

IV - Part 1

The Importance of the Life of Baptism for Saint Peter Julian Eymard



SESSION IV - Part 1

NOTES FOR PARTICIPANTS

Introduction to the Theme

The gift of life (birth) – expression of God’s love for us (*How he has loved me . . .*); the gift of Christian faith (baptism) – the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ who shares the Spirit with us and the life of a Son of God: these are some expressions that well characterize how Father Eymard understood and lived his baptism. For him, it was the beginning of a filial relationship with God and the start of a gradual discovery of everything that is possible for us from the crucial moment that God welcomed us as his children. He never forgot to celebrate the day of his baptism with deep gratitude. His future callings to be a priest and religious were rooted in this initial and permanent foundation.

Andre Guitton, SSS tells us that “whenever Father Eymard later returned to his native place, he never forgot to venerate the baptismal font in his parish. He loved to celebrate the anniversary of his baptism and remind his godmother of this: the name Julian was that of his father who had likewise given it to several of his children. It may also have been a souvenir of the holy patron of the parish of Auris, Saint Julian of Brioude, which possesses a relic” (13). (Auris is where Peter Julian’s father, Julien, was born. His family had been there for three generations.)

In addition to the two quotes from Father Eymard, you will find a wonderful reflection from Sister Catherine Marie Caron, SSS, in “*May God Be Praised!*” under the title *Living His Baptism* (pages 13 – 18). She also helps us understand this favorite expression of Father Eymard, “May God be praised!”

Note: The picture on page 35 features the old stone baptistery in the ancient church of La Mure (now the Chapel of Saint Peter Julian Eymard) where on February 5, 1811, the day after his birth, Peter Julian was baptized. When Father Eymard visited his hometown over the years, he would go to his old parish church to pray near this baptism font.

The **Purpose** of Session IV – Part 1 is to elaborate on why his own baptism was so important to Father Eymard

Session Four - Part 1

The Importance of the Life of Baptism for Saint Peter Julian Eymard

INVITATION TO PRAYER

Leader: Let us put ourselves quietly in the presence of the Lord.

We take a few moments to silence our minds and prepare for prayer.

Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: O Lord, you gave Saint Peter Julian
a deep sense of gratitude for the gift of his baptism.
He saw it as the beginning of a life
filled with grace.
Through his intercession may we discover
what you have called us to be
at the time of our own baptism.
Grant us the grace to live our Christian
vocation in creative fidelity to your call.
Amen.

TEACHING: Key Points

- The gift of life (birth) – expression of God’s love for us (*How he loved me . . .*); the gift of Christian faith (Baptism) – the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ who shares the Spirit with us and the life of a Son of God: these are expressions that characterize well how Father Eymard understood and lived his Baptism. For him, it was the beginning of a filial relationship with God and the start of a gradual discovery of everything that is possible for us from the crucial moment that God welcomed us as his children. He never forgot to celebrate the day of his baptism with deep gratitude. His future callings to be a priest and religious were rooted in this initial and permanent foundation.
- February 4 is the anniversary of Saint Eymard’s birth. February 5 is the anniversary of his baptism.

Saint Eymard *In His Own Words*

REFLECTION (Saint Peter Julian Eymard)

Anniversary of my holy Baptism

On February 5, 1846, Father Eymard wrote from Lyons to his older sister Marianne and her friend Nanette Bernard. She had nursed him years earlier when he was near death. He recalls for her the date of his baptism, which meant so very much to Father Eymard. He was then the provincial for the Marist order.

“Today I cannot resist the joy of writing you a few words. I’m sure that you can guess why I prayed so earnestly to God for you (*his sister was his godmother*), for our father, our mother and my godfather! It’s such a beautiful day for me. It’s the most beautiful day of my life since this is the day when I had the good fortune to be baptized.

“If I had died then, I would be in heaven now, praying for my godmother who is still on earth, weighed down by the cross, on the thorny path to heaven. But the good Lord did not wish it and has left me until now in this valley of exile, tears and struggles....

“Who would have thought when I was twenty years of age, stretched out in bed and condemned to death by all the doctors that I would have lived fifteen years more? If at least I had spent them well! It’s so true, the good Lord has given me many great graces. I cannot help but recognize the signs of his mercy and providence in my life—signs so great that I would be ungrateful if I didn’t love him with all my heart and if I didn’t serve him with all my strength.”

Letter to Marianne – February 5, 1846
Volume I, page 90

Nineteen years after the above letter to his sister Marianne (1865), Father Eymard again reflected on the anniversary of his baptism with a meditation on “The Grace of My Baptism.” Here is an excerpt:

“I made my meditation on the gratuitous and all-merciful grace of the holy baptism that I received. I understood what it is: a new creation in our Lord Jesus Christ, a second life in Jesus Christ, but in Jesus crucified. *‘For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ’ Gal 3:27. ‘We were buried with Christ by baptism into death’ Romans 6:4.* I saw the graces that made up the dowry of my baptism—beyond all computing: a son of God, a member of Jesus Christ, a child of the church, a brother of the saints; a right to the grace and to the glory of Jesus Christ. How good and wonderful Providence has been to me. It is an endless miracle.”

