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

Father Eymard and the "Memory" of His Baptism

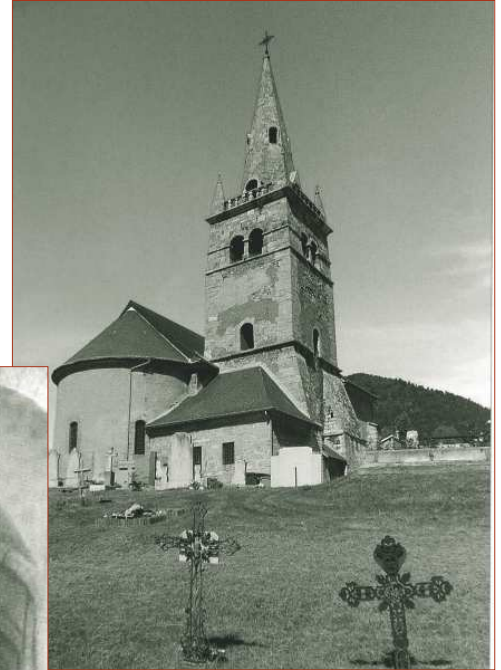
by Manuel Barbiero SSS

This is the last of the four articles that originally appeared in French in the January 2011 issue of the magazine of our France-Swiss Province of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament called Partager. We are grateful to Robert Lussier SSS for his translation of the article into English. We hope that during the 200th anniversary year of Saint Peter Julian's birth and baptism you have come to know this Apostle of the Eucharist a little better.

Peter Julian Eymard was born February 4, 1811. The very next day, February 5, he was brought to the parish church and baptized by the pastor, Father Joseph Second. The record of his baptism was inscribed in these words:

"On February 5, 1811, I solemnly baptized Peter Julian Eymard, legitimate son of the other Julian Eymard, the knife sharpener, residing in La Mure, and of Marie Pelorce, his wife. He had been born on the previous day. His godfather was Antoine Eymard, his brother, and the godmother was Marianne Eymard, his sister."

The parish church of Father Eymard's time is known today as the "Chapelle Saint Pierre-Julien Eymard;" it still contains the ancient stone font where Peter Julian was baptized.



▲ The Old Church of La Mure d'Isère
◀ Painting of Saint Peter Julian Eymard in the SSS community in Vienna, Austria

Later on, when Father Eymard returned to his native land, he would never fail to venerate the baptistry of his parish, as he would love to celebrate his baptismal anniversary

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and to remind his godmother (his sister Marianne).

As for the name Julian, it was his father's name, given to many of his children. One could think that it's in memory of the holy patron of the parish of Auris (the village where the Eymard family had its origin), Saint Julien de Brioude. Baptized at La Mure, Peter Julian would keep in his name, the memory of his ancestors of Oisans.

Saint Peter Julian was a great apostle of the Eucharist, we know with how much care he prepared himself to receive his first Holy Communion, but we are surprised when we discover that, in his correspondence, he never spoke of the anniversary of his first Communion, but in contrast, he often remembered the day of his baptism.

Baptism: A Cornerstone of his Life

It began in 1841, two years after his entry into the Marists, that Peter Julian began to remember, with a certain regularity, the fact of his baptism.

On the occasion of a retreat, he noted on February 5, that it was the feast of Saint Agatha, also the anniversary of his baptism. The day before, after having recited the "Veni Creator", before the Blessed Sacrament, he placed himself under Mary's protection, and made a resolution to make his retreat with ardor and fidelity as though it were his last one.

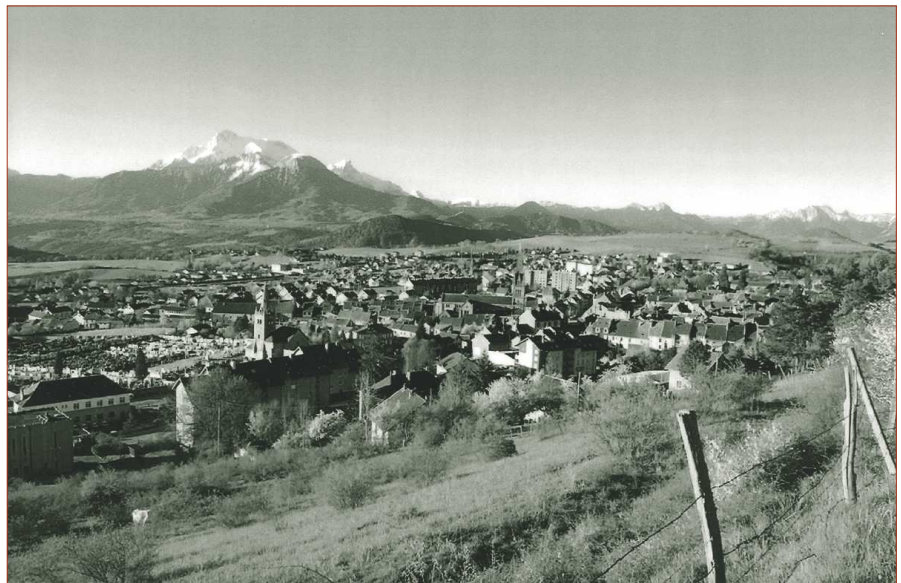
On the same day, February 5, 1841, he wrote to his sister Marianne, who was his godmother: "Today is a fine day for me, it's today that I had you as my godmother. You know how many millions of times I have called you by this sweet name. On entering into the clerical state, I have given you the

