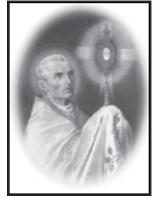


“Mother Therese must espouse this Work along with the work of the Holy Face. It is indeed here that the Holy Face of the Saviour is covered with spittle, with blood and with slime upon the face of his priest.” (To Fr. Arthur Dhe, November 1866)

We presume that the Mother Therese mentioned here is the one who had already established a congregation of sisters of Reparation and was contemplating another one for priests dedicated to the Eucharist. Zealous woman that she was, she had several other projects in mind like that of the work of the Holy Face. Knowing her fairly closely, Fr. Eymard would have possibly suggested to her that she take on this work of sheltering fallen priests also. For it is in them that Our Lord is disfigured most and the work of the kingdom harmed the greatest! Besides, it often happens that the priest precisely because of the leadership role he has in the Church is in a position to cause the greatest damage to the faith of those who still choose to remain within the fold.

Their situation reminds us of what Jesus had warned his disciples about already while he walked the earth, 'Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.' Or again, "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it wanders through waterless regions looking for a resting place, but not finding any, it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' When it comes, it finds it swept and put in order. Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself,

and they enter and live there; and the last state of that person is worse than the first" (Mt. 12:43-45). Thus the priest who has fallen into the clutches of



the Evil One could be a much more dangerous person to contend with than the ordinary Christian who has fallen away.

This is not to say that the fallen priest should be shunned because of this and be kept at a distance. Rather, it is all the more urgent and necessary to work for their rehabilitation so that once they have been brought back and the house tidied again, it can be kept clean with a bit of extra caution and vigilance. It must be remembered, though, that this work of helping fallen priests is the work of specialists, men who are spiritually close to the Lord and share deeply in Christ's feelings for these unfortunate persons. They would also need special skills to deal with these men who have already been hurt emotionally and in other ways and hence would be rather sensitive and difficult to deal with.

What would greatly help those inspired to take on such a work is the thought of how much benefit would accrue to the entire Church if even a few of these priests were brought back to the fold. Even if on returning they did not exercise any active ministry, yet their evident repentance and new-found attachment to the Lord itself would be a great inspiration to so many others struggling with their own inner demons. Following Jesus is not an easy matter in any situation until the person experiences the love of God especially through the people around him/her.

“We are so unassuming here that I don't see how anyone could be afraid of us: there is nothing about us which draws over-zealous vocations: to come to us a person must be either on fire for the Lord, or dead to the world. Poor self-love only dies here.”

(To Mme Antoinette de Grandville, November 1866)

Fr. Eymard is here speaking of a problem that vexed them especially during the early days of the Congregation. Obtaining good vocations is a difficult task in any period of the Church's history, but it was particularly difficult in France after the French Revolution. We have mentioned in several earlier reflections that numerous priests had given up their commitment to Jesus, besides the large number of lay faithful who had fallen away. Against this background even fewer would venture to join up for the priesthood, a life of self-sacrifice and dedication, with little benefits from the human point of view.

One of the reasons suggested to Fr. Eymard for the shortage of vocations to the Blessed Sacrament congregation was fear of the group that had already joined and were SSS. Fr. Eymard is surprised at this being given as the reason for the fear, since almost all of them were simple, unassuming men caught up with a vision and a mission in the Church and in the world. Their vocation was undoubtedly a noble one, and perhaps it is the fire of love in them that made them so special that several felt that they would not be able to rise to that level in their commitment to Jesus. Nothing in their charism of being at the service of the Eucharistic Lord, nor in their practices as Blessed Sacrament

Fathers, particularly the adoration they made would have made them stand out as supermen. It was their personal enthusiasm that made them different.



All that the congregation asked of those wishing to join was this inner fire, a burning desire to make Jesus Eucharistic better known and loved. They would need to allow Jesus to consume them with his love and be ablaze with love in their response to his divine love. Undoubtedly, this would have made them stand out against the somber background of penance and reparation so widely prevalent in the Church of that era. All those who joined the newly established Blessed Sacrament Congregation from the start did stand out for the love they focused on and emphasized in all their work. While other contemporary priests focused on human sin and frailty and hardly ever mentioned the tremendous love that Jesus our Saviour has precisely for the sinner, the Blessed Sacrament Fathers were conspicuous for their refreshingly different emphasis in the opposite direction.

On every possible occasion, they referred to God's love which is the only effective and lasting remedy that we have for our miserable situation here on earth. This is summed up so beautifully by St. Paul when he says, 'Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!' (Rom 7:20-25).

“Situat your soul, not in the outcome of your service to God, even less in good feelings that is all too changeable and untrue.”

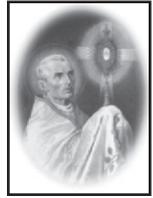
(To Countess D'Andigne, November 1866)

Here is another piece of sound advice given by Fr. Eymard to his directee. Whether the reference is to the end of one's life or even to a particular project in life, it is important to be rightly situated vis-à-vis God who is the source of our lives and also our goal towards which we are oriented. However, Fr. Eymard very wisely points out that if the reference we have in mind is linked with any of our own achievements or accomplishments done for God, that would amount to looking on life as a pressed service for which we expect some recompense.

St. Paul takes up this question in reference to Abraham when he argues, 'What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? For, if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness. So also David speaks of the blessedness of those to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the one against whom the Lord will not reckon sin." ...

“The purpose was to make him the ancestor of all who believe without being

circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them, and likewise the ancestor of the circumcised who are not only circumcised but who



also follow the example of the faith that our ancestor Abraham had before he was circumcised. For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith... For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham... - in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist” (Rom 4:1-17).

If our contributions to God's kingdom in terms of activities should not be the basis of our relationship with God, much less can feelings be the needed foundation because they are so uncertain and changeable! In fact, feelings come and feelings go but it is our convictions that keep us firmly anchored to God, the rock of our salvation. And in this particular covenantal relationship it is God who takes the first step and invites us to enter into covenant with him! We have absolutely no claim or right to his love and a share in his life it is his to give or withhold. It is only his gracious love that moves him to share his life with us. And so, we will always remain unworthy servants in God's presence even while sitting at table with him in his kingdom. The only one element that remains steadfast and unchanging in our relationship with God is God's own love for us no wonder he is often referred to a rock, a stronghold or fortress!

“(After their father had died)..A few days before, he had turned in all his money to Fr. Chanuet.. saying to him: ‘A religious should no longer have anything. I want to give up everything.’”
 [To Srs. Euphrosie, Louise and Marcelle Ravanat, August, 1867]

This statement of Fr. Eymard is part of the condolence letter he wrote to the three sisters on the death of their father. It is evident that he seeks to console them by indicating some of the positive signs their father had given of a genuine and complete renewal of his life after committing himself as a religious. From the little we read in this letter, Mr. Ravanat seems to have been a genuine person seeking God after having lived his life to the full, provided for his family and taken care of all his other commitments. Here Fr. Eymard remarks how he had handed over all his financial assets to the Novice-master keeping practically nothing for himself.

In one sense this is not surprising seeing that Fr. Eymard himself excelled in the total gift of Self in all its varied dimensions. Besides, it is a known fact that the Lord cannot be outdone in generosity. Against this background, we cannot but recall what Jesus himself told his disciples when the rich young man posed the question of doing what was necessary to gain eternal life. “Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.’ When the

disciples heard this, they were greatly astounded and said, ‘Then who can be saved?’ But Jesus looked at them and said, ‘For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.’ Then Peter said in reply, ‘Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life.’” (Mt 19:23-29).



The reason behind this stripping oneself of all that one relies on is important. As long as there is something one can fall back on, one does not really feel the need of God. That is why when calling a person to himself Jesus insists on bringing him/her to his knees, as it were. Once s/he experiences his/her total helplessness, that is when s/he really turns to God and is ready to do whatever the Lord indicates. It is only in this situation of helplessness that faith begins to operate at its best. Thus, if the Lord does not take the initiative in this matter, then the person him/herself will have to do it at some point or other in his/her life. Once this is done with love and generosity, the person experiences a tremendous inner freedom and begins to take giant steps towards belonging totally to the Lord. The only sad part in this case is that Mr. Ravanat did not have too much time here on earth to enjoy this freedom and love of God; nevertheless, he certainly would not have been denied its full measure in heaven!

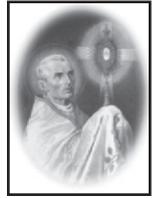
“Let us see God and his divine goodness in all things. Let us adore the motives of his divine Providence which are ever wise and gracious.” [To Mme Josephine Gour, August 1867]

Once a person begins to feel God's love personally, s/he notices that love at work in almost everything around him/her. This is also the effect of the increased 'faith' vision the person develops. One begins to 'understand' God's ways a little better and so at times can even anticipate how God would act the next moment. One classic example would be the working out of the Paschal Mystery in our lives. When God desires to fill a person with some extraordinary blessing, he first ensures that everything goes in the opposite direction. This makes the person feel that s/he is losing control over the situation and is a good test of his/her faith.

