



CONNECTIONS

Celebrating Our Eucharistic Partnership in the Eymardian Family

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A Year of Jubilees in the Eymardian Family

In anticipation of the celebration of the feast day of Saint Peter Julian Eymard on August 2, we are pleased to present in this issue of Connections an article by the former director of the Center for Eucharistic Evangelizing (CEE), Father William Fickel, SSS. As he says in the opening paragraph, we are commemorating the 150th anniversary when Father Eymard made the vow of his personality in the Gift of Self. As we have been addressing the question, What is Expected of an Associate of the Blessed Sacrament?, one simple answer is: give to the church, your parish, your community, all those people with whom you are in relation, the gift of yourself.

One other matter about the feast day: if you are looking to plan a holy hour to commemorate the feast day of Saint Peter Julian, I refer you to the current July/August issue of Emmanuel Magazine (pages 242-246) and a beautiful prayer service written by Father John Thomas Lane, SSS.

Family celebrations are special opportunities to enrich the members of the family as they gather to remember the past and realize who they are

as family at the present time. Such was the experience in the Eymardian family earlier this year during the Ongoing Formation Conference of the Blessed Sacrament Communities of Europe. The meeting in Malmantile, Italy, of associates and religious focused on two important jubilees. The Holy Father has called for a **Year of Consecrated Life** to mark the 50th anniversary of *Lumen Gentium* and *Perfectae Caritatis*. Also, this year commemorates the 150th anniversary when Saint Peter Julian made the vow of his personality in the **Gift of Self** while on his long retreat in Rome, March 21, 1865.

In the apostolic letter written to announce the Year of Consecrated Life, Pope Francis states: "This year calls us to live the present with passion. Grateful remembrance of the past leads us, as we listen attentively to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the church today, to implement ever more fully the essential aspects of our consecrated life." He raises the question, "Is Jesus really our first and only love, as we promised he would be when we professed our vows? Only if he is, will we be empowered to love, in truth and mercy, every person

who crosses our path. We will have learned from Jesus the meaning and practice of love. We will be able to love because we have Christ's own heart" (2).

It was a particular blessing of the Holy Spirit to bring these two events in conversation with the charism and vision of Father Eymard. In his letter, the Holy Father challenges us to examine our fidelity to the mission entrusted to us: "Are our ministries, our works, and our presence consonant with what the Spirit asked of our founders and foundresses? Are they suitable for carrying out today, in society and the church, those same ministries and works? Do we have the same passion for our people; are we close to them to the point of sharing in their joys and sorrows, thus truly understanding their needs and helping to respond to them?"

In the mind of Father Eymard, the call to consecrated life was, yes, rooted in living the Gospel (evangelical councils). To this, he added yet greater dimension in living a life of holiness, which is to live the life of Christ as sacramented in the Eucharist. The consecrated life has its origins in the sacraments of



*Gift of Self,
March 21, 1865*

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initiation. The path of sanctity flows from living in the body of Christ as the people of God. Our founder's charism initiated a great paradigm shift which positioned the Eucharist at the center and summit of our consecrated life. Belonging to the Eymardian family, religious and laity pattern our lives on the self-giving love of Christ in the paschal mystery. In *Rule of Life*, 4, in both the Aggregation and Congregation, is found expressed the heart of our vocation: "... we are animated by the spirit of love that led Christ to give his life for the world."

We have only begun to appreciate Saint Peter Julian's inspiration of the graces that transform humanity in and through the Eucharist. Actively, and to the extent we identify to be members of the body of Christ, can we realize the words of Saint Paul, "Through the law. I died to the law that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live no longer I, but Christ lives in me. Insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me" (Gal 2:19-21).

Father Eymard took these words to heart, "I live no longer I, but Christ lives in me," to define his Gift of Self as the life of Jesus now living in him doing the work of the Father. That God freely chose to empty himself of divinity is expressed in Philippians 2:5-11. Through the incarnation, the divine is hidden away and God humbles himself to suffer death on the cross for the salvation of the world, doing the work of the Father. It is in and through our lives that Christ continues

this work as we unite ourselves to the self-giving of Christ in the Eucharist and in service to the world.

Eymard's insight into the Gift of Self is rooted in the incarnation: "Just as in the mystery of the incarnation, the sacred humanity was deprived of its own person, so that it no longer sought itself as an end, no longer had any interest of its own, no longer acted for its own sake — for it had another person substituted to its own, that is, the person of the Son of God, who sought only the interest of his Father and had his eyes fixed on him always and in all things; so must I be without any desires and interests of my own, and have none but those of Jesus Christ, who abides in me to live therein for his Father and gives himself in Communion to do just that in me" (*Retreat Notes*, 252). "The Father who dwells in me is doing his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. . . . Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and do greater ones than these" (Jn 14:10).

While on his long retreat, Peter Julian experienced the personal love that God had for him, drawing him into a self-abnegation of his personality. Through this complete self-giving at the altar in reception of Communion, it becomes possible for the Lord to "live again in us and continue through us the glorification of his Father, so that the Father may look favorably on all our actions . . . that he (the Father) may live and reign in all men as in so many members of Jesus Christ" (*Ibid.*, 255). "As

the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me" (Jn 6:57).

One in the paschal mystery with Christ, we seek to die to sin and ego desire in order to allow our lives to be transformed: "You know that our old self was crucified with him, so that our sinful body might be done away with, that we might no longer be in slavery to sin. . . . If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. . . . Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as being dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus" (Rom 6:6).

In celebrating these jubilees, Pope Francis encourages us to embrace the future with hope. He does not skirt the challenges that are set before us in a secular society, suffering from hostilities and injustices that deny the dignity of the many that live in deplorable conditions. The question was asked by children, "Where is God?" And the pope replies by saying that we are to be "experts in communion." Our lives are to show forth the joy and love of God who is with us. "... The authentic fraternity found in our communities increases our joy, and our total self-giving in service to the church, to families and young people, to the elderly and the poor, brings us lifelong personal fulfillment."

This year of jubilees invites us to live fully the gift of the Eucharist with the insights of Saint Peter Julian's Gift of Self. We have placed the paschal mystery at the center of our lives. Father Eugenio Barbosa Martins, SSS, Superior General, has said that at this time God calls us to embrace the truth of the Eucha-

rist that from death comes new life. Dying is a natural dynamic of life and is required if we want our lives to become fruitful. We live in a time of pruning the dead branches from the tree of religious life that has been institutionalized, habituated, or become complacent.

The harshness of the world needs to be balanced with havens of hospitality and quiet places of prayer and refreshment. It is a time to listen in the silence and to penetrate more deeply the inner recesses of the heart of God to experience acceptance, compassion, and mercy. Prayer before the Eucharist invites a sharing of faith in communal reflection on God's word, so that collectively our unity is a sign of God's kingdom among us as we live this gift of our personality by building healthy relationships in our communities. The joys of service will go deeper with generosity in living the gift of self, wanting nothing for self and finding Christ in all.

We experience the richness of the Eymardian Family in the renewal of the Aggregation and as we journey together on the Emmaus road. In sharing the Scriptures and breaking the bread, we maintain our passion for the eucharistic mission still alive. In this way, we live the dream of Father Eymard to see the transformation of the world through the Eucharist.

"You will be entirely invested with me. My heart will beat within your body, my soul will act through your soul. Your heart will be the receptacle and the pulsation of my heart. I shall be the person of your personality, and your personality will be the life of my person in you" (March 21, 1865).