

LIFE, TO ME, IS CHRIST



*Saint John Eudes
and his message*

Editorial Claret, SAU
Roger de Llúria, 5 0 08010 Barcelona
D.B.L. 32.461-2001

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and his message**

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Abbreviations used when quoting:

- St John Eudes
- Vatican II

O.C. = Complete Works (French edition)

G.S. = "Gaudium and Spes" - Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World

L.G. = "Lumen Gentium" - Constitution on the Church

P.O. = "Presbyterum Ordinis" - Life and Ministry of Priests

PREFACE

"Life, to me, is Christ" (Phill:21)

John Eudes totally embraced this passionate exclamation of Saint Paul which had often been the object of his meditation and he wanted his contemporaries to experience this reality in their own lives.

Four hundred years after his birth, his passion for serving Christ remains young, vibrant and relevant. In this book, one of his spiritual sons echoes John Eudes' sentiments.

In simple terms, Eudist Father Robert de Pas aptly presents the basics of Saint John Eudes' message which is still able to challenge us today. Thanks to Eudist Father Louis Levesque we offer this English version. I believe the readers who will discover this little book will find it invaluable.

Because by his lifestyle John Eudes witnessed to the love of Christ, his message is convincing. He himself experienced that Christian living is nothing other than a continuation of the life of Jesus. The program he proposes consists of opening one's life to the one who is its sunshine, responding to the call to holiness, living our baptism coherently, in a vitalizing movement of "renunciation-adhesion", allowing Jesus to form himself in us and following him zealously along the Gospel pathways.

Hard to do? John Eudes claims it is not since it consists first and foremost in loving. And to enable us to love, God himself has given us his own Heart. With this Heart which he made "available" to each one of us, we have the ability to love God and our brothers and sisters "corde magno et animo volenti" (2 Maccabeus 1:3), without reservation or limitation.

If we need convincing we need only look to Mary. She kept the whole life of her Son in her Heart and made it the object of her meditation. She can help us do the same. With her, we can learn to make our own hearts more patient and compassionate and become "missionaries of Mercy".

Sister Marie Françoise Le Brizaut
Union of Our Lady of Charity.

A WITNESS TO THE LOVE OF CHRIST

"With this large crowd of witnesses around us, let us run the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus."

These words of encouragement addressed to 1st century Christians in the Letter to the Hebrews (12:1-2), remind us that we are not alone on the road to holiness. Who among us has not, on occasion, come across some of these witnesses who, perhaps without their knowing it, showed us that the call to follow Christ is for us too? The Holy Spirit is still at work in the lives of people today. Throughout the course of history, the Church has always proclaimed the holiness of some men and women, not to give them prominence, but to present them as models. Each one is unique in the Kingdom of God, already on this earth. But holiness is contagious, as evidenced in the life of these witnesses:

- Benedict, in a decadent 16th century world, established monastic life in Europe.
- In the 13th century, when cities competed for greater wealth, Francis and Clare at Assisi, and Dominic in Spain, chose a radical style of poverty and evangelical life.
- In the 16th century, after the shocks of the Renaissance and the Reformation, Teresa of Avila renewed the

Church through holy living, and Ignatius of Loyola founded "the Company of Jesus" to serve the Church on all fronts.

- In France, the 1st century was also a century of holiness: Francis de Sales and Jeanne de Chantal, Vincent de Paul and John Eudes, to mention only those who were canonized. This post-conciliar time (nearly a century after the Council of Trent) was rich in fruits of holiness among the Christians.
- The pioneers of this renewal also left us a spiritual heritage which we cannot keep hidden away. That is why I would like to tell you about Saint John Eudes: tell you who he is and try to pass on his message which could be summed up in these words:

MAY JESUS LIVE AND REIGN
IN ALL HEARTS!

JOHN EUDES' LIFE AND LIFESTYLE

John Eudes came from Normandy, a land rich in so many ways: a land of farmers and sailors, a land of church builders and authors, and a land of saints. In the 17th century, one fifth of the people of France lived in Normandy: the King's armies were recruited there. The ancestral spirit of enterprise and conquest had not vanished; at that time, Canada, the "New France," attracted pioneers whose language would survive in the new land; others went forth to foreign mission lands yearning to become martyrs for the faith, like the young Augustinian Nun that John Eudes knew in Coutances, Sister Marie-Catherine de Saint Augustin, who died in Montreal in 1668 and was beatified in 1989.

John Eudes left us his *Memorial*, a diary in which he made a note of the principal events of his life in order to give thanks for all God's blessings, both joys and tribulations. This precious document allows us to catch a glimpse of his life and may inspire us to write our own "Memorial" to remind us of the love God has shown for us (Psalm 139).

John Eudes began by giving thanks for his family:

"God granted me the grace to be born of parents who were of modest condition, who lived in the fear of God and who, I have every reason to believe, died in his grace and love."

John Eudes believed in God's love for his parents, peasants who were solid Christians. Let us listen to the rest of this passage which denotes the peasant mentality which he still maintained to a degree:

"My father and mother were married three years without being able to have children because of a curse that had been put upon them. Then they made a vow in honour of the Blessed Virgin, to go to Notre Dame de la Recouvrance ... Afterward, my mother then being pregnant, she and my father made a pilgrimage to that same chapel where they offered and consecrated me to Our Lord and Our Lady."

We can admire the faith of the parents which prevails over witchcraft, and their gratitude to God for this favour. John Eudes was aware that, from the very first moments of his life, he belonged to God and he says so:

"I am yours, Lord Jesus, I am yours, O Lady Mary!"¹

Baptized Nov. 16, 1601, at Ri, in the little church dedicated to Our Lady, John Eudes did not fail to note the events in his life where Mary is present with her Son, Jesus.

John Eudes was the first of seven children: one of his two brothers will be the King's historian, using the name Mezeray, and one of the first members of the Academie Française. But being born into a Christian family does not make one a saint: Mezeray was one of those libertines to whom Pascal tried to prove the existence of God.

1. O.C. XII, 103

John Eudes told how, touched by grace, he experienced God:

*"Living in a parish where there was very little instruction for salvation, and where very few people ever received communion except during the Easter season, I began to know God when I was about twelve years old through a very special grace of his divine goodness, and to receive communion every month after making a general confession. It was on the Feast of Pentecost that he granted me the grace to make my First Communion."*²

John Eudes added that it was at this same time that he decided to consecrate himself to God. The situation in the rural parishes at the time is clear: everyone was a practising Catholic but there was much religious ignorance; there was no catechism and frequent communion was not a common practice. It took a lot of courage for this young twelve year old to go to communion alone every month.

This young son of a relatively well-to-do peasant family began to get some schooling, thanks to a country pastor whose name he retained in his annals:

"After studying for a time in the fields under a master who was a priest named Father Jacques Blanette, from whose example and spiritual instruction I profited a great deal, my father sent me to Caen to continue my studies at the Reverend Jesuit Fathers' College, There, on the Feast of St. Denis, in 1675, I was put in the fourth frame directed by Father Robin, a virtuous

2. O.C. I, 105

*and pious regent who spoke about G6d often and with extraordinary fervour, and that helped me more than I can say in matters of salvation."*³

The adolescent was seriously influenced by this educator; we too might be able to single out persons who showed us the way to God.

There are also times when God comes into our lives in a significant way. John Eudes pointed out one such instance which happened when he was 17:

"I was received into the Sodality of Our Lady at the college of the very Reverend Jesuit Fathers, at Caen, about 1618, the year in which Our Lord granted me exceptional graces through the intercession of his Most Holy Mother."

Fifty years later, when writing his *Marriage Contract with the Blessed Virgin*, he discreetly alluded to this Marian blessing from his college days:

*"Oh admirable and most amiable Mary, Mother of God, ... how wonderful that you are willing to be the spouse of the least of all men, one who dared to choose you from his most tender age to be his unique spouse and to consecrate his body, soul and heart entirely to you... Oh most desirable and sole object of my heart, second only to God!"*⁴

What is to become of this young man who was fortunate enough to get to study at the Jesuit college? When he men-

3. O.C. XII. 105

4. O.C. XII, 160

tioned to his father that he intended to become an Oratorian, he met with a categorical no. Why? This man who himself had at one time thought of becoming a priest may have had other plans in mind for his eldest son. But young John had made his choice: he would enter this new congregation, the Oratory founded by Father de Berulle. It was quite adventurous for this country boy to go to Paris to enter the novitiate. John Eudes, in spite of his father's refusal, set out for Paris on the family's horse. But, the horse suddenly balked, refusing to go forward and John Eudes understood: he came back to plead with his father again; this time, approval was granted and the young man was sent on his way to respond to God's call.