In these circumstances, if the Self is still strong, the person will try to bring the situation under control and exert tremendous pressure coming from the Self. However, God repeats his tactic of moving in the opposite direction - and this tug of war will go on until the person wakes up and realizes what is really happening. And at some point, s/he either gives up the struggle to control and surrenders totally into God's hands, or breaks away and abandons God altogether. However, once a person has discerned this pattern, then no sooner does s/he see it beginning than s/he surrenders internally, freely and lovingly into God's hands and allows him to order things the way he chooses.

This decision to cooperate with God

rather than fight him works wonders. For one thing, the person conserves energy because instead of fighting and resisting, he has all that much more



energy to pour into doing what God asks. Besides, faith assures him that in the end the outcome will be far superior and evident not only to the person concerned but to everyone around. This makes it clear that 'it is the Lord's doing, and a marvel in our eyes!' (Ps.126). Further, each positive experience deepens the person's faith making him/her literally see God at work in everything that happens in his/her life.

The next level is when s/he can discern or guess God's motives for his apparent opposition. And when s/he can plug in to the right answer, his/her joy will know no bounds and his/her cooperation will be all the more generous. This is but another expression of the truth that 'it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (Gal. 2:20). Or again, 'I can do all things in him who strengthens me' (Phil. 4:13). Paul recalls how he has learnt this lesson over a period of time which he actually calls his 'novitiate' 'I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need' (Phil 4:11-12).

How much happier and less stressful life would be if we too could learn this lesson and live it in our day-to-day engagements!

“Good sister, struggle against the fears which are afflicting you, by holy surrender into the hands of the mercy of Jesus, your good Master.” [To Sr Camille du SS, August 1867]

It is not uncommon for even good and saintly Christians to go through a period of intense fear at some stage of their lives. Sometimes this fear has no particular focus but grips a person as a vague, nameless dread of almost everything. At other times it is more pointed e.g. fear of being condemned to hell for one's past sins, or a fear of losing God's grace and friendship. At times these fears are the result of a person's natural inclination and low self-worth. However, whatever the source, the distress a person goes through in this period of trial can be very severe and disturbing. And what is more, no matter what the person is told or tries by way of a remedy, relief and a strengthening of faith seem so far away in the future!

To one such directee Fr. Eymard suggests that she place herself in the hands of the merciful Jesus and that sounds pretty reasonable. For after all, Jesus was sent by the Father precisely for the sake of sinners who need his mercy. All through the Gospels we see that Jesus was particularly close to sinners, tax-collectors and outcasts. He demonstrated through his actions that God was not displeased with them, particularly when they sincerely desired to return to God's ways. And this he did by eating with them freely on every possible occasion. In a Jewish context, to dine with someone means to show solidarity with, to enter into a special relationship with that person. So, by

dining with people known to be sinners, Jesus showed that God, far from being distant, was instead very close to them.



This often encouraged the sinner to change and sometimes dramatically, as was the case with Zacchaeus. And many of those who repented in answer to the call of Jesus became his staunch followers and active members of his kingdom. As a matter of fact, no one can truthfully say that s/he is not a sinner. We are all sinners and that too by our very frail nature itself - and we will always remain that. But the important question to be reflected upon is: How does God view the sinner? All through the Old Testament, the attitude of God towards sinners was that of a loving parent to a helpless, mentally or physically challenged child! Sin was seen as coming from the Evil One and not primarily stemming from the malice of the sinner. God is shown as knowing full well that the sinner cannot help himself and that if left to his own resources, he would only go from bad to worse and finally end up destroying himself.

For this reason, God sent his own Son born of a woman, born under the law, so that anyone who believes in (entrusts his sinful situation to) him may have eternal life (Gal 4:4). If the fear-filled person can be brought to accept this truth, with perhaps several examples from the Bible, his/her fears might subside to a large extent. Yet, it seems that the problem will persist and so the person must be helped to cling to Jesus as the only resort. “Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through ***Jesus Christ*** our Lord!” (Rom 7:24-25).

“Do not let this death (of Sr. Camille) afflict you too deeply, because it is the death of the Just; she went to heaven to continue the adoration of earth. She suffered a great deal. It is finished now, now is her time of joy Life is but the seed of heavenly glory.” [To Mme Blanche Chanuet, August 1867]

A person's views and attitude towards death, the 'moment of truth' are perhaps the most important in life. Often it is this conviction regarding death that colours the person's entire life and activity. If death is seen as a fearful event, uncertain about its results, then either the person will live in fear all through life, or would engage in every activity that will ensure a safe ending. It stands to reason that such a life would not be very 'fruitful' in terms of spreading God's kingdom of love because the person is largely preoccupied with self.

On the other hand, when a person believes that death is a home-coming, a return to the Father's house where one will experience his love and care to the highest degree, then life becomes an eager and joyful preparation for this great and welcome event! Every occurrence especially the unpleasant and painful ones would be seen as an opportunity for the person to 'expand his capacity to love.' Having made every effort to broaden and deepen one's innate capacity for love, the person then can await the moment of death with great eagerness, expecting to hear the words of the Father, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and

you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me' (Mt 25:34-36).



However, when dealing with God we must always remember that we can never claim anything from him as belonging to us by right; whatever comes from God is always a sheer gift, given out of love. Ultimately, it is this love of the Father, totally undeserved and unmerited, that assures us of a deep intimacy with him in heaven! But the best part of the truth is that God wishes the deepest intimacy for all his creatures and will do everything in his power to grant it to them. So, unless a person deliberately despises and shuns this gift, there is every hope that it will be his/hers, to a greater or lesser degree. In the situation referred to above, Sr. Camille seems to have been purified through a lot of suffering and so there is every reason to believe that she has a great reward awaiting her in heaven, close to her beloved spouse!

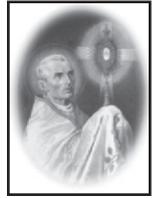
Life is indeed the seed of heavenly glory; yet that glory begins already on earth itself. It manifests itself in the form of a deep inner conviction of God's love for us in spite of our sinfulness, a great calm even on the exterior level, a readiness to share one's blessings with others in need, less and less preoccupation with oneself and one's eternal salvation, the almost total absence of fear and anxiety especially regarding the end of one's life. Fr. Eymard's suggestion is: once a person has gone back to God, there is no point worrying about that person's fate. Love, the eternal love that God has for all of us will take over and provide all that is needed for the person's safety and comfort Do not be afraid!

Fr. Eymard enunciates important principles: “Fidelity in fulfilling one’s rule of life is the primary virtue, we must come back to it constantly! A schedule is a requirement of health.” [To Mme Natalie Jordan, August 1867]

In this suggestion Fr. Eymard returns to a very practical tip. Human nature being what it is, it is extremely helpful and prudent to have a plan or schedule so that our time can be organized fruitfully. This plan is chalked out for us on an overall basis, by the Rule of Life we have chosen to adopt for ourselves (within the context of a religious congregation or otherwise). But besides that, we also need to work out a particular schedule so that this overall plan is implemented methodically on a day-to-day basis and thus becomes more productive.

Learned persons today suggest that this daily schedule should not consist only of a “To-do list” on which we jot down all the things that we need to do on a particular day. The reason for this is that not everything we need to do is necessarily 'urgent and important', reflecting and incorporating the basic orientation of our lives. The items might be urgent, but not particularly 'important.' An example might help. Answering a telephone that is ringing is certainly urgent, but not always important someone else could equally answer it! But, if I am a teacher, then it is important (though not urgent) for me to progressively deepen my grasp of the subject I teach through regular reading, methodical preparation of my classes,

intelligent discussions with others in the same field and so on. Such important activities too need to be included in our daily schedule.



So, what one needs to do is to plan on a weekly basis ensuring that all the *important* aspects of our vision and mission for our lives are covered in such a manner that our lives definitely move forward. Thus, an effective schedule is a requirement for health not only on the physical level, but on all levels of a highly effective life. Put differently, we could say that discipline in one's life is a must and that self-discipline is shown in the way we attend to all the important aspects of our chosen goal in life.

One of the most important aspects of a human life is the quality of relationships a person maintains, particularly with significant people. These include of course, one's family, community, colleagues at work and several others. But besides these one also needs to choose others who have high ideals in life and who are themselves highly disciplined and effective and whose company would inspire us to also aim high in life. These could be our own contemporaries, outstanding people living in our times, or even the great men and women of the past not excluding saints and holy people, provided we read their lives in an appropriate manner.

In short, if a person wishes to live a purposeful life, then rather than wait for things to happen and then attend to them, s/he should make things happen according to the plan that one has consciously chosen for oneself in keeping with one's life's goals and ambitions.

“Let your fidelity consist first in fulfilling the external practices of your rule well, that is, in accomplishing them at their appointed time and place... that's what the sacrifice of virtue consists of.” [To Mme Natalie Jordan, August 1867]

Coming now to the actual implementation of one's schedule, Fr. Eymard suggests that we begin with the external level, with the practices laid down for particular times and places. Thus, we have our daily schedule of prayer, work, study, community involvement, apostolic commitments and so on. These would form the general framework of our time schedule. Yet beyond this each person has to decide on a “vision/mission plan” for him/herself in which s/he determines what kind of person s/he would like to become.