title of sister; but the sentiment of a godchild will remain even to heaven, for I owe (you) very much, especially for having kept me in my youth, far from the occasions of sin, so that I can say that it's to you that I owe my vocation to the Church".

In the notes of another retreat, in 1843, he wrote more or less what he had written two years earlier. "On the eve, I recited the Veni Creator to implore the graces of the Holy Spirit on this mini retreat to prepare myself for the anniversary of my baptism. I resolved to do as follows:

- First meditation, on sanctity as the goal of my baptism,*
- Second meditation, on what makes someone lukewarm,*
- Third meditation, on the love of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, under the protection of Saint Agatha*

La Mure d'Isère



Finally, on February 5, 1846, always to his sister Marianne, Father Eymard wrote: "I cannot resist today the pleasure of writing two words. I have prayed often for you for our father, for our mother for my godfather. You can guess why! It is such a beautiful day for me, the most beautiful day of my life: this is the day that I had the joy of being baptized ... I owe you a lot, my dear godmother, for all of that vigilance that you exercised over me in my youth, and for all the pious practices that you suggested to me. Today all the days of my younger years are present to me in a particular manner, and I see great grace there."

There are other letters (for example the 5th day of February, 1849 or the 21st of March, 1853) where there is question of whether they recall the baptismal day, but the citations made are sufficient to draw several conclusions.

The baptismal day is called "such a beautiful day or "the most beautiful day of my life." It becomes the occasion to make an evaluation of the road traveled,

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to recall the benefits, especially as regards religious practices, to pray for one's family. The baptism day is also a day to reawaken a desire for a life that is more faithful to the call of God.

Baptism: A Cornerstone of his Eucharistic Vocation

We have seen that Peter Julian never forgot to commemorate the day of his baptism with a profound sentiment of gratitude. Writing to his sister/godmother Marianne, he thanked her, because thanks to her he had received the vocation to the "ecclesiastic state".

For him, his vocation as a priest and religious were founded on this initial and permanent base.

The meditation that he had written during the great Retreat of Rome, on February 5, 1865, the "day of his holy Baptism" reinforced this conviction:



The stone baptismal font at which Peter Julian Eymard was baptized on February 5, 1811

"I made my meditation on the gratuitous and all-merciful grace of the holy Baptism that I had received. I saw that it was a re-creation in our Lord Jesus Christ, a second life in Jesus Christ, but in Jesus crucified. All of you, in effect baptized in the Christ, you have put on the Christ [Galatians 3:27].

– those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and its desires [Galatians 5:24]. We have been buried with Christ by baptism in death [cf. Romans 6, 41]. If anyone comes to me without hating ... his own life, he cannot be my disciple [Luke 14] thus, behold the character of the second generation, the separation from the world, the crucifixion, the war, the constant death. I have seen the graces that have been the gifts of my Baptism – so great. This sonship of God, – member of Jesus Christ, child of the Church, brother of saints, the right to grace, to the glory of Jesus Christ. What made me weep was to see my three vocations, to the holy life, the priesthood, and the religious life.

In baptism we find all the foundations of the Christian life, the life of the disciples of Jesus Christ. It's the meaning one could give to Scripture itself.

Moreover, Father Eymard mentions his three vocations: To a fervent Christian life, to the priestly life, and to the religious life.

In the same meditation, he cites Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Dominic, Saint Ignatius and Saint Alphonsus – all four founders. He says: "*I have received the same graces.*" We could deduce that, for Father Eymard, even his vocation as founder is linked to his baptismal grace.

In fact, in the second meditation the same day, he writes: "*Of the goodness of God since my baptism, of his divine providence when he rescued me from some dangers, making me change place, state, even health itself so as to keep me from a slavery to studies, the vanity of success, the attachment to creatures, the slavery even to being praised, Our Lord having desired to be my Master in all things, a little like Saint Paul, because I would have too much loved those who have done me favors or shown me love. I have been a little like Jacob, always on the move. And all this was to bring me to my Eucharistic vocation. It took Marseilles to give me an exclusive love of the Eucharist and [to make it] the center; Lyons to teach me how, and to put me on the road to the Cenacle. And this dear Cenacle in God's time...*"

We recover here the different stages of the Eucharistic vocation, which led him to the foundation of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament. He speaks of his stay with the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (Marseilles), of his Marist experience (Lyons), and finally to the foundation (the Cenacle "in God's hour"). And all of this journeying placed under the sign of the goodness of God, all as an expression of his love.