John Eudes wrote in his *Memorial*:

*"I was admitted into the Congregation of the Oratory at their house on St. Honore Street, in Paris, where I was received by the founder, Reverend Father de Berulle, on March 25th, 1623 (Feast of the Annunciation)."*⁵

Cardinal de Berulle founded the Oratory as a school of holiness for priests living in community, but without vows. He formed men who would themselves be founders: Vincent de Paul, John Eudes and Jean-Jacques Olier, a disciple of Father de Condren.

John Eudes was 24 when he was ordained to the priesthood. He celebrated his first Mass at Christmas in the Chapel of the Oratory (Situating near the Louvre, it is today a Reformed Church).

5. O.C. XII. 107

Young Father Eudes, full of apostolic zeal and eager to begin his ministry, was stricken with an illness that would last two years. He later wrote:

*"God gave me these two years to spend on retreat, in prayer, reading pious books and engaging in other spiritual exercises. I consider this a very special grace for which I must eternally bless his divine bounty."*⁶

This is how God was preparing him to be a great "missionary", He was recuperating at Aubervilliers when he learned that the plague was ravaging the Diocese of Seez. Understandably, Father de Berulle was reluctant to authorize him to minister to the victims, but charity consumed John Eudes' heart and he insistently begged to be allowed to assist these people who were without any spiritual help. He lived with another priest, Father Laurens, and shared this ministry with him. He wrote:

*"Every day we would say Mass in St. Evroult chapel, not far from his house. Then, I would put some consecrated hosts into a small white tin box which I now keep at the bottom of my trunk, but which I then wore around my neck. Then we would go, this good priest and I, seeking out the sick, hear their confession and administer the Blessed Sacrament to them. We did this from the end of August until All Saints Day when the plague finally disappeared completely. God preserved us so well that we never experienced any ill effects."*⁷

6. O.C. XII, 103

7. O.C. XII, 103

Four years later, the plague struck the city of Caen. John Eudes attended his superior at the house of the Oratory, and two other members of the community. The superior died and so did one of the two confreres. About himself, he wrote:

"God again preserved me from all harm."

In 1632, John Eudes preached several missions in the Diocese of Coutances; in 1635, in the Diocese of Bayeux and, the following year, in the Diocese of Saint-Malo.

The first to begin missions for country folk because he recognized their great poverty, both material and spiritual, was Vincent de Paul who, at the time, was chaplain to Gondi, in Picardy. As a matter of fact, the congregation he founded was first called: "Priests of the Mission" (known today as Vincentians).

The Oratorians, like the Jesuits (in Brittany, Father Maunoir, after Father Le Nobletz, rector of Douarnenez) understood the urgent need for "missions" to renew the spirit of the Gospel among the Christian people. France suffered greatly from the Wars of Religion; in 1598, the Edict of Nantes restored peace. In John Eudes' day, the Huguenots were very numerous in Caen; those who converted, as he noted about several missions, did so without any coercion. In the course of his missions, John Eudes met with much misery, particularly that of women who were victims of prostitution. In 1641, he launched a daring venture in Caen, the House of Our Lady of Charity of the Refuge, to welcome these women and make it possible for them to turn their lives around. At first, a few lay people took over the house, but John Eudes felt that a religious congregation was needed to ensure continuity and survival of the spirit; but there were none available.

He called upon the Visitation Sisters and they lent him a few, but vocations were slow in coming. One of John Eudes'

own nieces would be one of the first Sisters of Our Lady of Charity. Only John Eudes' inexhaustible patience and tenacity would succeed in gaining recognition for the Congregation from Rome in 1665. He was encouraged in his projects by Marie des Vallees, a pious lay person he got to know in Coutances. He wrote:

*"In August of 1641, God granted me one of the greatest favours I have ever received from his infinite bounty, for it was then that I had the good fortune to first meet Sister Marie des Values through whom his gracious majesty bestowed on me a great number of singular graces. After God, I am indebted for this favour to the most holy Virgin Mary."*⁸

This uncomplicated woman was considered to be the "saint of Coutances," but John Eudes' enemies violently attacked him about this relationship.

Now came the turning point in his life. He wrote:

*"In the year 1643, Our Lord and his most Holy Mother, in their excessive goodness, granted us the grace to begin the establishment of our little Congregation, on. March 25th, the day on which the Son of God was made man and the Blessed Virgin became the Mother of God."*⁹

This note, couched in terms of thanksgiving, conceals a high drama about which he is most discreet, namely: his leaving the Oratory where he had spent twenty years of his

8. O.C. XII, 111

9. O.C. XII, 112

life. John Eudes loved that Congregation which formed so many remarkable priests, he loved his confreres with whom he had worked in the parish missions; furthermore, John Eudes was superior of the house in Caen. What happened?

During his missions, John Eudes was able to discern an enormous problem: priests, although numerous at the time, were not always very pastoral for lack of spiritual and apostolic formation. A century earlier, the Council of Trent had requested the founding of seminaries. Vincent de Paul, again first in line, opened a seminary in Paris. John Eudes was thinking of doing the same in Caen. He had spoken about it to Richelieu who was willing to give him the necessary authorizations. But those in charge at the Oratory disagreed. John Eudes, after lengthy reflection and prayer, decided to leave the Congregation to pursue his goal.

Along with five diocesan priests who were to be his first companions, he set out on a pilgrimage to Notre Dame de la Délivrante to entrust to Mary the new Congregation which he called the Congregation of Jesus and Mary (now known as the Eudists).

The first seminary opened in Caen, in 1643, followed by others in Coutances (1650), Lisieux (1653), Rouen (1660), Evreux (1667) and Rennes (1670).

These foundations did not come about without some difficulties. The new Bishop of Bayeux, for instance, ill-informed by Father Eudes' detractors, ordered him to close the chapel of the Caen seminary. John Eudes nevertheless continued to preach numerous missions in Normandy, in Burgundy and at the Royal Court. While Paris, in 1660, had just been hailing its new king, Louis XIV, shouting: "Long live the King!", John Eudes, monstration in hand, preached and had the faithful shouting: "Live Jesus!". The courtiers

were astounded by the preacher's boldness as he denounced injustices and sin in the kingdom of France. But the Queen Mother herself is recorded as saying: "That is how one must preach."

John Eudes, who could have let this success go to his head, was learning at the rugged school of the Cross. Trials abounded for him, but he welcomed them as graces.

"Divine Mercy has had me undergo a great number of tribulations, which is one of the greatest favours granted me because they have been most useful to me and God has always delivered me from them."

*"At the beginning of 1660, God allowed me to be despised, reviled and calumniated to an extraordinary degree."*¹⁰

In 1662, he was seriously ill for six weeks, but suffered much more morally at the hands of people "who were very dear to him." A year later, he was deeply affected by the death of Father Manchon, referred to as "our dearest brother," one of his first companions with whom he preached missions for twenty years.

John Eudes' diary also underlines the joys in his life, notably the placing of the cornerstone of the church of the Caen Seminary, dedicated to the Holy Heart of Mary (1664).

In the last years of his life, Father Eudes suffered "the king's displeasure," and that risked jeopardizing the future of his Congregation. John Eudes wrote:

10. O.C. XII, 120

"A thoroughly false calumny against me was implanted in the King's mind. He was persuaded that I had done things contrary to his Majesty's interests, which is something that never entered my mind."

In the end, the King, properly informed, called to Paris the old Normand priest who made the journey with much difficulty. But it was all worthwhile since the King redressed the wrong and Father Eudes was once again in his good graces:

"I am very pleased to see you, said the King, I am aware that you are doing a great deal of good in my kingdom. Continue to work as you are doing. I shall be very pleased to see you again and will help and protect you whenever the occasion may arise. "¹¹

John Eudes thanked the "Father of mercy and God of all consolation," and made arrangements to leave the Congregation in the hands of his successor, Father Blouet de Camilly, who was elected at the first General Assembly, in 1680.