Thus if I choose to become a loving, self-sacrificing kind of person, then I would need to foster those activities (behaviour, reading, associating with like-minded others and so on) that will bring about such a frame of reference Love and sacrifice! Having chosen love as the guiding principle of my life, I cannot afford to regularly associate with unloving, self-centred people as this kind of an atmosphere will hinder the realization of my mission in life. The clearer the enunciation of this mission plan, the easier it is to schedule one's activity in keeping with it. The plan outlines for us what we need to do and what should be avoided as being not urgent and not important either. Thus, the person who chooses to make a positive difference in the lives of others as far as

possible cannot afford to spend hours on end before the TV watching one programme after another. That may be indulged in once in a way, but if done



on a regular basis it would lead to a life of dissipation and purposelessness.

However, in Fr. Eymard's suggestion there is question of the regular framework of our day's activity. Where that is wisely chosen it would include not only spiritual activity like prayer, reading, meditating and so on, but also time for physical exercise, social contacts with significant people, quality time spent with members of one's family or community, moments of silence and withdrawal from activity, sufficient rest and relaxation, some time for learning new skills, creative activity and the arts according to one's abilities and tastes. A person who engages in all these activities, at least on a weekly basis, would stand out for a certain quality of life which is not often seen in most people.

One of the problems faced in this area is maintaining consistency and regularity. Inevitably there would be innumerable obstacles preventing us from being faithful to this schedule. Besides the natural pain and hardships inherent in a schedule like this, there are also the unforeseeable elements that crop up from time to time. And so, a certain amount of flexibility must also be included in the schedule to allow for such emergencies. All in all, if one is serious about the kind of person one wishes to become, keeping to one's chosen schedule is no big deal! It would flow naturally and remain consistent all through one's life, flowing from one's inner being, as it were, not forced or contrived!

“Leave the spiritual success to God as well as the sentiments of grace to be received. You are only bound to sow, plant and water... God is asking you to give it your care; the success depends on him.” [To Mme Natalie Jordan, August 1867]

As one lives the spiritual life, the desire to check and see how close to God has one reached often arises after some time. This is particularly true when one approaches the spiritual life in terms of acquiring virtues. These are listed and taken up one by one for acquisition through fairly persistent spiritual effort and examination. This used to be the approach for several centuries if one followed the method popularized by the followers of St. Ignatius of Loyola. Undoubtedly in the method, there is a fair amount of effort directed by the will and hence there is plenty of scope for the Self to operate quite freely and openly. However, it is noteworthy that Fr. Eymard, the good and zealous Spiritual Director that he was, was able to discern that in the spiritual life, it is more God's work than ours that really matters. Hence, he recommends that the directee leave all matters of success and degrees of it to the good Lord himself.

Today, with a more biblical and liturgical spiritual approach, one is asked to merely gaze on the desirable qualities one discerns in Jesus himself and perhaps in the great saints leaving it to God to cultivate these virtues in us as and when he sees fit. Thus, the question of which qualities and how much one acquires is automatically left to God himself to whom the credit is ultimately given. The candidate's work is only to do the basics

viz. remove whatever obstacles are visible and that too by focusing on God's power of love more than on one's own efforts and skills. In this enterprise it is God who takes the lead and he points out in his own inimitable way what needs to be attended to, what is best removed, what planted in their place and so on. And this usually follows the readings of the day's Eucharist or an inspiration received in prayer, or perhaps even the example of a person that inspires us, and so on.



The approach here is more free and easy, following God's lead rather than a set regime that one devises for oneself and follows with rigorous self-control and self-punishment for failings chalked up. The focus in this approach is on God and not on Self, and hence the progress made is much more rapid and stable, with the archenemy, the Self being gradually eliminated more by the power of God's love than by any direct choices made by the person him/herself. In all matters the Gospel criterion still holds pride of place, “for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'” (Mt 25:34-40).

“In your prayers, aspire to nourish yourself upon God rather than to purify yourself, or humble yourself... nourish your soul with the truth personified in God's divine goodness towards you with the tenderness of his personal love for us! What can I do for you?... That is the flame that rises from the hearth.” [To Mme Natalie Jordan, August 1867]

This is a continuation of the advice given in the previous reflection and so it is not surprising that the tone is the same. We endorse all that has been said in the last reflection and concentrate only on the last bit the key attitude of the person seeking union with God. Perhaps the best Gospel image would be that of Mary of Bethany at the feet of Jesus: 'She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her"' (Lk 10:39-42).

In this icon we see Mary seated (position and stance of a disciple) at the feet of Jesus just listening to him. She allows him to do all the talking, but responds intelligently to everything he says. He leads and she is content to follow. Were we there we would have noticed the rapt attention with which she listened, drinking in not just the words, but the very

person of Jesus. She literally made him feel that he was the centre of her life and that she belonged totally to him. She wasn't one bit concerned about the correctness of her posture, her gestures or even the few words that she did speak. Wasn't she there like clay in the hands of a potter, ready to be moulded and re-moulded according to the plans and desires of the Master? No wonder Jesus was really pleased with her effort and more, with her approach!



On the other hand Martha was full of her own plans and desires, inspired by love undoubtedly, yet emanating from herself rather than from Jesus. She would have hardly asked him even once, 'What would you have me do for you, Lord?!' She knew what she wanted to do and set about doing it with great gusto. At the end of the evening in which she had entertained Jesus, her reflections would perhaps be something like, 'All that I planned went off well, without a hitch!' and then she would have taken much of the credit to herself. It would not have even crossed her mind to check and see whether Jesus, the guest, had really enjoyed the time spent in their company or not!

And what gave away her self-centred attitude was the fact that she resented Mary's being so engrossed in her divine Guest instead of helping her prepare the dishes. She even complained to Jesus to try and get him to force her to help! Just contemplating this scene with calm and openness would enable anyone to see which qualities one should rather have, even if Jesus had not mentioned anything. Then, if one could place this quality in the hands of the Spirit and leave oneself in his hands, he would look after the rest much more effectively than we could ever do by ourselves!

“...To attain such a living prayer, we must strive very hard to forget ourselves, to avoid seeking ourselves in any way in prayer. We must specially simplify the work of our mind by a simple and calm view of God's truths.” [To Mme Natalie Jordan, August 1867]

Continuing with the same piece of advice, Fr. Eymard zeroes in on the key point: the Self. Whatever efforts we make in prayer, their intent has to be somewhat negative, meaning thereby that we seek only to lose the Self and not emphasize it, to let go our tight control over every situation we find ourselves in and focus intently on what the Lord would rather have us do! Now this change of our habitual tendency does not come about easily, because first of all, most people are so self-conscious, with such a dread of losing themselves especially in the hands of God that they do not even notice how focused on the Self their entire prayer is! It takes an outsider to point this out to them, and even then it would need a lot of time for them to be convinced that a selfless prayer is far more effective than a self-directed one.

Secondly, the usual dynamics of growth in prayer are that if at all our prayer is growing, particularly in the earlier stages, it becomes more and more simple and unified: for one thing, the amount of talking on our part becomes far less for we soon realize that our words are totally unnecessary and redundant. The Lord knows all that we need even before we ask it, anyway! Besides, when it is he who takes the initiative in every instance and sees the entire project through, giving

us just an ancillary role in it, wouldn't we really be messing things up by our constant interference? Again, once we truly get a taste of his love, we



instinctively realize that there is nothing much that we can or even need to do. All he asks of us is to allow him to work in our lives freely and uninterruptedly. Happy is the person who understands this and practices it in his prayer consistently.

What we need to train ourselves for in prayer, then, is to let-go in faith and love. This does not mean that we are reluctant to do our bit. There is a certain amount that Jesus would want us to do, but our focus is on allowing him to tell us what and when and also how much our intervention should be. Once we have mastered this docility in prayer, then we can be sure that our prayer will be productive and achieve the goal which is the losing of the Self in us so as to be filled with God's life and love. However, it may be worth stressing that even in this matter of losing the Self, the efforts of the Self should be minimal, else we are likely to take pride even in this, viz. that we have ourselves got rid of the Self. The true test of this is that when the Self has been eliminated, we would not even be aware of it if the job was done by the Lord. If achieved through our own efforts, then we would gloat in the victory, offering it to the Lord, no doubt, but also glorying in it ourselves!

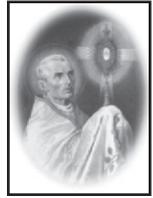
The truly humble person is not even aware that s/he is humble but only sees his/her own faults and failings ever more glaring before his/her eyes. It is only the Lord who chalks up the progress made and prepares the reward to be given at the end of the journey!

“The secret of this simple view is to see things at first glance, under the aspect of God's goodness for us, the reason for this grace, what it cost our Lord Jesus, its actuality and permanence for us.” [To Mme Natalie Jordan, August 1867]

The normal way people act is to see at first glance what appears on the surface and that is what human nature perceives. But God reminds us that 'My ways are not your ways; as far as the east is from the west, so different are My thoughts from your thoughts (Is 55:5-7). This simply means that we need to look again to be able to perceive God's design in that particular action. We usually refer to this as to 'respect' to look again, to discern a deeper level of meaning. That is what is called the 'faith vision' of reality. Now the person who wishes to be close to God trains him/herself to make this 'respectful' vision the first glance or the ordinary way of looking at things. This is no doubt a gift given by God himself and comes as a result of entering into Covenant with God. Yet it also calls for consistent practice and frequent repetition if it is to become a part of our lives.

