emanating from the great mystery there was so much more to be discovered and shared with God's people. He was so focussed on the Eucharist that nothing else mattered for him. His task in the Church was to make the riches of the total Eucharistic mystery known and available to all of God's children, especially the most neglected and abandoned. He was aware too that this work entrusted to him would not attract much glamour and recognition from others, yet it had its irreplaceable slot in God's providence for his people and was a task that could not be

neglected.

Another quality worth reflecting on in Fr. Eymard's life is that he focussed largely on the positive. He sought to



visualize the total picture, keeping that always before his mind's eye, so that step by painful step he could inch forward towards its fulfilment. Had he developed a negative approach in the same situation that would probably have hindered his progress immensely! We have seen how no sooner we begin any work for God than we are bound to meet with obstacles, one after another. Against this background, having a positive picture of the whole project can eliminate several unnecessary painful situations.

What would the ultimate glory of the Eucharist really be like? We know of course, that there will be no Eucharistic presence or Blessed Sacrament in heaven. There we will have Jesus himself in person fully radiant and victorious. So, the peak of Eucharistic devotion would be the intimate awareness of Christ's real and effective presence to each person in the Interior Cenacle of his/her life! Once a person attains to that depth of intimacy all the rest pales off into insignificance. It could be that at the time of writing this sentence, Fr. Eymard may not have even dreamt that he himself would attain to that fullness of Eucharistic devotion thanks to God's liberal grace given to all who sincerely seek him!

“I feel that every road by which I travelled through the goodness of God was but a preparation for this wonderful and holy vocation; nor do I cease thanking God for my having been with the Marists and to have been a parish priest and a curate.” []

Here Fr. Eymard enunciates another important principle in the Spiritual life. God never assigns a person to a particular task, without first preparing him for it and also equipping him with all that is necessary and useful to accomplish it. And this preparation begins even before the person is born into this world and continues all through life. Thus every event that forms part of a person's life is placed there simply in order to further this preparation. Fr. Eymard was able to see this with regard to his own life nothing that happened to him, even the staunch refusals of his father to allow him to pursue his priestly vocation, were but steps forward towards his ultimate vocation as the founder of the Blessed Sacrament Congregation.

When a person has this kind of a positive vision regarding his life, he finds that there is nothing to grumble or complain about. All he need do is cooperate generously and lovingly with whatever the Lord ordains for him, learning the important lessons enshrined in each experience. And one experience will lead to the next, each fitting into the rest almost like a jigsaw puzzle until one fine day the picture becomes clear and fascinating. All one can do then is simply thank the Lord from the bottom of one's

heart for his persistent goodness in guiding the person up to that point of time.

Fr. Eymard's presence among the Marists again



was no mistake, his rejection or inability to join the Oblates was no error either! Each experience taught him important lessons and afforded him vital hands-on experience that would stand him in good stead later. We see this approach in the life of Moses too his 'crime' in killing the Egyptian while certainly being reprehensible, nevertheless led to his escape from Egypt to Midian where he learnt the one subject he could not have learnt in Pharaoh's court to know God more deeply. Was it a mere coincidence that he found himself in the home of Jethro who was a priest of the Most High, and also that Jethro had seven daughters hence, there was no other male member with whom Moses could share on a man-to-man level? The journey Moses made through the desert would eventually turn out to be the same route by which he would later lead the Israelites out of Egypt. From personal experience he learnt the hardships of the desert and was later able to sympathize with and understand the difficulties of the people.

As we apply this principle to our lives today we see that what we often lack is the faith to see God at work in our lives; God who loves us and has a plan for us does not abandon us even when we deliberately refuse to cooperate with him. His love is far greater than our stubbornness and in the end he always wins.

“Be grateful like poor people are.” []

Our daily experience teaches us that most poor people are basically grateful people. And the reason for this is pretty obvious too. Being poor and unable to fend for themselves or having very little resources, they have to depend on the generosity of others and see everything they possess as a gift either from God or from their compassionate neighbours. They instinctively regard anything and everything done for them as a favour done, or as a blessing showered on them and quite spontaneously burst into thanksgiving. And what is more, having experienced real hardships in their lives, their thanksgiving is more often than not genuine and sincere, besides being spontaneous.

Now many people could be poor with regard to material things, yet this does not apply to every human being. Some are blessed with plenty of material goods. But all of us without exception are poor with regard to our spiritual standing before God. And in this matter, the Eucharist teaches us to develop the habit of gratitude. At the Preface, the Celebrant reminds the people that 'it is right to give you (God) thanks and praise... always and everywhere!' And yet we find that quite often we take God's gracious gifts to us for granted and forget to thank him or the instruments through whom he sends us his blessings!

One of the reasons for this could be that we fail to consciously practise this art of praising and thanking God during the Eucharist itself. If we could have some

concrete events in mind consciously for which we praise and thank God, and each day make the effort to prepare this beforehand that would make a difference in our expression of gratitude throughout the day. In fact, that is the meaning of the phrase 'we have lifted them up to the Lord,' with which the Congregation responds to the Celebrant exhorting them to 'lift up your hearts' or, in plain language, to have their reasons for praising and thanking God ready in their minds and hearts.