On July 25th, 1680, less than a month before his death, John Eudes penned the last lines of his diary:

"God granted me the grace to finish my book.- The Admirable Heart of the Most Holy Mother of God."¹²

This huge work is a compendium of Father Eudes' spiritual teaching on the Heart of Mary whose liturgical Feast he had celebrated for the first time in 1648. He had also

11. O.C. XII, 134

12. O.C. XII, 135

composed both an Office and a Mass in honour of the Heart of Jesus which was celebrated in 1672.

So, when John Eudes was canonized in 1925, he was acclaimed as: "The Father, Doctor and Apostle of the liturgical worship of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary."

A Priest With a Heart Afire

John Eudes' *Memorial* (his diary) has left us a portrait of the priest "in action", a man of prayer and praise: he gave thanks to God through all the events of his life. With a passionate love of Jesus Christ, this ardent missionary lived Jesus' words:

"I came to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already kindled!" (Luke 12:49)

A 1673 painting represents John Eudes holding in one hand a missionary's cross and in the other "the Heart of Jesus and Mary, furnace of love". It is indeed from that hearth that John Eudes received all the love that enkindled his life and with which he was devoured for "the salvation of souls". Much like Theresa of Lisieux, she too a Normand, who will say: "I choose it all." John Eudes likes the word *all* applied to Jesus:

*"Oh Jesus, be all on the earth as in heaven. Oh Jesus, my dearest all, please live and reign in us and in all things. Live Jesus! Live Jesus! the great all! Live the great Jesus who is all! Live the great all who is Jesus! Live Jesus! Live Jesus."*¹³

13. O.C. I, 566

A man of action, missionary during half a century, founder of Congregations of priests and Religious women, John Eudes was also a man of prayer. His Normand realism is balanced by a life of habitual union with God. One can guess about whom he is speaking when, to illustrate that all Christians can live in the Presence of God in their most ordinary actions, he writes:

*"I know a certain clergyman who has reached the point where, when eating his meals, can make almost as many acts of love of God as he puts bites into his mouth, and this without much effort and with such facility and ease that it does not keep him from conversing with his neighbour."*¹⁴

This is how this 36 year old priest knew how to be an interesting companion at mealtime while putting into practice the words of Saint Paul: "Whether you eat or drink, do it all for God's glory". (I Cor 10:31). At every turn, love flows from John Eudes' pen; he is a true disciple of Father de Berulle, his spiritual master, whose teaching often concludes with a prayer which he calls an "elevation". The first of John Eudes' works, *The Life and Kingdom of Jesus in Christian Souls* (1637), contains some of these cries of love:

"Oh all lovable and all desirable Jesus, enkindle in my soul such a burning thirst and such an extreme hunger for your holy love that it may be a ceaseless martyrdom for me not to love you enough."

"Oh Jesus, my God, my life, my all. There is nothing in you that is not all love for me."

14. O.C. XII, 454

"Oh God of my heart, let me spend my life loving you and ever growing in your love. I would rather suffer a thousand deaths than to lose your love forever."

"Oh Jesus, it is time for me to start loving you!"

"Oh Jesus, you are so little loved, If I had the hearts of all humans, an infinite capacity for loving, I would want to use it loving Him who is infinitely lovable."

"It is the infinite love of your Heart that I want to offer as my own heart and love since you have given it to me in giving yourself to me, with the loving Heart of your Mother. So too do I love you with the most pure love with which your Father and your Holy Spirit love you."

It is this same love for Christ that made of Saint John Eudes a priest full of apostolic charity: to the priests, religious and Christians of his time, he spoke about "zeal for the salvation of souls" in these terms:

"The greatest of all works, the most divine thing you can accomplish in this world and the most pleasing to Jesus is to work with him at the salvation of souls which are so dear and precious to him. You must consider it a great favour and blessing to spend all your time, your health, your very life and all the treasures of this world if they belonged to you, to help save a single soul for which Jesus gave all his blood, spent all his time, his life and his strength."

"Oh Jesus, consumed with the desire to save humankind, I beg you to implant in the souls of all Christians the sentiments and dispositions of your zeal and most ardent charity for souls." ¹⁵

15. O.C. I, 264

For John Eudes, one's entire life is mission: this is what he came to realize when contemplating Jesus, beloved Son of the Father, receiving his life and his mission from his Father.

Like St. Paul, John Eudes was supported in his apostolic work by numerous collaborators, both women and men, like Monsieur de Renty, Monsieur and Madame de Camilly, etc.

He also displayed great love for his confreres. For him, charity was "the rule of all rules in community life". Often, in letters to his confreres, to religious or to lay friends he was very encouraging and consoling in times of trial; he stimulated, sometimes firmly, but always lovingly.

To some of his confreres he was not able to accompany on their mission, he wrote:

"I love you all, both as a group and individually, more than my very heart, and I think that is no exaggeration, but simply the truth."

Here is a man, a bit rough on the surface, but with a heart full of tenderness and charity. Little by little, John Eudes learned humility and gentleness from Jesus (Matt 11: 29). He recommended to priests that they mirror a little of "the goodness and humanity of Christ" (Titus 3: 4). He himself, by his entire life and ministry, witnessed to God's Mercy. His heart was one with the Heart of Christ, and his whole life, so often touched by the Cross, became a song of praise as expressed in the *Magnificat* he composed:

- *"My soul magnifies the Lord; my spirit rejoices in the great Heart of Jesus and Mary.*
- *Infinite thanks for his ineffable gifts!*
- *He has received me from the moment I entered my mother's womb: the abyss of my misery calling on the*

abyss of his Mercy, he has filled me with the blessings of his Heart.

- *He has chosen me to be his priest; he has put his words in my mouth.*
- *He has led me to the valley of death and has called me back to life; everywhere, he has guided my every step.*
- *Praise, love and glory to You!*
- *Oh Heart of Jesus, broken for us upon the Cross by the violence of your love, may our hearts be consumed by the perpetual flame of your Love.*
- *Oh Heart of Jesus and Mary, may our hearts be but One in you." ¹⁶*

16. O.C. III, 391

JOHN EUDES, Spiritual Master

John Eudes, himself transformed by love for Christ, has left us a message: to learn to become living images of Christ. In 1637, he wrote a book titled *The Life and Kingdom of Jesus in Christian Souls* with only one purpose in mind: make the baptized discover their vocation and mission, namely: to form Jesus in themselves and in the hearts of men and women. Aware of the needs of his day, John Eudes founded the Order of Our Lady of Charity, in 1641, to welcome women who were victims of prostitution. The many missions he preached convinced him that it was urgent to establish seminaries to form priests who would be true pastors; so, John Eudes founded the Congregation of Jesus and Mary in 1643, precisely for that purpose.

The ardent desire to communicate the Life of Christ was John Eudes' constant motivation, as is evidenced in the dedication of *The Kingdom of Jesus*:

"Oh Jesus, I adore you as the one who is Life and is our own true life, our sanctification. I adore the design and most pious desire you have of living and reigning in my soul and in all Christian souls. In order to contribute to the accomplishment of this desire, Oh Jesus, I no longer want to live except to work ceaselessly at forming you and making you live and reign in

*my soul and in all the souls it will please you to bring to me for that purpose."*¹⁷

Obviously, for Saint John Eudes, holiness and mission go together. Christian living consists in "*sanctifying Christ in our lives*" (I Peter 3: 15), living of his Life. Saint John Eudes is going to teach us how to "*make of one's whole life a perpetual exercise of love of Jesus*".

His pedagogy is simple and pacifying: essentially it consists in keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus to allow ourselves to be transformed by him.