Once we are habituated to live at this level, then we see everything as far as possible from the angle of God's vision: his intention in allowing that particular incident in our lives, the immense love that led to his granting us that situation, that in spite of what may appear on the surface it is indeed an expression of God's love for us... With this background the person then cooperates with God to the fullest and the results are really marvelous. Then the person can go further and include other considerations

like, what our entire spiritual lives have cost Jesus, the suffering and death of the Cross, that each manifestation of God's love for us makes the bonds of the Covenant stronger and stronger, and also our reaction more firm and loving.



The Jews had developed a marvelous way of picking up and responding to God's love in their daily activity. They were so sure of God's love that they did not have to wait to see God's promises fulfilled and then come to praise and thank him. The moment the oracle was uttered they took it to be as good as done and so began their rejoicing, thanking and celebrating. Thus, Hannah began to rejoice the moment Eli told her that she would return the following year to the Temple to give thanks to God for having received a son. Unfortunately, our spirituality today does not take us that far; we still somehow want to see and touch and feel before we believe that God is for us, that all that he ordains for us is really for our good. If we could only believe God's word, how different would not our lives be! "I know what plans I have for you, plans for your welfare and not for your harm. I mean to give you a future with hope" (Jer. 29:11). For today, we could perhaps keep just this one promise of God in mind and seek to respond positively to whatever he ordains for us.

Thus we will gradually build up our faith and be able to exercise it on every occasion, especially when everything seems to go the wrong way. We might even be able to rejoice in such adverse situations because we believe that 'the Lord is close to the broken-hearted' (Ps. 34:18).

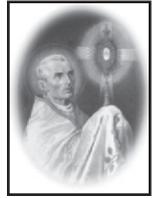
“When the soul has the joy of finding this good side, prayer becomes more like a delightful contemplation, where the hour passes quickly.” [To Mme Natalie Jordan, August 1867]

Once we begin to discern God's marvelous plan for us in every event of our lives, we notice that our prayer moves to a higher level. We no longer need to enumerate all the blessings we are in need of. We instinctively realize that the Father knows all that we need and will take care of our needs even before we ask him. And that too in a way far beyond even our wildest dreams! That is because he is good and he loves us immensely, more than we can ever understand. And this is a firm conviction within us!

Thus, all we need to do in prayer is to gaze lovingly on everything God does for us, marveling at the ingenuity of his planning and the intensity of his love. This 'loving glance' that makes up our prayer without any words or desires expressed, is perhaps the best form of prayer because it leaves God free to do whatever he wants in our lives. Besides it guarantees that we will follow up lovingly all that God initiates because we believe that he is on our side and works for our good. No amount of adversity will be able to shake us and make our faith in him waver; rather, the more adversities we face the better, because by now we instinctively recognize the pattern of the Paschal Mystery in our lives: when God wishes to take us upwards, he usually begins by asking us to allow him to move us in the opposite direction. When we accept this without any resistance, he

moves much faster and does greater things in our lives.

One powerful example from the Old Testament is the way God



dealt with Gideon when he chose him to lead the Israelites against their enemies in the early days of their settlement in the Promised Land. Gideon took a long time to really accept God's word recall the test he put to God concerning the fleece. After all that, when God finally ordered him to get ready for battle, he came with more than thirty two thousand soldiers, the biggest number he could muster, so that victory would definitely be theirs. But God asked him to reduce that number as it was too high. He reduced it to three thousand, but even this God found was excessive. Finally he brought it down to three hundred and with this small insignificant number Gideon was able to defeat the enemy because it was the Lord who fought with them.

Do we not experience similar marvels in our lives when our prayer leads us to deep faith in God's action on our behalf? When we begin our day with prayer of this kind, it will inevitably spill over into all the actions we do the rest of the day. Each little victory, or rather each new way that God adopts, will simply serve to deepen our faith and make us marvel at the numerous ways and means he has at his disposal all of which are placed at the service of his beloved children. Thus our prayer influences our day and the day in its turn also colours the way we pray. Thus, the Lord moves us forward step by painful step till he gets a complete grip over our lives and leads us to a deep simplicity and freedom in all we do!

“Believe what I say, accomplish acts of zeal only through duty, but aspire to the interior life by the attraction of divine love.”

[To Mme Natalie Jordan, August 1867]

Here is another practical piece of advice from the rich store that was Fr. Eymard. External acts must first of all be the 'fruit' if an interior fecundity. 'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks!' (Mt. 12:34). So, when one is on fire with love for the Lord, he himself will point out what he wants to be done on the external level. And he indicates this through our legitimate superiors, through the circumstances in which we find ourselves, through the suggestions of friends and well-wishers, even through the difficulties and obstacles in our path. Nevertheless in all this activity, we need to look to the Lord who is the One who takes the initiative. Ours is to obey his desires and fulfill his plans and not to make an 'offering.' When we offer something to the Lord, *we* decide on what is to be offered (generally because we think it is good and is something that will please the Lord) but it need not be really what he wants of us. Hence, we need to listen carefully before undertaking any such external works.

But when it is a question of responding to the demands of the interior life that is when we respond to love and out of love. In this case, we listen with the heart and first seek to experience God's special love for us. Once this is clear then all we need to do is to give free rein to our own heart's desires because generally love knows how to respond to love. Nevertheless, here too we need to remember that God's Spirit dwells within us directing us how to respond to God's call in the best possible and most productive

manner. God's love is what will draw us out of ourselves and possibly the acid test of our acting out of love will be that we accept all the sacrifices involved in



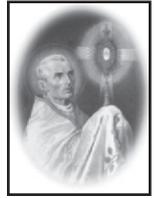
the process without even noticing that they cost a good deal. Love makes all things easy and likeable.

We recall two instances mentioned in the Gospels, both involving women. In the story of the sinner woman, while defending her before Simon the Pharisee Jesus says that 'she has been forgiven much because she has loved much!' (Lk. 7:36-50). However, even though not expressed it is obvious that she was able to love much because she perceived that she had herself been loved much by the Lord who called her to a better way of life! That gave her the courage to brave all the adverse circumstances and criticism of those around and approach Jesus as he reclined at table and express her love in that marvelous manner.

The other instance is similar, except that in this case the woman approaches Jesus seated at table and first of all *breaks the neck of the alabaster jar* and then pours the precious ointment on his head. She broke the neck of the jar as a sign of her total giving not just of the ointment but of the jar as well, which once broken could not be put to human use again! Only love would dictate such a radical generosity from the woman. And she would have done this without even giving it a second thought. The others who witnessed the gesture were struck by the extravagance and claimed that the ointment could have been sold and the money given to the poor! (Mk 14:3-9). Following our heart in our response to Jesus brings out the best in us, always.

“When in church, remember that you are only a servant adorer of the Blessed Sacrament. Consequently don't worry too much about your responsibilities, or about yourself. Pure love forgets itself and glorifies the goodness and tenderness of God in himself and in us.” [To Mme Josephine Gourd, August 1867]

please him most. Besides, it helps when we remember that we go to pray not so much to get something for ourselves, but rather to be at his service. Unfortunately, there are so few persons who go to pray (even before the Blessed Sacrament exposed) with that selfless intention! Most people approach the Lord in order to get something for oneself and so the focus is generally on oneself.



Referring to her presence in the Church, Fr. Eymard obviously envisages the time spent in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. He looked on this as a 'service' done to Christ the King, present there for us. Hence, a person is there on 'duty' as it were, and during that time, the primary responsibility of the person is to be there and to attend to the Lord. The focus would have to be totally on the Lord as was the case with Mary, the sister of Martha when the Lord visited their home. She certainly was aware that there were a lot of things to be attended to, in order to make the visit of Jesus pleasant and comfortable for him... but none of these was as important as 'being there' for him. Imagine a guest being welcomed into the home and then left alone while the members busy themselves with the arrangements and preparations for the meal! What an insult to the guest and much more so when the Guest is Jesus himself!

When we come into the Lord's presence in prayer, it is he who welcomes us and places himself totally at our disposal. And so, responding out of a similar love, we should aim at forgetting ourselves and being all there for him so that he can convey to us all that he has in mind for ourselves and those he will bring into our lives that day. That is what would

The true adorer goes to pray with the mind and heart prepared to be totally at the disposal of the Master. S/he is attentive to every word he says, be it through the Scriptures, through memory, through another person who animates or even shares the prayer, through circumstances around and so on. His/her attitude is like that of Samuel, 'Speak, Lord, your servant is listening!' But it is an attitude steeped in love and reverence. For the Lord too, it would be a pleasure speaking to a person who has this attitude rather than to another who has come mainly to get something for himself.

However, such an attitude is not only developed gradually, but also presumes that one is whole, full and rich, inside and hence does not approach the Lord with the beggar's attitude which is so common among Christians even today. Most do not seem to have read Eph. 1:3-10 in which the hymn reminds us that 'he has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, through Christ Jesus.' This simply means that there is nothing that we do not really have all we need to do is to use the gifts that the Lord in his goodness and love has already showered upon us. This awareness frees us to be totally at the disposal of the Lord in prayer.

