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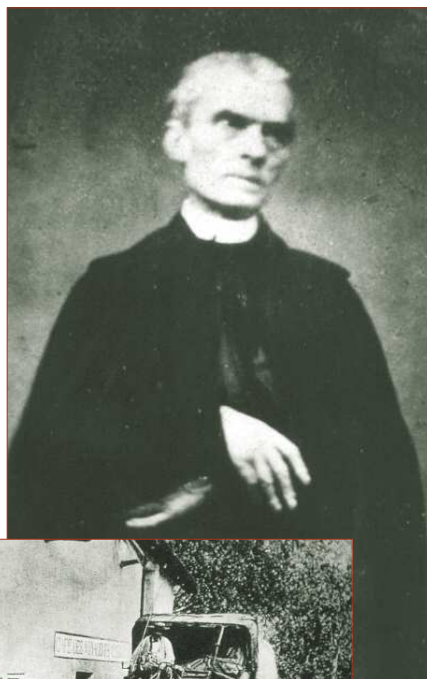
A Newsletter for friends of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament of the Province of Saint Ann

La Mure and Its People in the Correspondence of Saint Peter Julian Eymard: Father Eymard's Love for his Native Land

by **Marie-Thérèse Joubert**

We continue to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth and baptism of our saintly founder, Peter Julian Eymard. We share with you articles that originally appeared in French and with this issue are now becoming available to an English-speaking audience. This is the second of four articles that appeared in the January 2011 issue of the magazine of our France-Swiss Province of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament called **Partager**. It is a bulletin of Eucharistic Formation. The translation of the French into English was done by Robert Lussier SSS. All four articles help to situate Saint Peter Julian Eymard in his own time and place.

Saint Peter Julian Eymard left us abundant correspondence. We note, especially, the many letters addressed to his own sisters, who resided at La Mure. These letters are a



▲A coach in use during the lifetime of Father Eymard which he probably took in his travels to his hometown of La Mure

precious resource for learning of the relationship that he sought to have with his native land and its people. They help us also to discern some

traits, perhaps lesser known, of his personality.

Father Eymard's letters well express his attachment to La Mure, the small town of Dauphinie, where he was born, on February 4, 1811, and he spent his childhood and his youth.

"I thank you for the good news that you bring me of my dear native land that I always cherish, and if the good God wills, I will go to see you," he writes to his sisters on May 7, 1846. "I pray very much for La Mure, that God may make it holy and happy", he explains in another message (December 12, 1851).

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▲One of the last photos of Father Eymard prior to his death in 1868

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If we don't find any mention, or very little in this correspondence, about the countryside of his native region, on the other hand, the allusions to the rugged climate of the Matheysine plateau, the small region where La Mure is implanted are very frequent.

"I was not eager to come into the Midi," he writes to his sister while at La Seyne-sur-Mer (November 7, 1851), "but since it is God's will, I am feeling good about it; it is such a beautiful area with such mild climate: at this moment you probably have snow and bitter cold, while here we don't have need of a fire yet."



The town of La Mure with the Alps in the background

Nevertheless, he mentions in another letter one year later, *"You are, I think, in the cold and the snow, but God has given you fire. Here it's true, we have bright sunshine and warmth of springtime: but the ferocious mistral, stronger than the strongest north wind, of the cold place (the ancient name of the actual place la Liberté at La Mure) which comes upon us often, replaces the more constant climate of our land."* (November 30, 1852)

This love for his native land includes a love for its people: *"One always has a healthy love for our native land."* The La Mure people are good to his sisters (November 7, 1851).

In fact, Peter Julian Eymard often asked his sisters for news of some people he had known at La Mure: *"In your letters I like to have many details, so don't forget the sick and the dead. I really love to pray for those whom I have known"* he writes to his sisters on December 6, 1842.

Some names return often in his letters: *"Please give me, I pray, some news of Madame Lesbros, of mother Cros, of the honorable family of Madame Fayolle* (July 7, 1841). (Mr. and Madame Lesbros owned the house next to the Eymard home – both now existing at 69 and 67 rue de Breuil.)