He proposes different ways of living the events of everyday life as Christians, but always remembering the need to let ourselves be led by the Lord. John Eudes liked to recall his teachings often as prayers or elevations, as he called them, and it is with this in mind that he invites us to read his texts:

*"I am confident that the Lord in his most great goodness will give you light to understand these things and the grace to put them into practice. Read, not hastily, but with careful attention and intelligent application of your mind and heart, weighing, savouring and assimilating what you are reading, according to the dispositions with which Our Lord will fill your soul."*¹⁸

17. O.C. 181

18. O.C. 194

JESUS, SUN OF OUR LIVES

Christ at the Centre of Christian Life:

What would life be like without the sun? People of many cultures have worshiped it for fear that it would one day disappear ... Among all peoples, Israel alone proclaims that the heavenly powers are simply creatures: "God alone will you adore". What a revolution!

Science, in John Eudes' day, provoked another revolution: in 1632, Galileo claimed that the earth revolves on its axis. The centre of the universe is not the earth, but the sun, confirming what Copernicus had discovered earlier.

From Father de Berulle John Eudes had learned to place Christ at the centre of Christian life. De Berulle, who had a profound sense of the grandeur of God, of his transcendence, was also the mystical theologian of the Incarnation; he advocates contemplating God in Jesus, the Incarnate Word. We will never cease marvelling at this Mystery of God becoming man for our sake. No longer do we have just men groping to find God (Acts 17:27), we have God himself revealing himself to us in his Son who is his Word.

Already in Abraham's day, God had wanted to conclude an alliance with humankind; now, in the Person of God's Son, Man and God become one. An Incarnation which we see as marvellous, but one which Jews and Muslims viewed as scandalous. It is the marvel of our faith proclaimed by the

Church: Jesus is true God and true man. And there is still more for us to marvel at: our divine adoption. It was indeed to make of us his children that God gave us his Son:

"When the appointed time came, God sent his own Son, born of a woman. He lived under the Jewish Law to redeem those who were subjects of the Law, and to enable us to be adopted as God's sons. The proof that you are sons is that God has sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit that cries: "Abba, Father". (Gal 4:4-6)"

This brings us to the very heart of our Christian life, our vocation, our *raison d'etre*. The vocation of every human being is divine. Saint Paul discloses God's plan, his inscrutable mystery of love, the fact that from all eternity God loved us, chose us for his children:

"Blessed be God the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ. Before the world was made, he chose us, chose us in Christ, to be holy and spotless, and to live through love in his presence, determining that we should become his adopted sons, through Jesus Christ" (Eph 1 :3-5).

Christ enters our life to join us to God, "our Father". A lot of Christians are "deists": for them God is some vague, impersonal being. While sects come upon dead ends, the Church announces Jesus Christ as "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14,6).

Vatican II refocused Christian life on Christ. He is the one who gives meaning to the lives of human beings:

"In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh, Christ, new Adam, that the mystery of humanity

truly becomes clear... He is the perfect man who has restored in the children of Adam the likeness to God... By his Incarnation he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each individual. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind, he acted with a human will and with a human heart he loved." (G.S., 22)

Let us see how John Eudes tells us that Jesus is the center of our lives: Jesus, Beloved Son of the Father, who is also all our love:

"The first and principal object, indeed, the only object of the attention, love and good pleasure of the eternal Father is his Son Jesus. I say "the only one" because, as this divine Father has willed that his Son Jesus be "all in all things" (Eph 1 :23), and that "in him and by him all things hold together" (Col 1:17), he sees and loves all things in him, and sees and loves nothing but him in all things. And as this same Apostle teaches us, "he has made all things in him and by him" (Col 1:16), and "placed in him all the treasures of his knowledge and wisdom" (Col 2:3), of his goodness and beauty, of his glory and happiness. He himself proclaims loudly and more than once that he "has placed all his good pleasure and his delights in this only-begotten and well beloved Son" (Matt 3: 17).

"At the invitation of this heavenly Father whom we should follow and imitate as our Father, we should make Jesus the sole object of our minds and our hearts. We should see and love all things in him, and should see and love only him in all things. We should do everything in him and for him. Since he is the Paradise of the Eternal Father in whom he takes his pleasure, so

this holy Father has given him to us; in fact. he has given himself to us to be our paradise. This is why he commands us to make our dwelling place in him: "Remain in me" (John 15:4).

"Look then upon your very lovable Saviour as the unique object of your thoughts, desires and affections, as the sole goal of all your actions; as your center, your paradise and your all. Withdraw in him by lifting your mind and your heart toward him. Remain always in him, often remembering these words: "There is only one thing that is necessary" (Luke 10:42), and that is to serve, love and glorify Jesus. You are on earth for no other reason. It is the principal, most important, most necessary, even the sole duty you have on earth.

"Remember, from time to time, that you are in God's presence and even in God himself (Acts 17:28); that Our Lord Jesus Christ, according to his divinity, surrounds you on all sides, indeed penetrates and fills you, so much so that he is more in you than you are yourself; that he never stops thinking about you and that his eyes and his heart are always turned towards you." ¹⁹

John Eudes reminds us *that our whole life belongs to Jesus:*

"He is our creator: "our whole life must be referred to him as the image reflects its prototype".

"He is our saviour who redeemed us at the price of his blood and his life.

19. O.C. I, 114-117

*Therefore, all our life, every moment, every thought, word and action, everything that is in our body and soul, and all the use we make of the things that are in this world, all must be consecrated and used for the greater glory of Jesus."*²⁰

With John Eudes, we learn to make of our lives a constant offering of love:

"Oh Jesus, object of all my love, when shall I love you perfectly?"

"Oh divine Sun, fill with light the shadows of my mind, set fire to the frigidity of my heart!"

"Oh my God and my all, take away all that is not you to unite me entirely to you!

Oh Jesus, you are all mine; may I be all yours forever!"

*"Oh you only necessary One, it is you that I seek, the only One I need, my Jesus who is all things and outside of whom all is nothing!"*²¹

This is a cry of absolute love, similar to Teresa of Avila's "Todo - Nada" (all - nothing). The ending of "The Life and Kingdom of Jesus" is typical:

"Oh Jesus, be all, be all on earth as you are in heaven. Be all in this little book.

Everything good in it comes from you. Let its readers see in it nothing but Jesus, seek in it nothing but Jesus, and find in it nothing but how to love and glorify Jesus".

²²

20. O.C. I, 101

21. O.C. 1,117-118

22. O.C. I, 566

Sharing in the life of Christ:

"Christ is living in me" (Gal 2:20)

Christian living does not consist only in keeping Christ before our eyes, nor even in imitating him as someone living outside of us: it means really sharing in his life or, as Saint John Eudes puts it, "continuing his life in us". The Jesus of Nazareth who lived, died and rose from the dead two thousand years ago communicates his Life to us today.

"Marvellous exchange", says a Christmas carol, Christ became a human to enable humankind to share in his divine life. Listen to Paul as he addresses the Galatians: *"It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who is living in me. This life that I live now, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave his life for me."* (Gal 2:20)

Christ, indeed, turned Paul's whole life around. This faithful Pharisee who persecuted Christians with a vengeance is stricken down on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). He did not know Jesus while he walked the earth, but he now discovers the Risen Christ in the light that envelops him and the voice that calls him by name. "Who are you?" he asks. "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting": double revelation which will change Paul's life forever: he discovers both Christ and the Church at the same time and learns that Christ and the Christians are but one. This experience will be the foundation of all of Saint Paul's theology. His ministry as an apostle of Jesus Christ will reveal to him that the life of the Christian communities is the life of Christ continued in his followers. Paul is aware that he has received the grace to make known the "Mystery of Christ" now made manifest in the Church: the fulfillment of God's plan to save all humankind, Jews and pagans alike, through Jesus Christ (Eph 3:1-13).

All of us form in Christ one body of which Christ is the Head and we the members:

"All of you are Christ's body and each one is a part of it" (1 Cor 12:27).

"He is the Head of his Body, the Church" (Col 1:18).

The Church, in fact, is that communication of life between Christ and us and among us all, that Life which has its source in the Father and is passed on to us by Christ in the Spirit.

Based on this marvellous reality, Saint John Eudes presents Christian life as *the continuation and fulfillment of the life of Jesus Christ.*

"Not only is Jesus Son of God and Son of man, our Saviour and our sovereign Lord, he is also our Head and we are members of his body, as Saint Paul puts it (Eph 5:30).