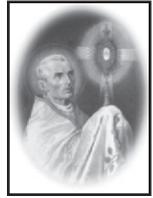
“You could have hoped to live calmly and in solitude close to your dear mother, but see how our Lord is separating you and is surrounding you with noisy activity...The more you expend yourself exteriorly the more you must cover and fill yourself interiorly with Jesus.” [To Ms Stephanie Gourd, August 1867]

When a person hands him/herself over to the Lord, s/he can expect the worst from the viewpoint of the enemy - Self. Because the Lord wants the best for us, he will never allow us to get into a rut and remain for long in our comfort zone dominated by the Self. Generally, he uses an approach that will produce the best results in the shortest amount of time. And so one could expect to receive precisely what one would rather not have. As Peter was told, 'Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go' (Jn 21:18).

However, when we have full trust in the Lord, we are sure that no matter what he chooses for us, that will always be the best he can offer us. That enables us to respond positively and generously.

In the present case, the person naturally seemed inclined towards quiet and recollection, and so the Lord immerses her into a very noisy and distracting situation. Once in this kind of a 'unfavourable' situation, the person can either just stick it out, biding one's time and gritting one's teeth, or trusting in the

Lord's goodness, enter wholeheartedly into the situation and from inside, as it were, still seek to make a positive difference in the lives of people. Since in this kind of a situation one may not easily be able to see the good the Lord intends, one would need to cling to him in sheer faith and love.



One positive outcome of a situation like this is that the person can learn the art of working at two levels. While being immersed in hectic activity on the external level, the person would need to train him/herself to be interiorly close to the Lord and work in collaboration with him. Initially this art or skill of being fully present at two different levels is very difficult, yet with the Lord's help nothing is impossible. All great saints had to learn this difficult lesson but in the end the Lord was triumphant in their lives too. The Gospel scene that comes to mind is that of Peter who suggests to the Lord when he came to them walking on the turbulent waters, that he command him (Peter) to walk towards him on the waters. At the Lord's command he did actually step out and begin to walk, but seeing the huge waves all round him, he took fright and began to sink (Mt. 14:30-31). The point seems to be that if Peter had continued to keep his eyes on Jesus rather than on the waves, he would not have experienced much difficulty in walking over the waters as Jesus did.

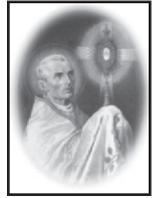
Once Jesus is no longer the centre of our lives we could easily find ourselves in all kinds of difficulties. Even if he is asleep, as happened at the time of the other crossing (Mk. 4:35-40) there is nothing to fear we still have him with us in the boat, and that is all that matters!

“...When you are with our Lord, don't allow yourself to think of others, busy yourself with our Lord, with our Lord alone. Say little about yourself to Jesus, much about Jesus to yourself. In real love, we need to forget ourselves, achieve a life of union in our Lord by deep awareness of the heart. That is not tiring and can harmonize with everything else.” [To Ms Stephanie Gourd, August 1867]

Continuing in the same strain, Fr. Eymard again emphasizes that one must always keep Jesus as the focus of our attention. Our attitude then is, 'What would you have me do, Lord?' and when we proceed to do 'as he tells you' following Mary's suggestion to the servants at Cana (Jn 2:1-11), we can certainly expect marvels from him. Yet, it is not easy in trying circumstances to remember that our hope is only in him. We don't need to recount to him the entire story of our ailments and problems for he certainly knows about it already. Rather, if we can focus more on his qualities and the marvelous deeds he does on our behalf, then we have little to fear.

No matter which angle he takes, Fr. Eymard almost always returns to the key point: You cannot serve two masters at the same time, God and Self. So the more we learn to do without the Self at the centre, the easier it becomes to keep that central place reserved for Jesus. Further, he returns to another key idea viz. the supremacy of the interior life. When this interior communion with the Lord becomes an important aspect of our

spiritual life, then we find that we actually expend less spiritual energy and hence don't tire or get discouraged easily. When again it is love that governs



our responses to Jesus, then we don't mind whatever difficulties come our way our main preoccupation is to respond to him in the best possible manner.

Love does make all things possible and renders the project so simple and acceptable that we don't even notice the huge sacrifices we make. Now if that is true on the natural level in our relationships with people around us, how much more would this not be true in our relationship with Jesus?

This is possibly what Jesus was looking for in his chosen disciples on the night of the Last Supper. He invited them all to accompany him to the Garden of Gethsemane and sought their comforting presence around him. 'Watch and pray with me for a while,' he pleaded. But their hearts were heavy and sleep soon overtook them all, so much so that this drew the complaint from the weary heart of Jesus himself: 'Could you not watch one hour with me?' Had their love for the Master been a little more alive, they would have eagerly shared that difficult hour with him, even though they could not do much to eliminate it altogether. But that was not what he sought either. All he wanted was to know that they were with him, ready to share that difficult moment in which he had to try and be loyal to the Father's will at all cost.

“At his feet, listen to him like Mary: it is the bread of life and knowledge. It is the banquet of the soul which comforts you in every way. It is the prayer of silence, of a glance, of the happiness of being under the influence of the divine Sun on His heart in holy Communion or when your soul suffers, or is sad.” [To Countess D'Andigne, August 1867]

Addressing another directee but almost in the same strain as the previous reflection, Fr. Eymard returns to his oft-repeated picture of Mary listening attentively at the feet of Jesus. Even if Mary did initially choose to accompany Jesus because she saw her sister Martha busy with several chores, this soon became a work of love as she listened to him and entertained him. She probably did not have much to say for herself, but she took great pleasure in listening to every word he said. And for Jesus this would have been a situation that was refreshingly different from what he encountered in most other cases.

He was accustomed to having people listen to him attentively, but soon discovered that his hearers were not necessarily eager to learn the truth or to share his inmost thoughts. They were often interested only in catching him out in something wrong that he said. Others would possibly have also been eager to listen, but more for the sake of discovering what they themselves could get out of his teaching. Hardly anyone would have treated him as a person in his own right, seeking to offer him the

intimacy of a listening heart! After all, every single person longs to have someone take him/her seriously especially by listening to all that s/he



would like to share. So often we realize that people generally do not have the time, and much less the desire to be totally at the disposal of another, especially to listen to them.

True and deep love does not have to say much, just a glance suffices for the beloved to catch all that needs to be expressed. And much as Jesus would want to be listened to by others, so does he also take us seriously when we need to be heard. What a tremendous joy it is to know that he listens to us as much as we make the effort to listen to him once we have this experience our closeness to him cannot but increase and deepen. After this, our communion can be experienced in any place and at any time, without too much of formality. That is when we begin to realize that Jesus is present to us in the interior Cenacle of our hearts and lives and that we do not anymore need to go to set places and observe set rituals in order to experience his loving embrace.

Such possibly would have been the relationship that the 'beloved disciple', St. John himself, had with Jesus. He understood every word of Jesus, every gesture he made and had the freedom to lean back on his breast and ask a very personal question and what is more have the joy of receiving an answer from Jesus! None of the other disciples dared to be so free with Jesus. Truly how much Jesus is prepared to gift to us, for so little a response on our part! Could we make a more serious effort to be part of that inner circle of his close friends?

“When Jesus seems dead, his Heart does not die, his blood was still warm even after his death in his divine Person. Jesus said, 'whoever eats me abides in me, and I abide in him.' A beautiful and divine sharing of life! To dwell with Jesus, in Jesus, that is to be his servant adorers.” [To Countess D'Andigne, August 1867]

The most central mystery of our faith is the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead. In spite of telling his apostles beforehand of this truth, all of them found it difficult to accept it and believe in it. And even today, while we do assent to the truth of the Resurrection notionally, hardly anyone makes an effort to delve into this mystery to understand at least what little we can about it. Put in simple terms it reminds us that at his death, Jesus is totally transformed becoming one with the Father and that is the fruit of his unconditional surrender in love and faith. First of all, this occurs at the very moment of death - thus the dying-rising form one mystery, one moment with no gap in between.

Jesus is the Risen Lord from the moment he died on the Cross and will ever remain the same. But the important point is that we now approach him always as the Risen Lord in glory. Recalling the events of his life may be instructive and educative for us, but we do not meet the Lord in any of these. Thus, we could spend hours contemplating the infancy of Jesus, but we will never be able to meet the Infant Jesus. And so, our devotion to the “Infant Jesus” which is so popular in the Church today would remain sterile unless it somehow led us to the Risen Lord eventually. Now the Risen Lord is available to us primarily in the Liturgy as is shown in Luke's gospel.

The Risen Lord catches up with the two disciples as they trudged along mournfully recalling all the events of the past few days. No matter how much they went over the facts of the past



week they couldn't get any closer to solving the mystery. The Lord joined them and after giving them a chance to explain their predicament, he took them back through the Scriptures right from Moses up to the present and showed them the real meaning of what was written about the Messiah. Thus, he indicated to them the first 'place' where they could encounter him as Risen Lord in the breaking of the Word for during the entire explanation of the Scriptures their hearts were burning within them a sign of his effective presence to them!