Again we should mention Mr. Faure, Mr. and Mrs. Demoulins...so many family names of people who have always lived on the Matheysin plateau, who bring Father Eymard much closer to us.

He sympathizes with the suffering of the sick *"Madame Lesbros is then always sick: too bad! That good lady, alas! The good Lord fills her life with many trials. But here on earth, Calvary is everywhere and in all conditions, and happy are those who know how to find Jesus and Mary."*

Or else, he comments on certain deceased who have touched him: *"That brave mother Bonnier is finally dead! She is a saint in heaven. She was so thoughtful, so gentle! I certainly envy her crown; it must be a great one.* (June 25, 1842).

Having some emotional ties to the place where one was born and raised is easy to understand. Some other passages of this correspondence, however, permit us to better analyze the attachment that Father Eymard had.

According to him, La Mure is a small town that has remained faithful to traditional values. Faced with the rise of indifference which he sees, both in the worker's world and in the irreligious bourgeoisie, he cries out: *"Today there is so little faith! Long live La Mure and its open country ... our Matheysins have much more to offer."* (to his sisters, December 13, 1846).

La Mure seems equally in his letters to be viewed as a place which has been

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*Celebrating
Saint Eymard*

Anniversary of Birth:
February 4

Anniversary of
Baptism:
February 5

50th Anniversary of
his Canonization:
December 9, 1962



Once again we honor Saint Peter Julian Eymard, our saintly Founder on the 201st anniversary of his birthday and baptism. Peter Julian, throughout his life, celebrated the anniversary of his baptism rather than that of his birth.

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spared the troubles which agitated France in this first half of the 19th Century.

From Lyons, where he is staying, he writes to his sisters: *"I am not sending any news of Lyons, where commerce is bad. Ah! My sisters, there are so many unfortunate families in the heart of these great cities, what misery, what corruption, such iniquities! You are a thousand times happier, even with our problems, in our little village than in a city where life is so complicated."* (May 7, 1846).

And when, several years later, his sisters considered going to Lyons to be closer to him, the counsels that he gives them follow the same vein: *"I don't know what to say...living in Lyons, with this climate is so different from that of La Mure, will it affect your health? ...and the hustle and bustle of the city, this new way of life and if some political catastrophe should happen, as we expect, Lyons surely would not be peaceful. We, having several*

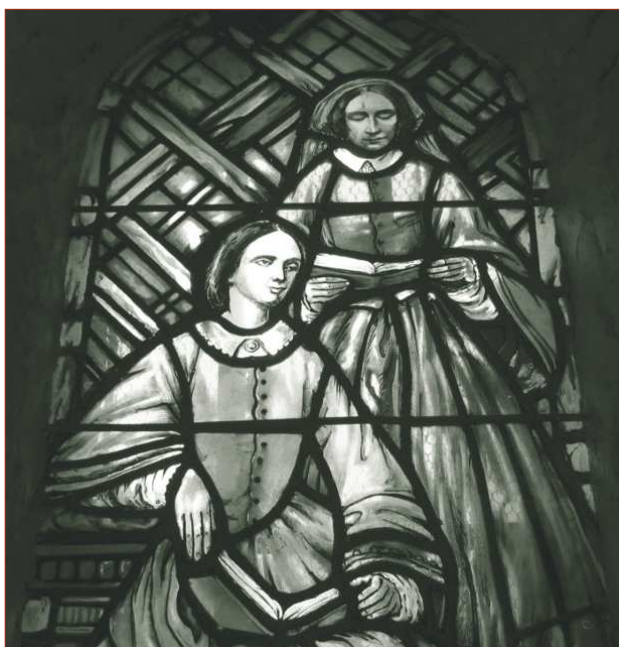
houses, would have a place to go; but you, where could you go in these circumstances?" (April 26, 1850).

Another important factor, it's at La Mure where resides the only family he has left, Marianne Eymard, his sister, and Anne Bernard his adoptive sister, who are 12 and 10 years older than Eymard.