It follows that we are united to him in the most intimate union possible, comparable to the connection there is between members and their head. Spiritually, we are united to him by faith and by the grace he gave us in holy Baptism. Bodily, we are united to him by the union of his most holy body with ours in the Blessed Sacrament. As a necessary consequence, just as the members are animated by the spirit of the head and live of the same life, so too must we be animated by the spirit of Jesus, live of his life, walk in his ways, be clothed with his sentiments and inclinations, perform all our actions with the same dispositions and intentions with which he acted. In a word, we must continue and fulfill the life he had on earth."²³

23. O.C.I., 161

Christianity is, therefore, not first and foremost a set of beliefs or a moral code, but a life which identifies us with Christ, a Gift of God received and maintained through the sacraments. Saint John Eudes here again based his teaching on the Word of God as evidenced here:

*"I am the Life and I came so that you might have life. I live and you live. On that day you will know that I am in the Father and you are in me and I in you. (cf John 14:6; 10:10; 14:19-20) That is to say that, just as I am in my Father, living of the Life my Father communicates to me, you too are living of my life and I am in you, communicating that same life to you,- thus I live in you and you live with me and in me."*²⁴

John Eudes goes on to explain that we can speak about Jesus' life on earth (from his birth of the Virgin Mary to his death on the Cross), and about his glorious life which he communicates to his Body, the Church, until the end of time, for the greater glory of his Father. Thus the life of Christ continues to be fulfilled in us,

"so, when Christians pray, they continue and fulfill the prayer of Jesus,- when they work, they continue and fulfill Jesus' work life; and so on, in all the other actions done in a Christian manner.

*So, you see what Christian life is: a continuation and fulfillment of the life of Jesus. We must, therefore, be so many other Jesuses on earth in order to continue his life and work."*²⁵

24. O.C.I, 162

25. O.C.I, 165

Incorporated to Christ by Baptism, we are One with him:
all that is his is ours:

"Not only is he all yours, he wants to be in you. He wants all that is in him to be living and reigning in you: his Spirit in your spirit, his Heart in your heart, all the capacities of his soul in the faculties of your soul, so that these words may be fulfilled in you: "Glorify and carry God in your body" (I Cor 6:20), and the life O; Jesus may show forth visibly in you" (II Cor 4: 10).²⁶

26. O.C.I, 114

BAPTISM IS ITS SOURCE

Saint John Eudes had a deep veneration for Baptism and was able to explain its importance to the Christian people. In his day, everybody was baptized but John Eudes was able to see first hand the tremendous religious ignorance of so many people *"who live more like animals, like pagans, than as real Christians"*. In his missions, he attempted to evangelize the baptized. The spirituality he proposed to the faithful is the development of their baptismal life.

Even today, for many, Baptism is a ritual and an occasion for a party rather than the beginning of a life, life in Christ. God loves and saves all human beings, without exception, in his Son, Saviour of the world (Acts 10:34-36). Those Christians who are fortunate enough to know about it have the mission to proclaim it. *"Go, of all peoples make disciples, baptizing them ..."* (Matt 28:19).

The word *baptism* means bath, immersion ... This ritual can be found in many religions, in India, in the Jewish faith; John administered a baptism of purification in the Jordan which foretold another baptism, the one inaugurated by Jesus who will "baptize in the Holy Spirit and in fire" (Luke 3:16).

The icons representing *Jesus' baptism* in the waters of the Jordan symbolize his Death: that baptism Jesus pro-

claimed when speaking about his Passion (Lukel2:50); plunged into death, he rose to new life for us.

Saint Paul uses the same symbols when speaking about *Christian baptism*, based on the baptismal rite that consisted in going down into the pool and coming up out of it to don the white alb, sign of new life: *"You know that when we were baptized into union with Christ Jesus, we were baptized into union with his death. By our baptism, then, we were buried with him and shared his death in order that, just as Christ was raised from death by the glorious power of the Father, so also we might live a new life (Rom 6:3-4). You have put on the new self (Christ)" (Col 3: 10).*

Saint Paul also speaks about *"giving us new life by washing us"* (Titus 3:5). The baptised person begins a new life in Christ: it is a conversion experience. But Christian living also entails a permanent conversion in the logic of our baptism: *"In the past you were ignorant and stubborn hearted; but now that is no longer what you have learned about Christ: you must get rid of your old self that was being destroyed by its deceitful desires. Your hearts and minds must be made completely new, and you must put on the new self which is created in God's likeness and reveals itself in the true life that is upright and holy"* (Eph 4:17-24).

Every year, Saint John Eudes invites us to set aside some time to give thanks to God for our birth and our Baptism:

- First, *thanks for the gift of Life:*

"I give infinite thanks to you, Oh my God, on my own behalf and on behalf of all created beings, especially my friends and those close to me, for the gift of life and the capacity to know and love you ... I offer and consecrate it to you together with the being and life of

all humans and all creatures, affirming that I no longer want to live to serve and love you.¹²⁷

In his book, *The Interior Colloquies*, Saint John Eudes delights in recalling that:

- *God has loved me from time eternal:*

"God cast his divine gaze upon me from all eternity. He thought about me, he loved me, he formed great designs concerning me. He chose to create me with all the natural advantages and perfections he has given me. He designed to preserve and protect me as he does every moment of my life. He chose to create the world and to preserve it in existence for love of me ... How good he is to have made so many marvels for all of humankind and for each individual in particular". "What can I offer the Lord for all his goodness to me"? (Psalm 115) 28

- I am made for him; in him is my happiness:

"Why did God create me? For himself, to think of him, to love him, to speak to him, to work for him ... Indeed, not only is he my principle and prototype, he is also my sole end. In him, therefore, reside my sovereign wellbeing, my center, my treasure, my glory, my happiness, the perfect repose of my spirit and my heart, my true paradise.

"You made me for yourself, Oh Lord, and my heart can find no rest except in you." (St. Augustine)

27. O.C. I. 499-500

28. O.C II, 135

29. O.C. II, 140

Created out of love, we are made for loving, for living of the life of God. This is essential to our understanding of where we come from and where we are bound, Creation is a work of love, a gift from God. God, my Creator is also my Father, the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ who made it possible for us to enter into his relationship of love.

– *Thanks for the gift of Baptism:*

"Having begun in Baptism to live of the true life which is the one we have in Jesus Christ, this sacrament is at the very origin of all our happiness. Oh Jesus, I adore you as the One who baptized me through the instrumentality of a priest. I give myself to you; renew that grace in me; fulfill the plans you have deigned to have on me. Baptize me with that Baptism of the Holy Spirit and of fire which your Precursor told us you used, that is to say, consume all my sins in the fire of your holy love and the power of your divine Spirit."³⁰

Saint John Eudes allows us to discover and appreciate the riches of our Baptism:

- *Baptism is a new birth, as Holy Scripture puts it, "a bath of regeneration" (Titus 3:5).*

"Unless you are reborn of water and the Spirit..."
(John 3:5).

Admirable birth, mirror of the eternal and temporal birth of the Son of God: as the Father, from all eternity, communicates his being and his life to the Son. He willed to make of us his children. To you also are spoken the words

30. O.C.I, 506-507

Jesus heard at his own Baptism: "You are my beloved Son, this day I have begotten you" (Luke 3:22).

Saint John Eudes wrote:

"At the moment of his Incarnation, the Son clothed himself with our human nature. Similarly in the Holy Sacrament of Baptism he united himself to us and incorporated us with him; he formed himself and, as it were, took flesh in us.