As they approached the village, he 'made as if to go on' thus providing them with the opportunity to practice what they had learnt, viz. the breaking of themselves for the benefit of their neighbour. They rose to the occasion when they pressed him to stay with them, for the day was far spent. And as they met round the Table, there again they 'saw' the risen Lord in the breaking of bread. Hurrying back to Jerusalem, they began to recount their experience to those gathered there and 'while they were speaking' once again the Lord was present to them. The third place then is their sharing faith in community. Once again the Lord took them through the Scriptures and shared a meal of broiled fish with them as a community after which he commissioned them to be witnesses of his resurrection, proclaiming repentance to all. Thus, as they engaged in ministry of preaching they would meet the Risen Lord. And finally, he led them out as far as Bethany, the point at which his Passion had begun, and after blessing them he departed leaving them to walk their way to Calvary and death and a final share in the Resurrection. Thus, meeting the Risen Lord is the most important thing for us in all our devotions!

“May God protect and increase your growing fervour and recollection: two great gifts of divine love. The first makes us serve God well: it is the activity of love. The second fills us with strength necessary to work: it is the bread of life and understanding.” [To Mme Mathilde Giraud-Jordan, October 1867]

Fervour and recollection are pointed out as the two great gifts that sustain us throughout our journey in this world. Both come to us as gifts from the Lord given generously but received in the measure in which we are ready to appropriate them. The Lord will not thrust his precious gifts onto us, especially if we are not keenly desirous of using them for our benefit and that of others. We are reminded often in the Scriptures that the Lord loves people who have great desires. Even when our desire for him cannot always be fully satisfied, if we keep placing those desires before him, he will fulfill them some day far beyond our expectations. Here again, it is not from our own resources that we draw the strength to do this he himself will provide us with all that we need.

Having tasted the first installments of his love, we are drawn forward step by eager step until we realize that nowhere else would be find such deep happiness and contentment. Love makes us generous to give to the Lord as he gives to us. It is no wonder that Fr. Eymard is characterized by the Gift of Self and the Vow of Personality through which he was inspired to give himself totally back to

God through the Eucharist as God had given himself totally to Fr. Eymard through the Eucharist!

Recollection, Fr. Eymard claims, will



provide us with the strength and stamina to keep giving of ourselves in every situation the Lord ordains for us. And that is because it enables us to focus on the essentials. It is like a runner in a race he concentrates on the finishing tape and that gives him the courage, strength and inspiration to make that tremendous effort to get there before everyone else. Even if he trips and falls, he gets up and resumes the race running till the finish. Thus, it is a good practice to entrust our enthusiasm and love into the safekeeping of God himself for then we know we are safe in his loving hands.

Love is a tremendous power for bringing out the best in a person. It inspires us from within and produces that extra burst of energy needed to persevere till the end. And in the spiritual life (as also on the natural plane), the initial spark of love is a gift coming from the outside. If only we can be alert to its presence and then do all we can to foster its growth, we can't go too far wrong. And the primary place to replenish our love is precisely the Eucharistic celebration where through Word and Sacrament, the Lord is present to us filling the receptive person with gifts beyond measure. Happy is the person who has learnt the secret of love and does all within his power to keep it increasing through prayer and exercising it in favour of the needy!

“Since recollection cannot be your duty of state, you must make your meditation the principal practice of recollection, where you find your strength and make your spiritual provision for the day.” [To Mme Mathilde Giraud-Jordan, October 1867]

In the case of this directee, recollection could not be her duty of state meaning that her calling in life as a wife and mother would not allow her the privilege of profound recollection for too long a period. In this case, the alternative is to 'do whatever is needed at the moment' with full concentration and love. For after all, a mother at home manifests her love for her family precisely in all the little works she does on their behalf, to make the home a happy and contented family. In all these efforts, when the focus is not on herself but on the others she serves, she acts selflessly and hence grows in union with the Lord. For the only thing that blocks our spiritual growth is self-centredness. That somehow switches off the pump or device that brings us a constant flow of God's love and so we die of spiritual starvation.

Over and above this, if the person can find some time to reserve exclusively for the Lord in meditation or prayer that would be a further blessing as this too would deepen the contact with the Lord. It could be compared to recharging one's batteries so that in the hurly burly of life, one can still continue loving and serving the Lord, even if not at one's highest potential. While at prayer, therefore, it is vital that one follows the dynamics correctly, otherwise one would be wasting precious opportunities to replenish one's

strength needed so desperately throughout the day. Thus, prayer is not a time for concentrating on oneself and asking for spiritual gifts for oneself.



As Jesus taught his disciples, we pray that the Lord 'give us each day our daily bread' which is the Eucharist, bread that is broken and shared. Thus, whatever we ask is in view of it being shared liberally with everyone in need.

This approach of selflessness again comes as a gift from the Lord because he grants us the deep inner assurance that we are loved for what we are and not for what we do or perform. This last kind of love is conditional and can never really satisfy the human heart it leaves it cold, shrivelled and hungering for more. Where even the daily time of prayer becomes difficult, e.g. because of the illness of a family member who then needs extra care and attention, that very service can become our meditation provided we undertake it out of love and self-forgetfulness. The ideal should be never to want to do anything, no matter how trivial, simply because "I" want it that way. We seek out and do always the things that please the Father as he himself indicates this to us in a thousand different ways. Reading the signs of the times then becomes the most vital activity of our lives. Once we discover his good pleasure, then the rest follows if our hearts are filled with love.

Again, it is worth recalling that love is not primarily an emotion, which comes and goes. It is rather a decision to do always what pleases him. Like the eyes of a maid are on the hands of her mistress, so our eyes are on the Lord, our God, eagerly waiting to do all he asks of us! (Ps. 123:1).

“It is better to drag oneself than to let oneself fall to the ground. Continue to go to Holy Communion: that is your life and only virtue... Jesus forming himself in you. Consider Holy Communion as a pure gift from God's merciful goodness, an invitation to his table of grace, because you are poor, weak and ill. So, you should go joyfully.”

[To Mme Antoinette de Grandville, October, 1867]

The expression 'fall to the ground' speaks of defeat, of being rendered totally helpless, most likely by the enemy or by our own decision to give up the fight. Once that happens then no one can help us, not even Almighty God because we refuse to cooperate. But if we keep dragging ourselves, it at least speaks of a certain desire to keep moving, even if with great difficulty. As long as he crawls along, there are signs of life in the person still and hence plenty of hope. In short, even in the face of the greatest difficulties, we should not give up hope, because our God is the Conqueror and Victor even when his victory does not appear on the surface.

The truth of the Resurrection keeps reminding us that in the end the Lord has conquered and he assures us, 'Do not be afraid, I have overcome the world' (Jn. 16:33). And so we return to him as our only strength and support for he is keen on sharing his victory with anyone who will allow him to. We come to Communion with him not because we have been good, thus looking on Communion as a kind of reward for being

faithful. Rather, we come to him because we still need to be formed in his likeness, particularly in his steadfast love of the Father and his unquestioning



obedience to his will. As he shares his life and love with us, it is like jump-starting a car whose battery has run down and cannot start on its own. Drawing power from him, we find new life injected into ourselves and we can at least begin the effort anew.

This starting afresh from Jesus is undoubtedly God's gift to us especially when our own resources are low. It is at this time that we need to cling to Jesus as the rock of our salvation who invites us saying, 'Come, all you who are hungry, buy milk ... (Is. 55:1). Our very coming to him is an admission of our helplessness and our trust in him that he will not abandon us in our hour of need. He was sent precisely for sinners and takes delight in raising the lowly from the dung heap and setting them up on high in the midst of princes and kings. (Lk 1:46-55). There is nothing more effective in drawing the Lord's mercy and strength towards ourselves than a humble admission of our inability to help ourselves, an avowal made with deep faith and love, not with abject beggarliness.

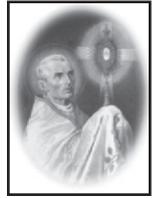
'Lord, if you wish, you can heal me,' should be our plea and we can be sure we will hear his reassuring words, 'Of course I want to, be healed!' (Mk. 2:40-45). Thus, we approach the Lord our rock with joy and confidence and return reinvigorated because he never refuses the humble contrite heart anything it needs!

“You accuse yourself very strongly of laziness: it is possible; of not being sufficiently generous in those things that God is asking of you... Then what should you do? ... sacrifice those things which are unnecessary or useless for your personal use, or suitable to your situation. Then you will find peace with yourself.” [To Mme Antoinette de Grandville, November, 1867]

In a situation where the directee feels that she is not doing enough, and is not sufficiently generous in giving the Lord all that he asks, Fr. Eymard recommends that the person take the offensive and begin by cutting oneself off from all unnecessary and useless possessions, which possibly have been accumulated in order to boost one's sense of security. Having made ourselves helpless, like a little child, we can then expect the Lord's powerful presence to us in a more tangible manner for 'he who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted' (Lk 14:11). The Lord waits to fill us with his love, but if we are already full to the brim with the Self, there is no room in us to receive all that he wishes to gift to us. Hence the need of emptying ourselves, sometimes even forcibly if we want to experience the power of his love!

