

# A very special Eymardian Pilgrimage

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On Friday, April 22, a group of eight pilgrims, from the Blessed Sacrament Chapel in Dublin, Ireland, set out on a week-long Eymardian Pilgrimage. From the moment we arrived in the airport of Lyon, France, and were greeted by Fr Vergel Dalangin sss, on behalf of the Association *Friends of Fr Eymard in Matheysine*, we felt that something special was in store for us, and so it was!

Our drive to La Mure was very comfortable and exciting. Going into the house where Fr Eymard lived and died was inspirational, and it was to be our home for the next week. After a delightful meal, a slideshow and a briefing as what the pilgrimage would include, we retired for the night.

Each day of our pilgrimage was very carefully planned for us. Besides ensuring that we visited each Eymardian place, Fr Vergel ensured that we had some time to explore and reflect on our own. Guided by informative booklets during the guided tours, we had access to some of our Founder's own reflections that connected deeply to these places of interest, as it was explained along the way by Fr Vergel, for an added depth and nuance. Of course, a good measure of trivial information and humorous insights are also thrown in, to keep us light-hearted all throughout our visits.

Our first day involved us in a walking tour around La Mure that brought to life before us the history of the birthplace of Fr Eymard. Of special importance was our visit to the two churches of the town – *Eglise Notre Dame* and *Chapelle St Pierre Julien Eymard* -, the *Exposition Eymard* and the *Calvaire de La Mure*, where Eymard walked barefoot as a young boy, during winter time. We celebrated Mass in Fr Eymard's room, at the end of our touring, and this was very special for all in attendance.

On our second day, we visited the *Sanctuaire de Notre Dame du Laus*. Fr Vergel showed us how the story of Benoit reflects Fr Eymard's own life journey with the Blessed Mother. In this place where our Founder made a pilgrimage at a young age, we were very blessed to have visited the *chapel of the Bon Rencontre*, Benoit's room at the entrance of the shrine, the *chapel of the Precious Blood*, the *Oratory of Angels* and the *Pindreau*, the place of the apparition on a hill, and they just filled us with awe and wonder. The fact that it is a place of reconciliation had a strong appeal for us, especially on this year of mercy.

On our third day, we visited *Ars*. Having celebrated the Mass at the *Crypte St Pierre* was very inspirational as was our guided tour of the Shrine and the Parochial House. Hearing of the deep friendship between Fr Eymard and St Jean Marie Vianney inspired some members of our group, and learning how our holy Founder sought counsel from the Curé of Ars, who in turn, encouraged him strongly, was something the group members would not have been aware of. Learning how this priestly town likewise reminds us of the commitment of Fr Eymard to the service of priests, was something that touched everyone's heart.

On the fourth day, we had a delightful touring day to *Saint Marcellin*, where we visited *Notre Dame de l'Osier*, *Chatte*, *St Romans* and on our way home, a visit to the town of *Monteynard*. A Mass was celebrated in the Shrine



of Our Lady of Osier (willow tree), which served as a memorial of the first Mass of the newly ordained Fr Eymard on that very same place. It was enlightening to visit Chatte, where Fr Eymard began his priestly mission as the assistant parish priest, and of course, pausing at the *Rock of St Romans* enabled us to reflect and savour with Fr Eymard one of the extraordinary graces he claimed to have received there. The grace that the holy Saint received on that Rock opened up for him a spirituality marked by the love of God.

On the fifth day, we travelled to *Grenoble* and celebrated the Eucharist at the *chapelle de l'Adoration* at Rue Voltaire, the same place where Fr Eymard presided his last Mass. When visiting the Cathedral of Grenoble, we saw two statues very near the altar, that of the Holy Curé of Ars and that of St Peter Julian Eymard. The two were both ordained in Grenoble: Jean Marie Vianney on Sunday, August 13, 1815 and Fr Eymard on Sunday July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1834. After lunch, we went to visit the *Grande Chartreuse*. This was a delightful trip with absolutely beautiful scenery that truly delighted us, pilgrims. At the museum of La Correrie, we got some understanding of the life of St Bruno and his companions, the evolution of the Carthusian Order and of what a day in the life of a Carthusian monk entailed. We returned to La Mure with lovely memories, images, stories and insights to reflect on.

On the sixth day, we visited *La Salette*. We had lunch at the Shrine and had a guided visit of the place. We learned that the event that lies at the origin of this pilgrimage site took place on Saturday, September 19<sup>th</sup>, 1846, when a "Beautiful Lady" appeared to two children from a nearby village of Corps: Maximin Giraud, aged 11, and Melanie Calvat, aged 14. We learned how Fr Eymard was the first to make known in Lyons the message of the apparition in La Salette, by the end of 1846. Between 1852, the date of his first pilgrimage and 1868, the year of his death, Fr Eymard made no less than two visits there. In 1852, on August 18<sup>th</sup>, he noted in the Visitor's Book that "I had the honour of being the first to announce the miraculous events of the apparition in Lyon, and I am happy today, to come and kiss with love and gratitude, this blessed earth, this mountain of salvation". We returned to La Mure, from our visit to the La Salette, feeling very happy and with a precious sense of Our Lady's presence and of Fr Eymard's deep devotion to her.

On the final day of our pilgrimage, we visited *Lyon*, a city of great importance to the life and vocation of Fr Eymard, and while there, we went to the *Sanctuaire de Notre Dame de Fourvière*, where he prayed often. As a Marist priest, he stayed there between 1844 to 1851, the decisive years in his spiritual journey, since it was as in Lyon, and specifically in Fourvière that he received the "grace of vocation". For Fr Eymard, Lyon was a "beautiful and pious city". "When you go there" he counselled to his friends, "you should see Fourvière, the heavenly citadel of the Rome of the Gauls, and from Fourvière, go to St Ireneus, the reliquary of the martyrs of Lyons...". At the conclusion of our visit, we headed for the airport to journey home.

We were really pleased with our pilgrimage and are most appreciative at how Fr Vergel had so meticulously planned it from beginning to end to assure us of a profoundly meaningful journey on the path of Fr Eymard, and we are now filled with a new sense and understanding of the Founder's spiritual journey and legacy. We are truly very impressed with how Fr Manuel and the members of the Association *Friends of Fr Eymard in Matheysine* welcomed us, cared for us and shared with us. Our evening meals with the community were truly special family occasions, where there was collaboration, sharing, humour and fraternity. This Eymardian Pilgrimage was a truly wonderful occasion and experience. May God bless and reward Fr Vergel, Fr Manuel and the Association.