He clothed and filled us with himself, according to these words of Saint Paul: You were baptized into union with Christ and now you are clothed with the life of Christ himself" (Gal 3:27).³¹

"The three Persons of the Blessed Trinity have cooperated in the admirable work of the Incarnation; so too are they present in our Baptism: the Father is there generating his Son in us and generating us in his Son. The Son is there being born in us and imparting his divine sonship to us. The Holy Spirit is present forming Jesus in us as he formed him in the womb of the Blessed Virgin. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are there consecrating us to them in a special way, imprinting their image in us and establishing their dwelling place within us."³²

- *Baptism makes us participate in the Pascal mystery: dying to live with Christ.*

"Oh Jesus, you had me in mind every moment of your life. Your plan was to imprint on my soul, by holy Baptism, an image of your death, burial and resurrection,

31. O.C. I, 508

32. O.C. I 181

*causing me to die to myself and to the world, hiding me in you and with you in the bosom of the Father, raising me up and causing me to live a new life like you. I give myself to you, Oh Jesus, and surrender myself to the spirit and power of the mystery of your death and resurrection that you might bury my spirit in your spirit, my heart in our heart, my soul in your soul, my life in your Life."*³³

- *Baptism, admirable covenant with God:*

Throughout the Bible there is evidence of God's startling project of establishing a covenant with man: first, with Abraham, the one God chose to become "the father of a multitude", then with the chosen People, Israel, through the mediation of Moses. We are the People of the New Covenant, accomplished in Jesus Christ, sole Mediator between God and humankind.

God is always the one to take the initiative of proposing the Covenant, but he leaves humans free to enter into and live this Alliance or not. Baptism is the sign of this Covenant which makes us enter into communion with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3).

"What is this communion? It is the noblest and most perfect that can exist. It is not merely an alliance among friends or among siblings, of children with their father, of a bride with her bridegroom, but of members with their Head, and that is the most intimate and closest of all unions.

It is far more than the natural and bodily union of the branches of a vine with the stalk, and of members of the

33. O.C. I, 509-511

human body with the head; these are but a shadow of the spiritual and supernatural union we have with Christ in Baptism and through him with the Father, according to Jesus' own words: "That they may be one just as you and I are one: I in them and you in me" (John 17:22).

"How wonderful the alliance we enter into with God by Baptism. It is exalted and ennobled by being founded, so to speak, on the Precious Blood of Christ and sealed by the Holy Spirit. Thus, that same Spirit who is the unity of the Father and the Son is the sacred link in the relationship and union we have with Jesus Christ in Baptism and, through him, with the Father: "that they may be perfectly one". Through Baptism, we become one with Jesus Christ and, through Jesus Christ, one with God."³⁴

To speak about baptism, John Eudes, faithful to his Normand roots, approaches the matter in terms of a contract and calls it Man's Contract with God through Holy Baptism, a very advantageous contract... where God makes commitments to us in his great love:

- *"The eternal Father having granted you the honour of entering into a covenant with him by Baptism as one of his children and a member of his Son, is obliged to look upon you with the same eyes, love you with the same heart and lavish upon you the same love he bestows on his beloved Son, Jesus. His fatherly eyes are always fixed on you, his mind is continually occupied with thinking about you, his heart perpetually applied to loving you. He promises you, if you remain faithful to him, to be his heirs in heaven and coheirs with his Son."*

34. O.C. II, 185-186

- *"The Son, when he welcomed you into this alliance, pledged himself to look upon you, love and treat you as part of himself, bone of his bones, flesh of his flesh, spirit of his spirit. He willed to give you his Father to be your father, his Spirit and his Heart to be your spirit and your heart.*

He pledged to give you his Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, to be your Mother.

He also willed to give you the Church as your Mother.

He gave you his flesh and his blood to be your nourishment.

He gave you his very Name: 'They will be called children of God and that is what they really are' (1 John 3:1)."³⁵

There is no Christian life without the Holy Spirit intervening, that Spirit who was given to us in Baptism and who animates our entire life just as he directed Jesus during all his life.

- *"The Holy Spirit formed the One who is our Redeemer and our Head in the womb of the most holy Virgin. He inspired and guided him in all that he thought, said, did and suffered, in the sacrifice he made of himself on the Cross (Heb 9:14). And, once Our Lord had ascended into heaven, the Holy Spirit came into the world to form and establish in it the Body of Jesus Christ which is his Church. He comes at the time of our Baptism to form Jesus in us, to incorporate us with him, to make us live to work at forming Jesus in us, to incorporate us and make us live in him, to animate, inspire*

35. O.C. 11, 212-215

*and conduct us in all that we need to think, say, do and suffer in a Christian manner for God."*³⁶

*"Christians are temples of the Holy Spirit (I Cor 6: 19).Because we are children of God and one with the Son of God, we must be animated by the same spirit:
'Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him' (Rom 8:9).*

The Holy Spirit was given to us to be the spirit of our spirit, the heart of our heart, the soul of our soul, and to be with us always (John 14:16).

*Oh what great and marvellous things were done by the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit to make us Christians."*³⁷

Once he has presented Baptism as a "contract" wherein God committed himself out of love for us, Saint John Eudes goes on to tell us that Baptism involves a commitment on our part too in response to that Love: it is a life experience, following logically from our Baptism. The Baptism ritual reminds is that we must always:

- renounce all that is not Christ, all that stands in the way of his life in us and in the world
- in order to adhere to Jesus who is "the Way, the Truth and the Life".

"Whoever bears the name Christian is obliged to follow Jesus Christ in the holiness of his life and his conduct."

36. O.C. II, 176

37. O.C. II, 172

Saint John Eudes recalls the beautiful phrase of Saint Gregory of Nyssa:

"To be a Christian is to profess Jesus Christ"

What does that mean exactly? It is not just professing one's faith: it consists in "witnessing to the life of Jesus," committing oneself to live in his spirit. It means offering oneself totally to him, as Christ coming into the world offered his life to the Father: "Here I am, to do your will" (Heb 10:5-7).

Saint John Eudes recommends that, on awakening in the morning, we begin our day with the Sign of the Cross, thus renewing our Baptismal commitment:

"I renounce Satan and adhere to you, Jesus, my Lord, my Saviour, my Life."

Christian living is a constant battle with evil, but even more a requisite of love, with the grace of God which cannot be lacking if we but ask for it with humility and confidence:

"What can be more satisfying than to follow a God and a Saviour who is all goodness and beauty, perfection itself. who is infinitely lovable and desirable; who is the sovereign good and source of all that is good; who is all heart and love for us?" ³⁸

John Eudes invites Christians to **"make the effort to draw the water of eternal life from the fountains which the Sacraments of the Church are,"** to receive the sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist frequently. This was daring in these times when Jansenism was rampant and frequent communion was not a common practice.

38. O.C. II 236

The way Saint John Eudes speaks about Mass attendance shows how dearly he perceived *the baptismal priesthood of the faithful*:

"You go to Mass, not just to attend or watch, but actually to perform the holiest and most divine, the noblest and most important of all actions on earth. All Christians being one with Christ, the sovereign Priest, and sharing in his Priesthood, are entitled not only to assist at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, but also to participate in the priest's action, that is to say, to offer with him and with Jesus himself the sacrifice which is offered to God on the altar."

"Since Christians are one with Jesus Christ, priest and victim, all those who attend Mass must offer themselves with him: Pray Jesus to unite you to him to offer yourselves with him to the glory of his Father."³⁹

Our whole life thus becomes an offering, as Saint Paul told the Christians of Rome: *"Because of God's great mercy for us, I appeal to you: offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the true worship that you should offer"* (Rom 12:1). So, Christians thus offer the whole world to God: *"All is yours and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God"* (I Cor 3:23). Saint John Eudes teaches us, therefore, to unite all created beings in heaven and on earth to our offering. As Vatican II reminds us, it is the mission of all the baptized to offer and consecrate the world to God through their prayers and their whole life (L. G. 34).

39. O.C. I, 459-462

UNIVERSAL CALL TO HOLINESS FOR ALL THE BAPTIZED

First, *what is holiness?* All too often holiness is confused with perfection or moral effort: stoicism was the lot of generations of Christians. Still today people strive to achieve perfection by way of methods and techniques that allow them to reach greater goals.

Holiness is reserved for God: *God alone is holy*, but he allows us *to share in his holiness which is his Life*. Israel is holy because it is the people God chose (Ex 19:6). We are God's people, "a holy nation, a people set apart" (I Peter 2:9). When Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians or the Romans, he called them "saints by vocation" (Rom 1:9 – 1 Cor 1 :2), and they were far from perfect ... Saints are saved sinners, with Peter at the head of the line! Such is our vocation: "The will of God is your sanctification" (I Thess 4:3).

Vatican II recalled the universal call to holiness in the Church (L.G. Chapter 5).