However, even when we take the initiative and deprive ourselves of things that surround us, it would be helpful to look to the Lord to ascertain what exactly he would want us to do. There is no point in us depriving ourselves of what we think is unnecessary when we do not surrender

to the Lord the very things he asks of us. This should come first and then we can add what we think we could surrender of our own free choice. Doing God's will



should always take precedence over doing our own will, no matter how good our intentions may be! Possibly what Fr. Eymard suggests would be a first step, that we attain inner peace; then, of course, we will be able to listen more carefully to what the Lord asks of us.

Further, it could happen that the laziness the person experiences is simply the result of the dryness one goes through in the life of prayer not long after beginning the journey. During this period, then, it is recommended that the person should not reduce the time given to prayer, even if it appears to be distasteful and dry. Rather, if possible, the person should spend extra time in prayer not as a duty or penance, but rather as an expression of love. The key point at this stage is to cling to the person of Jesus even though his presence seems to be remote and ineffective. During this test of faith, we could also offer to the Lord the sentiments of Mary, especially her wonderful surrender into God's hands all through her life, her strong faith in her Son Jesus and her total dependence on the Father. We recall also all the valiant Christians who form part of the Church and keep on struggling with love and trust no matter what the odds against them are. We unite ourselves with them and share in their efforts as well.

All through this period of trial it is helpful to keep our gaze on Jesus who has not abandoned us but is, in fact, very close, even if his presence is not tangibly felt.

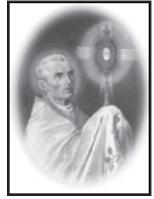
“Apply yourself to achieve a stable spirit of divine love in your various duties, actions and interior states.” [To Countess D'Andigne, November 1867]

The spiritual journey during this period of trial and dryness could be compared to a train passing through a dark tunnel. In such a situation we remind ourselves first of all that the tunnel makes our journey considerably shorter and easier, even if somewhat inconvenient and distasteful. While passing through a tunnel, our focus is on the end when once again we will emerge into the light. We endure the period of darkness knowing full well that it is temporary and transitory and will lead us to our destination in due time.

Since love is the greatest virtue we could cultivate and at this critical period, perhaps the most difficult one to focus on, we need to come to it with all the greater zest and vigour. Initially this would cost us a lot of effort, but once the habit is formed, it becomes more and more a stable disposition that endures. To act out of love involves keeping our eyes on the person whom we love, on his good and gracious qualities, his kindness and care of us especially in difficult circumstances. As long as we keep our gaze not on ourselves but on the other, we find that the difficulties we face are not unbearable.

Availing ourselves of the truth of the 'communion of saints' whereby we believe that we are all one, no matter where we come from or what our qualifications, we draw on the goodness and virtues of the other members who are perhaps stronger than we are at present.

These need not be persons whom we actually know, but we recall that Jesus guarantees that his Church is holy and by that he means that at any given time, there will always be at least a few members who are truly committed to him and to the kingdom. We recall such persons and share in their generosity and love.



This period in our spiritual lives could be compared to the boat journey the disciples made with Jesus asleep in the stern (Mk. 4:35-41). When the storm arose, the disciples panicked and rushed to wake him up and ask for his help. St. Therese, the Little Flower used to say that if she was in that boat with Jesus when the storm arose, she would not disturb his sleep. For her, it was sufficient to know that Jesus was present in the same boat tossed by the angry waves. Even if the boat sank as long as Jesus was with her, she was convinced that she would be safe and that he would see them through that storm. This is easily said, but not all that easy to practice unless one's faith in the person of Jesus is really strong.

Nevertheless, it is good to recall that our faith does not become strong until it is tested and tried in several different ways, even difficult ones. Each victory gives us a greater assurance that Jesus will never let us down in a moment of crisis as long as we remain close to him. He holds us in the palm of his hands and no evil will approach to harm us (Is. 49:16)!

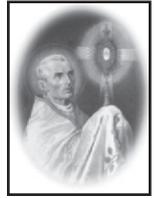
The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want ... even if I walk through the valley of darkness, no evil would I fear. For you are there with your crook and your staff with these you give me comfort! (Ps. 23:1-4).

“You must find God in your varied activities: how can this be done? By frequent aspirations, by frequently renewing the offering of your intentions during your actions.” [To Mme Mathilde Giraud-Jordan, November 1867]

Fr. Eymard in this suggestion to his directee asks her to find God in the multiplicity of activities which form our normal daily routine, by repeated aspirations and renewal of intention to act always out of love. That would be the standard approach in a situation like that. But there would also be other ways e.g. of seeking to discover some of the qualities characteristic of God in each situation we face. The moment we face an obstacle we train ourselves to take the problem to him, yet remain calm enough to also have at our disposal all the resources he himself has provided us with. Several of these are within our own selves, and many more perhaps are outside ourselves in the persons surrounding us. Thus, we could humbly ask someone to help us in that difficulty and discover that several persons are genuinely generous and go out of their way to help.

At other times, it would perhaps help to ask ourselves what we stand to lose if we do not have things our way and accept to let go of our plans. Thus, if we are ready to conduct an audio-visual programme and there is a power failure just as we are about to begin the session, rendering the machines un-useable, we need not get upset but could ask ourselves whether there is any other way in which the programme can continue, even without using the audio-visual projector. With this kind of an approach we might

find that we could have an equally effective presentation in a novel and creative manner, without getting upset because our plans failed. And the Lord's objective could be fulfilled in a much better manner, for that matter!



The understanding underneath this approach is that God is the one in charge of our entire lives and so it is he who determines which is the most appropriate action we could undertake in a given situation. We are merely instruments in his powerful hands, and as long as we work in unison with him, he will attend to the outcome making it beneficial to the recipients in ways that only he knows best. Thus the variety of activities that make up our day need not present insurmountable obstacles for union with God. We could find him even in the midst of the daily surprises that come our way. Because of his great love the Lord is present to us in marvelous ways blessing us with every possible grace. Once we are able to discern the Lord close to us we find that we can take all these difficulties in our stride profiting from them as the Lord shows us how. For Paul reminds us that, 'for those who love God everything works for their good' (Rom. 8:28). The result that follows is that 'nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, no hardships or even failures...!' (Rom. 8:35-39).

The secret then seems to be that we seek to remain united with God's will, come what may, and within a given set of circumstances, we respond out of love in the best way we can! Once we get habituated to this approach, we find that we really do not have any major upheavals in our lives!

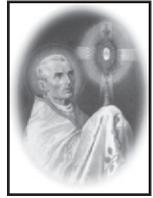
“Believe me, forget yourself more with God, look more closely at the details of his goodness, of his divine Providence in action. Let his love be the point of departure; its greatness is seen in proportion to our unworthiness.” [To Mme Antoinette de Grandville, December 1867]

One could say that the entire goal of the spiritual life is to learn how to lose or forget oneself and to allow Jesus to live in and through me. However, it is not easy to forget oneself because it means going counter to almost everything that we hold dear. But once a person can reach that level of putting oneself last, of thinking of others and particularly of Jesus instead of oneself, life on earth becomes almost a heaven. To facilitate this work of switching personalities, as it were, with Jesus, we need to look more often at his marvelous qualities.

In the beginning this calls for a conscious effort on our part, but it can soon become a habit if we are persistent in practicing it. In every situation we turn to Jesus present within us and calmly ask him to take over and direct our activity in that situation. No sooner do we sincerely give him a chance than he will really take over and we will marvel at the difference this makes in our practical living. We need to do this particularly in the time of prayer where it is important that we do not lose any of the precious graces the Father has prepared for us. One cannot always guarantee that one will be fully alert and attentive to the Father's voice speaking to us in prayer but when we approach our prayer in and through Jesus, great things

can be expected.

Another important area in which we need to turn to Jesus is when we listen to the Word of God, be it in the Liturgy of the



Eucharist, during the Prayer of the Church, or even in our personal prayer. It is important at such times to pick up the correct message that the Lord wishes us to have and also to make the correct response to that message. All this can happen only with the help and inspiration of the Lord present to us. His love for us assures us that he will never let us down. But, what is important is that we turn to him with trust and love and await his good pleasure.

This approach does not mean that we do not take the time and trouble to prepare ourselves for prayer or other activity. It simply means that after doing all that is within our power, we go to the prayer with an inward readiness to change the entire plan should the Lord require that of us. And sometimes, we find that he does inspire us at the very last moment, challenging us to let go of our plan and to allow him to lead us in prayer. If we can muster the courage to let Jesus be our guide in these situations, we will soon learn that it pays to always listen to him and follow his directions. At the end of the prayer, realizing that whatever good has come out of that prayer has been his work, it becomes easier to give him the praise and thanks, without directing any of it to ourselves. Even when others thank and praise us for the inspiring prayer session we have conducted, we would inwardly be re-directing all that praise where it really belongs to Jesus, our Lord and Master.

“God loves us though we are poor and unfaithful, and so deserves our gratitude all the more; that is the means that would help you to get up and find courage... You will see your faults better in God's mercy than in yourself.”