Retreat Notes, Second or Great Retreat of Rome, February 5, 1865
Page 90 (revised)

THE WORD OF THE LORD

The Leader asks one of the participants to proclaim the Scripture passage from Romans 6: 1 -11.

We will pause for a few moments in silent reflection before beginning our small group sharing.

INVITATION TO MISSION

Determine some specific action, as individuals or as a group, which are inspired by this session:

- *Perhaps there will be a baptism in the parish this coming month that you may attend.*
- *Perhaps you may send a note of welcome to a new member of the parish.*
- *Greet someone you have not met before or after Mass.*
- *Find out the date of your baptism and celebrate the anniversary each year.*

SENDING FORTH

Prayer to Saint Peter Julian Eymard

*Gracious God of our ancestors, you led Peter Julian Eymard,
like Jacob in times past, on a journey of faith.*

*Under the guidance of your gentle Spirit,
Peter Julian discovered the gift of love in the Eucharist
which your son Jesus offered for the hungers of humanity.*

*Grant that we may celebrate this mystery worthily,
adore it profoundly, and proclaim it prophetically
for your greater glory. Amen.*

Note: In preparation for the next gathering, please re-read or read if you haven't, pages 13 – 18 from “*May God Be Praised!*” and the article by Father Anthony McSweeney, S.S.S.

IV - Part 2

The Importance of the Life of Baptism for Saint Peter Julian Eymard



SESSION IV - Part 2

NOTES FOR PARTICIPANTS

Suggested Environment

The group will gather in the church near the baptismal font. Your pastor will make a short presentation on the font, why it is located where it is and a word about the theology of having Baptisms within the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The group might want to say the opening prayer there and then move into the Eymard room for the rest of the session.

Introduction to the Theme

We were reminded in Session IV – Part 1 how important the sacrament of baptism was to Father Eymard; how when he visited his hometown of La Mure he never forgot to venerate the baptismal font (picture above) in his parish. One wonders what Father Eymard would have thought about the fact that it is now a common practice that following the inspiration of what takes place at the Easter Vigil, baptisms are celebrated at the Liturgy of the Mass in many Catholic parishes.

The Rite of Baptism strongly recommends that baptisms take place at the Sunday liturgy. The newly baptized are welcomed into the faith community within the ritual of the mass which includes the active participation of those present including joining with the parents, godparents, family members and friends in rejecting Satan and professing their faith. (In some parishes, children attending are invited to gather near the baptismal font to get a closer look at the baptismal ceremony.)

This practice brings out clearly the significant relationship between the sacrament of baptism and the sacrament of the Eucharist, a point we stress in the teachings on page 43 that the “Mass is our most powerful resource for living out that radical transformation of our whole being into Christian being, or ‘Christ-being,’ which begins at baptism.”

And remember, Father Eymard taught that the Eucharist is “food for the journey” – a journey begun at our baptism.

Note: The picture on page 41 features the old stone baptistery in the ancient church of La Mure (now the Chapel of Saint Peter Julian Eymard) where on February 5, 1811, the day after his birth, Peter Julian was baptized.

Note 2: The section from the “Living the Faith” article by Father McSweeney on page 44 can be found on page 7 of his article starting at the fifth paragraph.

The **Purpose** of Session IV – Part 2 is to explain the connection of our baptism to our participation in the Liturgy of the Eucharist

Session Four - Part 2

The Importance of the Life of Baptism for Saint Peter Julian Eymard

INVITATION TO PRAYER

Leader: Let us put ourselves quietly in the presence of the Lord.

We take a few moments to silence our minds and prepare for prayer.

Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: O Lord, you gave Saint Peter Julian
a deep sense of gratitude for the gift of his baptism.
He saw it as the beginning of a life
filled with grace.
Through his intercession may we discover
what you have called us to be
at the time of our own baptism.
Grant us the grace to live our Christian
vocation in creative fidelity to your call.
Amen.

TEACHING: Key Points

- At our baptism, our “christ-ening,” we become Christ-like *and* a member of Christ’s body. At each celebration of the Mass we join with other members of the body of Christ to be nourished in order to be more Christ-like – to live our baptismal call.
- The sacraments of baptism and of Eucharist are inseparably linked. The Mass - as Cardinal Cahal B. Daly says in *The Breaking of the Bread* – “is our most powerful resource for living out that radical transformation of our whole being into Christian being, or ‘Christ-being’, which begins at baptism.”
- Father McSweeney calls attention in his article to the celebration of the Easter Vigil where “around the font of rebirth we assist at the washing-immersion of the baptized who, anointed and clothed in shining white, are then welcomed to the table of God to join the community of reborn in order to celebrate in thanks and praise the joy of their new condition and to be nourished by the bread of life and the cup of salvation.”