"The Lord Jesus, preached holiness of life which he both initiates and brings to perfection, to each and every one of his disciples no matter their condition of life: "You, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5: 48). For he sent the Holy Spirit to all to move them interiorly to love God with their whole heart, with their whole soul, with their

whole understanding and with their whole strength, and to love one another as Christ loved them. The followers of Christ have really been made sons and daughters of God by the Baptism of faith and partakers of the divine nature, and so are truly sanctified."

The call to holiness which is the fullness of life, the perfection of love, is addressed to all, but to each one according to his vocation and the diversity of states in life: holiness of lay people, holiness of priests, holiness of consecrated people.

Saint John Eudes reminds us that it is the vocation of all the baptized:

"Whoever bears the name Christian is obliged to follow Jesus Christ in the holiness of his life and his conduct. "

In the preface of his book *The Kingdom of Jesus*, he addresses all those who want to live a Christian and holy life, which is an obligation all Christians have, no matter what their condition in life is, since *"being Christian and being are the same thing."*⁴⁰

"You might say that this is well and fine for those who live in cloisters and monasteries. To that my answer is that Religious must be holy and models of holiness because of their sacred profession and because they have all sorts of means to achieve holiness. But, whoever is baptized is likewise obliged to be holy for many reasons:

40. O.C. I, 90

- *Holy, because he is a child of him who is holiness itself.*
- *Holy, because through Baptism, he received divine grace, a participation in the holiness of God.*
- *Holy, because he is a member of Jesus Christ, of his Body which is the Church; because he is animated by the same spirit as his Head, the Holy Spirit.*
- *Holy, in so far as he is fed the most precious Body and Blood of the Son of God.*
- *Holy, because God chose us in Christ, before the world was made, to be holy and blameless in his sight. (Eph 1:4).*

"You may ask how a human being, frail, weak and miserable creature that he is, can be holy as God is holy. My answer to that is: although it is impossible in our human weakness, it is possible, even easy, with God's grace which he never refuses to those who are willing to ask for it.

What must we do, then? Only one thing, and one that is most delightful. What, indeed, is easier and more delightful than to love? What is more pleasant than to love the one who is infinitely good, beautiful, perfect and lovable; the one who is all goodness, beauty and perfection, who never caused us any harm, but rather an infinite amount of good; the one who is all heart, all charity, all love for you? Love the most good and lovable God and you will be holy."⁴¹

41. O.C. VI, 393-394

For John Eudes, holiness is the perfection of love: love transforms the lover into the object of his love. Love is demanding: *"Separate your heart from all that is not God and do what is agreeable to him: "Whoever keeps my commandments is the one who loves me (John 14:21) - as I keep the commandments of my Father, says Jesus, and remain in his love" (John 15: 10).*

Jesus, who is our sanctification (I Cor 1:30), directs us to the Father to teach us how to live as children of God:

"You must be perfect just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matt 5:48).

What is that perfection of God? His Mercy:

"Be merciful just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36).

John Eudes was deeply touched by the Mercy of God which he witnessed first-hand. He commiserated with the misery of the human heart, with the poor and with all the sinful situations he came across in his ministry. At the same time, he believed with all his heart in the love and mercy of God made manifest to us in Jesus Christ. He preached mercy everywhere and put it into practice himself, as we have seen regarding the victims of the plague and in his missionary work. Mercy is what prompted his foundations: Our Lady of Charity, the Congregation of Jesus and Mary and the seminaries. Like Jesus observing the crowds who followed him, he saw the people of his day as *"sheep without a shepherd" (Mark 6:34).*

Holiness of Christians and holiness of their pastors, that was John Eudes' dual missionary objective.

Holiness and mission go together, as is manifest in Jesus' prayer to his Father for his apostles:

"Dedicate them to yourself by means of the truth: your word is truth. I sent them into the world just as you sent me. And for their sake I dedicate myself to you in order that they too may be truly dedicated to you" (John 17:17-19).

John Eudes was one of the artisans of Church renewal, after the Council of Trent, when lots of saints appeared on the scene. Paul VI, the post-conciliar Pope, has said that the Church has a greater need for saints than for reformers. When men and women are transformed by the love of God, they become evangelizers.

The first "agent" of the holiness and mission of the Church is the Holy Spirit, Spirit of Pentecost by whom we are, like Jesus, "consecrated and missioned" (Luke 4: 18). The important thing, John Eudes tells us, is to be available to the action of the Spirit, to cooperate 'with God:

"Oh, what our life must be! All holy, all divine, since Our Lord tells us that what is born of the Spirit is spirit. (John 3:6)

Oh divine Spirit, I give myself to you entirely: possess me and lead me in all things and let me live as one born of you and, as a result, possessed, animated and led by you."⁴²

And what about us? How will we be "God's collaborators" and respond to his Project of love? By living the holiness of our Baptism.

42. O.C. II, 177

IN THE DYNAMISM OF OUR BAPTISM

Baptism is not just an event of the past of which we have no personal recollection unless we were baptized later in life. Baptism is the beginning of a new life. How then are we to live today as baptized persons, as the children of God which we are?

Each year, during the Pascal Vigil, Christians are invited to renew their baptismal promises, in the faith of the Church, our Mother. Saint Paul indicated the meaning of Baptism as it was performed by immersion:

"When you were baptized, you were buried with Christ, and in Baptism you were also raised with Christ through your faith in the active power of God who raised him from death. You were at one time spiritually dead because of your sins... But God has now brought you to life with Christ" (Col 2: 12-13).

Saint John Eudes underlines this dual movement: dying to resurrect to new life with Christ, in the logic of Baptism: renouncing in order to adhere:

- "renouncing": involves being subject to a kind of death to all that distances or separates us from Christ;
- "adhering to Christ": means sharing the same Life with him.

1. Renouncing Self, to make oneself available to God and to others.

When "renouncing self" is mentioned, people tend to think about the negative side which makes Christianity appear opposed to man's desire to be free and to face challenges. Yet, Jesus said:

"I came so that you could have life -life in all its fullness" (John 10:10).

But he also said to his disciples:

"If anyone wants to join me, he must renounce himself take up his cross every day and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

Jesus leaves us the freedom to choose, just as God did with his chosen People:

"Today I am giving you a choice between life and happiness, death and misfortune. Choose life and love the Lord your God and be faithful to him" (Deut 30: 15-20).

Every choice, whether it involves persons or their plans, also calls for renunciation: one has to know how to say "No" at times in order to be more available. Christian living consists in always *choosing **Jesus Christ***.

These are a few of the instances where Saint John Eudes teaches us the road to freedom:

- **Renouncing** sin: Sin is more than a transgression or a sense of guilt. Every human being has a conscience, his own inviolable domain, but an individual's sense of good and evil may be more or less correct. In Israel, as in the Christian faith, sin can only be understood in relation to God: it is a violation of the Covenant, a lack of love. One cannot be aware of sinning if one does not know God or love him,

although God can still be offended if one fails to love others or oneself.

Saint John Eudes' sense of sin is very strong in relation to the life of God in us: sin impedes the flow of life between the vine and its branches (John 15:4). This is how John Eudes, in *The Interior Colloquies* speaks about sin as constricting:

*"What does the sinner do? He thinks more about himself than he does of God,- he loves himself more than he loves God; he prefers his own will, his pleasure, his glory, over God's will, pleasure and glory. He wants to be in charge of himself as if he belonged to himself and not to God, as if he were his own principle. He wants no other rule than his own inclination, his blinded spirit and his unruly will. Isn't that ravishing God's rights, repudiating God in action?"*⁴³

Grievous sin, says John Eudes, affects the whole body, the Church, and dismembers Jesus Christ. As Pope John Paul II puts it in his letter on the Holy Spirit, sin is at the root of evil in humans. Saint John Eudes wrote:

*"To sin is to disgrace the unity of the Father and Son by destroying its image; it extinguishes the Spirit of God."*⁴⁴

This Normand missionary who heard countless confessions during his missions has experienced first-hand God's Mercy which brings back to life and heals. This is what he has to say about the sacrament of Reconciliation:

43. O.C. II, 159

44. O.C. II, 187

*"Frequent use of the sacrament of Penance is a most holy exercise that contributes a great deal to the glory of God and the sanctification of Christian souls, provided it is done in a true spirit of penance, not routinely."*⁴⁵

Going to meet the priest as representing Christ and taking his place is a gesture of faith.