"La Mure is always La Mure for me, and all that happens there interests me, and especially you, my dear sisters," he confides in them, in a letter on November 30, 1852. It's in the same vein that he writes on March 15, 1860: *"If I should write to you every time I think of you, you would receive my letters very often, for you are my only family on earth, and I love La Mure because of you. Also, if you die before me, I would only go to La Mure to weep for you."*

This lively affection for his sisters expresses itself in many ways. Their health is of real concern. He worries about them

("If you knew how anxious one can be, when one is so far away!") (March 13, 1852) and then he multiplies his advice and precautions: *"Take good care of yourselves during the winter; say your prayers in the living room when it is too cold. And especially, don't travel too much; death and heaven, I hope, come soon enough after our lives."* (December 6, 1842). *"See about*



Stained glass window in the chapel at Saint-Roman with Natalie Jordan (mother) and Mathilde Giraud-Jordan (daughter), great friends and correspondents of Father Eymard

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Lent; no fasts or abstinence, you know that this harms you; also, simply ask for your dispensations." (February 5, 1846).

He even recommends some medications: *"A little medicine on time often prevents a greater illness, for instance, some applications of mauve or flax flour; maybe some leeches. You would do well to often have a little eau of arnica, it is excellent in such cases; there is some sold in Grenoble"* (December 12, 1851).

Showing his solicitude in other ways, he shares their material concerns and gives them some advice: *"As for what you propose to me to permit M. Lesbros to make a passageway for his house, I would, no doubt, want to please this good man, to whom we owe a lot; but at the same time, I see that this would be a concession that would greatly diminish the value of our house if later we would wish to do something else; and that would cost us some expenses"* (March 19, 1842).

Finally and especially, each one of his letters is an occasion to assure them of his prayers and to encourage them to an always greater fervor: *"See if I am not always very wise; I pray more for you than for myself; every morning, at seven o'clock, you have the benefit of my Mass, and when I make the stations of the Cross, you have your part of all that I ask. Do the same for me. Your well-beloved brother."* (December 8, 1840) *"Let us count a great deal on Providence, which takes care of those who trust. For you, my dear sisters, work always hard for heaven, always have much love for our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Visit him often. Devote yourselves entirely to the love and the interior life of the most holy virgin. Every day we must purchase heaven by some sacrifice."* (October 22, 1843).

In July, 1868, Father Eymard wrote a letter to his sisters, announcing that he was coming, at the advice of doctors, to spend several days at La Mure to take a little rest. *"I am very happy to be able to go and see you, dear sisters,"* he writes in what would be his last letter. *"I had not expected this favor from God, since I have so many things keeping me in Paris."* (July 19, 1868).

In fact, worn out by a life totally given to God and to others, taking no account of his fatigue (*"I don't have the time to be sick,"* he had written on January 19, 1842), Father Eymard died during his last visit to his native town on August 1, 1868.

Logically, he shouldn't have ended his days at La Mure, where he had not resided anymore since his youth. *"A favor from God?"* His funeral was celebrated on August 2nd in the church where he had been baptized and which today bears his name – Saint Peter Julian Eymard Chapel.

A man of great warmth, filled with solicitude and caring for his family, his friends, faithful to his native land and its people, so does Saint Peter Julian reveal himself in the letters he wrote. ❖

Who We Are

"Following in the footsteps of St. Peter Julian Eymard, our mission is to respond to the hungers of the human family with the riches of God's love manifested in the Eucharist." *Rule of Life 3*

Conscious of our call to bear prophetic witness to the Eucharist, we commit ourselves to the renewal of Church and society through this sacrament, especially by:

- ◆ gathering communities characterized by hospitality, reconciliation, and service;
- ◆ celebrating the Eucharist as the source and summit of the life of the Church;
- ◆ associating others with our prayer;
- ◆ giving personal witness to the presence of Christ in the Eucharist;
- ◆ sharing our Eucharistic mission with others in full collaboration.