Now when the assembly says 'we are ready' it should mean that they have some concrete reasons before their minds' eye because of which they wish to praise God, but in actual practice, very few people actually think of any particular favour God has blessed them with. They do not come to Eucharist with these reasons lined up in their minds and hearts! The words they say seem to be a mere routine response that is made. It is not surprising therefore, that during the day they have very little for which they are grateful to God. The Eucharistic celebration hardly touches the rest of their day or life. But if it could, then it is almost certain that it would make a big difference in their attitude. Not only would their lives change, but others too would be influenced by their example to be more grateful in their dealings with people. Thus, our spiritual poverty would lead to our being grateful people throughout our lives and also ambassadors who spread Eucharistic values all around them.

“When the master is served and happy, everything is fine.” []

This observation of Fr. Eymard is based on the vision that we creatures are servants of God to whom has been allotted a particular task in life. All this fits into the master plan that God has for the benefit of the entire universe. Now when each creature does what has been allotted to him/her, it is obvious that the entire jigsaw puzzle will function smoothly with every piece fitting into its proper slot. This outcome would certainly please the Master because there is nothing he wishes more ardently than that his children are always happy and contented. He wants the best for them and he reminds them, “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile” (Jer 29:11-14).

But unfortunately, from the very start human beings chose to go their own way and so messed up the beautiful plan that God had for them. The result then is that not only are these rebellious individuals or groups unhappy but they further disrupt the lives of everyone else too. We live in a very close knit society and the actions of one influence all the rest in an almost frightening manner. Scientists tell us that if a butterfly flaps its

wings somewhere in Japan, the atmospheric disturbances caused by this flapping can be recorded as far as India. And if this is true on the physical level, how much more will we not influence one another on the spiritual level where we are all 'one' in Christ as his body (Rom 12:4-8)?



So, it is to the advantage of the entire universe that every single person learns to fall in line with the unbelievably loving yet mysterious plan of God for the good of all. If we willingly and wholeheartedly follow his one commandment that we love one another as he has loved us, then we all stand a chance of being happy, sharing in the happiness of the Master himself. But the best part of the message is that even when we don't follow God's commandments and consequently find ourselves in a mess it is God himself who takes the initiative to bring us back and reinstate us in his kingdom of love. His tremendous love for us will not allow him to leave us in the land of exile for too long his loving heart melts with compassion and he mobilizes all his creatures to assist in the homecoming of his wayward ones (See Is. 40:1-11). And when they do return, he organizes a celebration like the one mentioned in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk.15:11-32). The return of his wayward children brings the heavenly Father immense joy it is the one event he had been looking forward to with eager expectation. Nevertheless, when we conscientiously and faithfully serve the Lord in our daily activities that too brings God immense joy and satisfaction!

“Love never says, 'it's enough'.”

[]

One of the characteristics of love is precisely that it does not place any limits, especially to its self-giving. In fact, the specialty of God's love is that it is a constant pouring out of itself onto others, first within the Blessed Trinity itself, on to the Son and the Spirit, and then outside of itself on to the whole of creation. And because God himself is limitless, the outpouring of love too is limitless. In fact, it seems to get better and stronger as it goes on giving of itself. And the more God gives the more supply of love he has from which to continue giving. God finds immense fulfilment in giving.

Further, in the face of such generous and constant self-giving, love draws everything else also into its own vortex, so that everything touched by love itself turns into selfless giving little by little. Thus everything that emanates from the creative power of God's love bears the stamp of this constant and never-ending self-giving. This is the creative energy that flows through the entire universe and shows itself in such a variety of forms of life. In fact, this is the strongest feature of love that it never stops or runs dry.

However, the one thing that can block this tremendously creative energy of love is self-centredness, that strange power we humans have of wanting to keep all of the love around us for ourselves only. It is that urge that we experience to make ourselves the centre of the universe and hoard love, seeking more and more of it as we go along. Yet, as the Israelites were warned while they journeyed through the desert not to gather

more manna than was sufficient for one day (except on the eve of the Sabbath), at the risk of the excess just rotting and becoming useless for



anyone, both the original owner and the others deprived of it, so too with us when we seek to garner more love than we need for ourselves.

And yet, the best aspect of love is that the more we give it away selflessly, the more it comes back to us abundantly in never-ending measure. The more we give of it, the more we get. We sow love generously and gather in a harvest of love, while the one who sows the opposite, be it hate or any other form of self-centredness, will reap likewise a harvest of what is sown. And so, the best way to ensure that we have a continuous supply of love is to keep on parcelling out all the love we are capable of! As Paul expressed it so well, “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends” (1 Cor. 13:4-8). And further, Jesus gave us love as the one distinguishing mark of his true disciples: 'By this shall all know that you are my disciples, that you love one another as I have loved you!' (Jn. 13:34).