REFLECTION

Living the Eucharist

Anthony F. McSweeney, SSS

www.blessedsacrament.com.au

Father McSweeney is the former superior general for the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament. He has travelled the world giving retreats and conferences on Saint Peter Julian Eymard and the charism of the congregation. In this article, posted on the website of the Australian province where he is from, Father Tony speaks of how the Eucharist reminds each of us of our own baptism and how in this sacrament we are “re-birthing” into the paschal mystery of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

“It is especially at the Easter Vigil that the paschal beauty of the Eucharist is revealed. There we gather as believers to celebrate the fullness of the paschal mystery as the source of life of humanity re-born. There the assembled community experiences the light that emerges out of deepest night and dispels the darkness.

“Around the font of rebirth we assist at the washing-immersion of the baptized who, anointed and clothed in shining white, are then welcomed to the table of God to join the community of the re-born in order to celebrate in thanks and praise the joy of their new condition and to be nourished by the bread of life and the cup of salvation.

“Each time we celebrate Eucharist, as Paul reminds the community of Corinth, we proclaim something profoundly paradoxical: the death of the Lord. The concept of a suffering and martyred Messiah was an exceedingly difficult one for the first believers to deal with. For us, too, the invitation to follow him on the same path awakens our deepest fears, for it seems to negate everything we might seem legitimately to be able to hope for.

“The Eucharist constantly brings us face to face with this paschal mystery of the Lord into which we have been initiated in baptism, providing us repeatedly with the opportunity to learn the dynamics of what we might call paschal transformation and apply them to daily living.

“The Christian proclamation bids us face the fact of death, not only the death that is the end of life as we know it, but also the death that stalks us daily in all the symbolic forms that it may take – loss of relationship, failure and rejection, hurt and suffering. It seeks to persuade us that life is found not in seeking to evade such inevitable “deaths,” but in learning to accept them and allowing ourselves to be transformed by God through so doing” (8).

Mystic and Prophet of the Eucharist

Catherine Marie Caron, SSS

“At baptism, we were incorporated into Christ to share in his divine life, *really*. Father Eymard valued his baptism. When he visited his hometown, he would go to his parish church to pray near his baptismal font. His baptismal font is still on display in the chapel dedicated to him, there in La Mure d’Isère. His sister had been his godmother. On or near the anniversary of his baptism, he wrote to thank her for inspiring and guiding his growth as a Christian.

During a retreat he took note of the following:

“To be a Christian is a grace ... of divine sonship, a grace of love! It is first of all a grace of love, a feeling which divine goodness places as a seed in our hearts and which at baptism becomes the foundation of our Christian existence ... this love develops with faith, grows with the virtues it inspires ... and then becomes a way of life, a state of love” (13-14).

THE WORD OF THE LORD

The Leader asks one of the participants to proclaim the Scripture passage from 1 Peter 1: 3 – 9.

Sharing Faith

1. Through baptism and the Eucharist we participate in the death and resurrection of Jesus in our own lives – a kind of re-birthing (“a new birth”) each time, small as it might be. In doing so our lives are gradually transformed into the likeness of Jesus who gave his life out of love for us. Please share a “re-birth” or “born-again” (dying and rising) experience in your life, small as it might have been.

2. Today many parishes celebrate baptisms during one or more of the liturgies of the Eucharist, which in effect is a parish event witnessed to by not only family and friends of the baptized but also parishioners of the parish. What do you imagine Saint Peter Julian would have thought about this modern liturgical development? What has been your experience of this practice? How might you prepare yourself for the renewal of *your* baptism promise at the Easter celebration?

Time for questions to our speaker and/or comments from the small group sharing (time permitting)

SENDING FORTH

Apostle of the Eucharist Prayer

God of life and of light, your love for us surpasses all our hopes and desires.

Renew our resolve to gather as your people and to celebrate your faithful love for us manifested in Jesus' gift of the Eucharist.

Feed us at the Table where we long for your presence more than for life itself.

May we cherish the gifts of bread and wine and share these blessings with our brothers and sisters.

Send us now (re-birthing to live our baptismal call), as witnesses of your gospel into a world of fragile peace and broken promises, so that, formed into the likeness of your son, Jesus, we may worship you in Spirit and Truth and proclaim your mighty deeds throughout the world. Amen.

Saint Peter Julian Eymard, Apostle of the Eucharist pray for us!

Note: In preparation for the next gathering, please read both the reflection at the top of page 48 by Father William Fickel, SSS (our guest speaker for V – Part 1) and also Chapter V from “*May God Be Praised!*” by Father Mario Vecchiato, SSS. We also refer you to pages 103 – 105 in *Tomorrow Will Be Too Late*.