[To Mme Antoinette de Grandville, December 1867]

While Fr. Eymard's expression in this piece of advice is that God loves us though we are poor, it would also be absolutely true to say that God loves us *because* we are poor. Didn't Jesus himself warn us seriously that 'unless you become like little children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven?' (Lk. 18:16). In other words, we have to make a strenuous effort to make ourselves into little children, helpless, needy and calling out for help which is not our natural tendency. Especially in our day, people like to feel independent and use their God-given faculties and talents to the full. The catch 22 here seems to lie in the fact that we humans need both complete independence and also total dependence at the same time.

Given our self-centred tendencies, if left to ourselves we would inevitably move towards using our gifts only for our own benefit. It is God's Spirit dwelling within us who keeps constantly drawing us towards transcending the Self and placing all our blessings at the service of our brethren. So, the pattern would seem to be this, as enunciated so well by St. Ignatius of Loyola: 'when you pray, pray as if everything depends on God; but when you work, work as if everything depends on you alone!' The emphasis here is on "as if" meaning that we know that there is

another aspect to each side of the statement! Hence, placing ourselves at the disposal of God is not subservience, but a way of getting to know what his plans for us are, and tapping



into all the resources he himself has placed within us.

Working in partnership with God and others is no easy task for most people. And yet, even the greatest scientists and other eminent persons who have benefited society beyond our wildest dreams have been known to work in collaboration with God and that too quite consciously and openly. And so, we don't need to apologize for taking this stance in life; rather we should be proud of the fact that in this way we fulfill the original plan of God. As Genesis shows us, from the beginning God intended human beings to be his partners when he said to Adam and Eve, 'subdue the earth and till it... give appropriate names to the animals...' (Gen. 1:28-30). These are but symbolic gestures indicating that God has left the creation of the universe incomplete and has given the task of completing and beautifying it to his human creatures. When we fail in this task, God does not reject or crush us, rather he renews us and sends us out again to finish the task, because without our collaboration it would remain incomplete for all eternity. If we can accept our failings with a spirit of gratitude and without being bashful about them, rise, acknowledge them and accept God's guidance for the future, how much more would we not be able to do for the good of society!

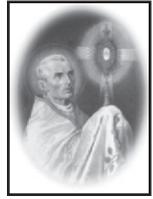
Indeed all truly great persons are at the same time deeply humble people; they are great partners to work with in a team and do not claim any credit for themselves!

“A soul that belongs to God finds its whole life in these two laws: God wills it or God does not will it. The perfection of love consists entirely in doing each thing as God wills it and in God's spirit.”
 [To Mme Josephine Gourd, December 1867]

Once we accept and live the principle explained in the previous reflection, we will have no difficulty in accepting this present piece of advice from Fr. Eymard. After all, God is the creator of the universe and has his original master plan for every single work of his creation. As Jeremiah put it: 'I know what plans I have for you, plans for your welfare and not for your harm...' (29:11-14). God's "intention" is written in bold letters all over creation and it takes a really wise person to be able to decipher this writing and work in tandem with him, rather than independently of God's plan or design. Thus, the tension seems to lie between ingenuity and love, wisdom and the self-control needed to place that wisdom totally at the service of others for their good! Thus, no person can offer any lasting blessing to his brethren unless he works within the sphere of God's plan and out of love!

In every endeavour, be it spiritual or otherwise, the arch-enemy therefore, is the Self. Yet, the Self becomes a threat only when it focuses on its weakness, limitations and such negative attributes. When these are made prominent, then of course, the natural tendency is to grab whatever we can lay our hands on in order to boost the value of the Ego. But where a person does not allow himself to get self-conscious about his limitations, what wonders are seen! Thus, Thomas Edison

responded to the one who asked, 'So, you failed five thousand times in your attempts to produce the electric bulb, didn't you?' 'No, rather, I learnt five thousand ways in which the electric bulb cannot be produced!' he responded calmly. What greatness in this man who could learn, even five thousand times, that there are ways in which he just cannot achieve his goal! And what is more, admit it freely and carry on his work until he found the right way!



This principle applies all down the line, even to the smallest detail of our lives. Unfortunate it is that we do not pass on this wisdom to many more people so that many more could reap the benefits. Once this principle is accepted and lived, how much violence, enmity, bitterness and the like would not be avoided altogether? Truly, as Jesus told us, 'he who seeks to exalt himself will be brought low, while he who humbles himself will be exalted!' (Lk. 14:11). And this humility needs to go to the extreme if one desires to be exalted to the highest: "he emptied himself becoming obedient unto death, death on a cross. And, therefore, God has highly exalted him and given him a name that is above every other name..." (Phil 2:5-11).

The point then is that we do not demean ourselves when working together with God; rather this pattern enables us to reach the highest stature of our innate, God-given greatness! The road to the greatest success seems to be not 'either or' (either God does it or We do it, but each by himself!) but rather 'both and' (working in harmonious collaboration, each respecting and treasuring the contribution of the other!). A difficult, but not impossible combination, indeed!

“The best grace is the grace of our interior state, which then becomes our form and law of action.” [To Mme Josephine Gourd, December 1867]

A person's true greatness is written into the very fabric of his life as seems to be indicated by almost every religion, but in different ways. Thus, his life's job seems to consist of first discerning what exactly is his/her mission in life? This itself could take a long time, not because the code in which this secret is written is difficult to crack, but because the natural obstacles to it are formidable viz. the Self which keeps focusing narrowly only on self-gain and immediate success, finding it difficult to keep the broader picture in view consistently. Secondly, the picture seems to unfold progressively and that too step by painful step. And so, one needs perseverance, a virtue difficult to cultivate because of the premium placed on 'instant' results and most likely also because of competition, the hidden desire to reach there before anyone else gets it, so that then the praise and glory will be altogether mine!

This discovery itself, therefore, calls for collaboration with the divine plan or pattern written into our very lives. Having obtained a fairly clear picture of what our life's mission is, we then would need to work at making it a reality but in a pretty consistent manner. Experience shows that there are many obstacles strewn all along the path to success and these need to be overcome one by one. Besides, several life-projects need team work and collaboration among several human beings. Now, each of them being a 'giant' in his own field, there lies the further difficulty of getting them to submit to one

another, to respect each other's views and work within the limitations of each, the weakness of some being compensated by the strengths of others. Further, the group would need to be clear where and how the question of profit or self-gain comes in and how it is to be handled in a truly positive and beneficial manner. Where such a combination is available great things can happen and the whole of humanity would benefit.



We need recall just the advancement in medical science today the innumerable new drugs that have been discovered and produced because of which humanity as a whole is blessed. But even here, adulteration, human greed, national pride and the like stand in the way and keep threatening to reduce that blessing to a curse, at least for the poor and helpless. There are besides, several other hurdles to be cleared: government regulations, media publicity which seems to interfere and twist results in a thousand different ways, competition especially for the sake of greater profits, vested interests keen on appropriating all the profits, thus establishing monopolies and evading taxes and other duties like ecological concerns, 'parasites' who want to attach themselves to the group purely to gain as much as possible without any significant contribution being made, and a host of other problems, which when all is said and done, are purely man made!

All these tend to make each human achievement a Herculean task and to reduce the output to a mere trickle. What would not be the amount of blessings humankind would enjoy if all could truly work according to God's plan: 'I mean to give you a future with hope...!' (Jer. 29:11).

“I advise you to read sacred scripture often, both the Old and the New Testaments...we must listen to the word of God in its divine source.” [To Ms Virginie Danion, February 1867]



We have seen in an earlier reflection how Fr Eymard made it a rule for himself to read two chapters of the Bible every single day. And he seemed to have been faithful to this practice, judging from the fact that he even recommends it to his directees. In our day we are privileged to have a greater section of the Bible read in the Liturgy of the Word at each Eucharist. So, for those who celebrate Eucharist daily there would be no need to read an extra passage from the Bible! All we need to do is to assimilate the message of what we read/hear in the Eucharist.

However, most Christians who celebrate Eucharist daily hardly ever pay attention to the rich message each day's portion has for us! For one thing hardly any silence is kept after each reading, and even in places where this is observed, the question would be: what do people do during this brief period of silence? Besides, how many would know that the key idea of the first reading in a given Eucharist is always reflected and expanded in the Responsorial psalm? While most people see it almost as another reading, it is designed and meant to be a meditation on the message of the first reading. Where the silence is observed after the reading and the Psalm is used profitably, we can be sure that the Word of God will be our daily sustenance deepening and developing our faith and love responses throughout the day.

Further, if we remind ourselves that at the end of all the readings in the Eucharist, the one question that God asks each participant is: 'Have you

seen how much I love you?' and seek to answer this question in a personal manner, what a difference it would make to our understanding of the Scriptures! The Bible is simply the story of God's unbelievable love for his children shown in a thousand different ways, precisely because this love is so rich and powerful. Yet, the last thing we seem to see in Scripture passages is the love of God for us; we latch on so easily to moral applications and other peripheral points that it seems amazing how blind we can be! Yet, those who are led by God do discover God's love in the Scriptures and respond to it throughout the day. 'When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that 'they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.'" And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables?"' (Mk 4:10-13).

Truly, the ability to understand God's Word is a precious gift given to all, but received and appreciated by so few!