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Baptism: Point of Departure for the Spiritual Life

Baptism has been, for Father Eymard, the cornerstone of his entire life and of his vocation. For him, the spiritual life of each individual is a growth of the new evangelical life, received from the beginning, by incorporation into the paschal mystery by faith and baptism. Christian maturity consists in an ever greater participation in the love of Christ for his (our) Father.

He has transmitted this conviction to others. We have an example in a text, taken from the Directory of the Aggregation, the lay people whom Father Eymard wanted to associate with the mission of his Congregation.

He writes: *“The grace of a Christian is a grace of adoption, of divine sons and daughters, a grace of love. Besides, it’s a grace of love which the goodness of God places as a seed in our hearts, and which forms, at Baptism, a foundation of the Christian character; then this love which it inspires and perfects, thus becomes a life, a state of love”.*

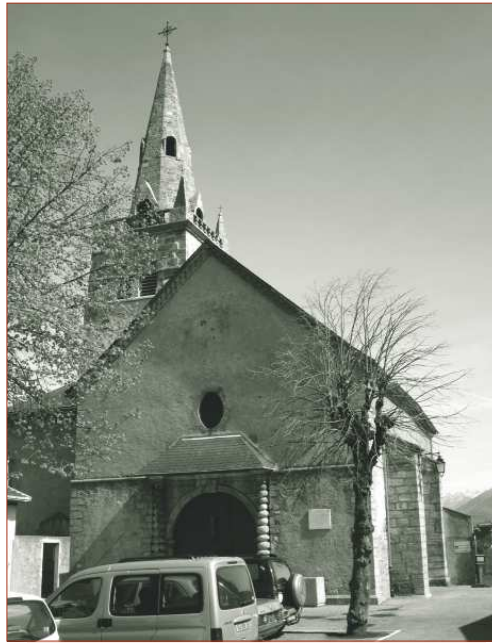
The life which Baptism brings to birth in us, is a life of love. Father Eymard states in the same text: *“All of Christian education, all spiritual direction of a soul, must rest on the love of God to be developed and exercised. Love is the reign of God in man (...) Thus love makes man a haven where the Holy Trinity is pleased to dwell.”*

Baptism, a Paschal Experience.

To conclude this article, it seems quite important to me to recall a last period in the life of Father Eymard, as the fulfillment of his baptismal journey.

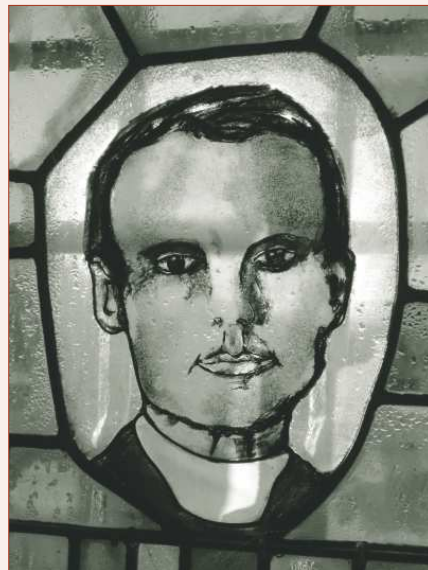
If baptism is participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, this same mystery is always realized in us. All of our life is a passage through death to arrive at the Resurrection, new life in Jesus Christ.

In the Retreat of Saint Maurice (April 27 - May 2, 1868) experienced three months before his death, Father Eymard recalls his Eucharistic vocation one



Chapelle Saint Pierre-Julien in La Mure

Stained glass window of the young Father Eymard at Monteynard



more time, the pathway of his life, always marked by the love of God. This journey has also been scarred by a whole series of deaths. Father Eymard writes:

- *The sacrifices of death at the thought of this prefect, of Rome (Father Favre).*
- *Death to the Society of Mary, so painful.*
- *Death at the reception by the Archbishop of Paris after 13 agonizing days.*
- *Death to self when deserted, left all alone.*
- *Death in Paris when the Cardinal was minded to get rid of us (Saint Theresa).*
- *Death from my subjects.*
- *Death at Rome, on the occasion of the Decree*
- *The most distressing death of all (separation from my first companion).*
- *Death from the loss of the esteem of Bishops because of Nemours.*
- *Loss of esteem of my own brethren because of...*
- *Death of self from the most painful trial.*

But in the baptismal vision of his life, it’s life which has the last word. And Father Eymard sings: *“And yet life follows death; it is the life of the Society and mine.”*

At the end of an impressive list of “symbolic deaths”, it’s the Paschal Mystery that illuminates Father Eymard’s whole existence; the strength of the risen Savior, found with faith and power in his Eucharistic presence, transfigured all these “deaths” and, in fact, so many journeys toward life *“Life follows death. It’s the road followed by the Society, and it’s mine as well.”* ✠