

In the footsteps of St Peter-Julian Eymard at Paris

by Yolaine Couder



In front of the Church of the Blessed Sacrament

In response to the invitation of their parish priest Armand Silaho Moudilou, eight parishioners of St Peter-Julian Eymard (La Mure) descended from the Matheysin plateau and made their way to spend two days of a very special pilgrimage in Paris following in the footsteps of St Peter-Julian Eymard on 27 and 28 March 2014.

On the eve of this we arrived at the **House of the Society of the Blessed Sacrament**, 23 avenue de Friedland-Paris, where we stayed and which was a place of prayer and shared Eucharists. After the evening Mass at which we were warmly welcomed by the community of the Fathers, we met Father André Guitton who was to be our guide on Thursday morning at 9 a.m., when we set out for the adventure and walk in Paris.

- **Chapel of the Blind Sisters of St Paul**, 88 Boulevard Denfert Rochereau: cradle of the Society and place of the first community.

Without knowing anyone, without money, without a residence, Father Eymard lodged at the Blind Sisters from 1 May 1856. He was lent a little sitting room in the Villa Chateaubriand, a place to live and work shared with his first companion, Father Raymond de Cuers.

To make known the existence and good standing of this new Society (the Fathers of the Blessed

Sacrament) was a real spiritual and human battle against adversity of all kinds (hierarchic levels of the Church, material, psychological levels...). Father Eymard and Father de Cuers lived through much solitude and met much incomprehension, but they were confident because they knew that God would give them the response that would be good for them. During this period of abandonment the response came from the bishops in the words of Archbishop Sibour of Paris: *"God's will is manifested very clearly for the Eucharistic Work. God has himself cut through the difficulty, you must consecrate yourself entirely to this work; no more hesitation, you must go ahead."* The work began; the Society of the Blessed Sacrament is indeed God's work.

The little sitting room was enlarged as a chapel on the grounds of the park and inaugurated on 20 September 1856. The first solemn exposition of the Blessed Sacrament was on 6 January 1857. The community of the two first Fathers of the Blessed Sacrament would have to leave this place at the end of March 1858.

- **68 rue du faubourg St Jacques**, Paris XIIth as it was called at that time and today is the Ile de Sein Square was the place to which the first transfer of the community took place.

On 4 April 1858 Father Eymard blessed the new chapel, celebrating Mass there and exposing the Blessed Sacrament. The community was made up of 8 members, four priests and 4 brothers. At that time this was in a poor working class neighbourhood, comprising workshops and little factories employing many youth and children who were uneducated.

With the help of members of the St Vincent de Paul lay confraternity Father Eymard made the rounds of the workshops and factories to propose that the youth and children make their First Communion. He linked catechesis and learning to read and write. The children who had followed his teaching found work more easily. On 15 August 1859 12 made their First Communion.

In 10 years the Fathers baptised and catechised more than 800 young persons. We were able to see the registers in the House of the Society.

- **St Thomas** (VIIth), **St Sulpice** (VIth), **St Etienne du Mont** (VIth)

To finance the Work of First Communion of adults Father Eymard went to preach in the parishes of the rich sectors of the city where some ladies solicitously collected money.

- **Saint Sulpice**

After receiving authorisation to found the Society on 13 May 1856 the two priests went to give thanks before the Blessed Sacrament at the church of St Sulpice and then they visited the chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary to offer themselves entirely to the service of Jesus and request her intercession. In that époque St Sulpice represented the clergy of France (St Francis de Salle, Mr Olier, St Jean Baptiste de la Salle) for Father Eymard it was a way of being inserted into the line of founders.

- **Notre Dame des Victoires**

This Marian sanctuary of Paris was discovered by Father Eymard in 1849. It is the place where in 1848 the Men's Nocturnal Adoration was founded with Father de Cuers. On various occasions Father Eymard preached in this church that represented for him an important place of Mary in his life.

- **St Pierre de Montmartre** (XVIIIth)

At the very beginning of his sojourn in Paris, during his time of retreat, on 8 May 1856, Father Eymard and Father de Cuers went to pray in this Romanesque church to put themselves under the protection of St Denis and the other founders of various kinds came to pilgrimage to this holy place and to consecrate their work here.



St Pierre de Montmartre

- **Sacré Cœur de Montmartre (XVIIIth)**

In 1861 Father Eymard preached a novena here.

This tour of eymardian places took us also to:

- the **Chapel on the rue du Bac (VIth)** - noted for the Miraculous Medal,
- the **Chapel of the Epiphany (VIth)** – Foreign Missions,
- the **Cathedral of Notre Dame.**

This pilgrimage of the Matheysin parishioners in Paris was a first. Thanks to Father Armand for his initiative. Thanks to Father André, our guide, who knew how to capture our attention by his great admiration for Father Eymard, his erudition about the history and context of the monuments visited, their functions in the époque of the Founder, making present to us what was distant, and all this with much humour. We have been able as if we were there “to see on site” Father Eymard go out by the little door at the left of the garden below at the bottom... and run after the children fleeing from his catechism lessons (while we were in the now empty spot of each building). We have been able to put images to the places that we used to read about of his life, which became for us more vibrant and nearer. It is a little as if Father Eymard was with us.

Impressions of pilgrims – We have been struck by Father Eymard regarding:

- *“the realization step by step of a foundation of priests, male and female religious, laity letting themselves be guided by the events and difficulties. His patient courage before obstacles. The diverse activities for the youth, the search for houses for the Fathers...”*

- *“his devotion to the Blessed Sacrament was not put off by men, but on the contrary he committed himself with all his energies in the evangelisation of the most lowly and youth...”*

- *“even though not leaving France he was a real missionary, occupying himself above all with the most helpless, poorest...”*

. *“the immense faith and undaunted trust of Father Eymard in God and in Mary, which made him (for two and a half years) live the night of the Spirit of graces: continuing to give his life to God without receiving visible consolations...”*

- *“his tenacity to found the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament while accepting beforehand to return to the Marists if this didn't come about...”*

- *“Father Eymard truly began his work in Paris without means, without friends: he dared to go ahead placing 100% trust in God for support and it is God who gave him the necessary means step by step...”*

- *“his manner of setting laity on the path to offer their support in action: the solicitous ladies in the rich parishes, the teaching of faith and accompanying youth, looking for those who weren't yet on the way...”*

- *« a Father Julian Eymard, tireless worker who went ahead in taking initiatives (departing from the Marists, responding to his vocation of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and leading to it other women and men) and enabling those who met him to feel illumined in their life and loved by Christ...”*

May St Peter-Julian Eymard support our parish in our proclaiming the Word and putting it into practice among all!

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