The closer one gets to Jesus, the more acutely one is aware of sin and of God's saving love for humankind.

- **Renouncing the world**, an expression that may be hard to understand. Could it be that Christians are afraid of the world or are always ready to condemn it? Vatican II has taught us to look positively on the world, on the life of humans, with its joys and its hopes, as well as its suffering, by denouncing the evil which disfigures humans.

In the Bible, there are two meanings for "the world";

- 1) Humans and creation: *"God saw that it was good"* (Gen 1:10; 1:31).

"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (John 3:18).

- 2) The sin which is in the world: pride, egotism, the will to dominate (I John 2: 16).

The 17th century, due to the influence of Jansenism, had a very pessimistic view of the world, and John Eudes shared it. Unlike the humanist Francis de Sales who accepted the human values from Antiquity, John Eudes believed that man is basically corrupt as an effect of original sin and the world is evil.

45. O.C. I, 126

This, however, did not keep him from accepting the challenges of his day, like when he nursed the victims of the plague, when he founded a house for reformed prostitutes, when he sided with the exploited peasants, when he waged war against religious ignorance of Christians and the lack of priestly formation. John Eudes had a profound influence on his times. When he said that "Christians must be detached from the world and worldly things", he made clear distinctions:

"By the world I mean the corrupt and disorderly life some lead in the world, the spirit that prevails there, the pernicious laws and maxims by which these people live.

By worldly things I mean all that the above esteem, cherish and seek: honour and praise, futile pleasures, riches and relationships based on self-love and self interest ".⁴⁶

The spirit of the world is the spirit that the world entertains, a spirit contrary to the Gospel, to the Beatitudes:

"The spirit of Jesus is a spirit of light, truth, love and trust.

The spirit of Jesus is a spirit of humility, self-denial, constancy and firmness.

The spirit of Jesus is a spirit of mercy, sweetness and peace."⁴⁷

It is imperative to know which spirit is ours:

"If you want to be truly Christian, that is to say, belong perfectly to Jesus Christ, live of his life, be animated

46. O.C. I, 178

47. O.C. I, 179

*by his spirit, it is necessary for you to renounce the world. I do not say that you have to leave the world and shut yourself up behind four walls unless God calls you to such a lifestyle. What I am saying is that you have to try to live in the world as not belonging to it, that you take pride in being Christian, in belonging to Jesus Christ and preferring the values and truths he left us in the Gospel to the false and pernicious maxims of the world. That calls for true courage and perfect generosity."*⁴⁸

It was not easy to be a Christian in the 17th century, just as it is not easy today: being in the world without belonging to it, with the grace of Baptism, in order to be a prophet, that is to say, one who denounces evil and discerns the signs of the new world which is knocking at the door.

- Renouncing oneself: isn't that just the opposite of the duty "to love oneself"? (Matt 22,39) and develop one's talents? (Matt 25: 14-30)

Here again, Saint John Eudes points the way to freedom by making us discover the self-love which keeps us from welcoming fully the Life of God in us and opening ourselves up to others:

*"If we want to follow in Jesus 'footsteps and belong to him, we need to renounce ourselves, that is to say, our own spirit, our desires, our will, our self-love."*⁴⁹

John Eudes teaches us to turn our gaze toward "Our Lord Jesus Christ, our head and model in whom all was holy and

48. O.C. I, 180

49. O.C. I, 184

divine and who never did anything of his own volition, but always looked for guidance from the spirit of his Father. He never did what his own will dictated, but always abided by his Father's will."

That is why, Saint John Eudes recommends that we lift up our hearts to Jesus at the beginning of our every action:

"Oh Jesus, I renounce myself my own spirit and my own will. I give myself to you, to your Holy Spirit. Guide me in this action according to your holy will."

The Holy Spirit is the one who gives us true internal freedom. John Eudes causes some surprise when he states that the perfection of detachment consists in being, "in a certain way, detached even from God". He reminds us that Jesus had to leave his apostles for them to receive the Holy Spirit, "in order for them to be animated by the Spirit of Jesus who is the spirit of Christianity."⁵⁰

John Eudes explains what being detached from God consists in:

- being detached from the consolations which usually accompany the love of God: *"When it pleases God to give us consolations, we must not reject them, but put them to good use: not take pride in our spiritual taste and feelings, but refer them to God in whom they originated, in order to faithfully glorify him in times of joy as well as in times of distress."*⁵¹
- being detached from our plans out of love of God: *"When we undertake an action for the glory of God,*

50. O.C. I, 187

51. O.C. I, 277

although we must do all we can to bring it to completion, we must keep from being so attached to it that, if perchance we have to interrupt or abandon it, we not be disturbed, lose our peace, rest and spirit, remaining satisfied with the will of God or divine permission that conduct all things for the greater good."

- being detached from our desires for spiritual progress: *"Although we need to make every effort to overcome our passions and imperfections, we must nevertheless do so without excess or attachment, acting in such a way that when we feel we have failed to attain the degree of virtue and love of God we had hoped for, we remain nonetheless at peace, humbling ourselves at the obstacles we place in the way of perfection, loving our poverty and maintaining our desire to progress while putting our trust in the goodness of the Lord."*⁵²

Saint John Eudes thus shows us how we can always go further in that total abandonment to God; he speaks from experience when he says:

"How sweet it is to be free and detached from all things! So many think it is very difficult to arrive at such perfection. But it would be easy if we gave ourselves entirely and unreservedly to the Son of God, and if we relied on the greatness of his goodness and the power of his grace and his love rather than on our own powers and resolutions. For wherever this divine love is found, all is done with extreme sweetness. True, we must do violence to ourselves in many things and go

52. O.C. I, 188-189

through many trials and suffering, much darkness and mortification; but in the ways of sacred love there is always more honey than gall, more sweetness than rigor.

Oh my Saviour, what glory you derive, what joy you take and what great things you accomplish in those who walk bravely along these paths, abandoning everything and becoming detached from everything, even from you, in a way, in order to give themselves more perfectly to you! How strongly you unite them to you! How you gain possession of them! How you plunge them into the abyss of your love! How admirably you transform them into yourself clothing them with your qualities, your spirit and your love!

What joy, what delight for a soul to be able to say in truth: My God, here I am, free and detached from everything! My beloved is all mine and I am all his!"
(Song of Songs 2: 16).⁵³

Such is the joy of all who are totally given over to Christ.

2. Adhering to Jesus

In the economy of Baptism, Christian life consists in detachment to make room for total adherence to Jesus Christ: detachment from self in order "to put on" Christ, death to self in order to rise to new life with him. And how does this come about? First, through faith.

53. O.C .I, 189-190

LIVING our FAITH

In Scripture, faith is not just believing. The Latin word for faith means both belief and trust. When you believe in someone because you love him and are sure of him, you trust him. That was Abraham's attitude toward the God of the Covenant when he entered his life. For him, Abraham left everything: his country, his family, even the religion of his ancestors (Gen 12: 1) and set out on the journey, risking all for God, "*not knowing where he was going*" (Heb 11:8). Abraham who was also a sinner honoured God with his faith: it is by his faith that he was justified, that is to say, recognized as holy in the eyes of God (Gal 3:6). That is why, for both Christians and Muslims, Abraham is recognized as "the father of believers". It is to Abraham's faith that John Paul II refers us when he speaks about our "pilgrimage of faith," following the example set by Mary, true daughter of Abraham (*Redemptoris Mater*, 14) and by Joseph (*Redemptoris custos*, 14).

Saint John Eudes tells us that "*faith is the first foundation of Christian life*" ... It is in the Faith of the Church that we were baptized: marvellous gift from God, along with Hope and Love, the theological virtues, which establish our relationship with Life, with God.

Let us see how Saint John Eudes speaks to us about faith in relation to Jesus, Son of the Father:

"Faith is a heavenly and divine light, a participation in the eternal and inaccessible light, a radiating beam from the countenance of God. It is a communication and kind of projection of the light and divine knowledge which was infused in the holy soul of Jesus at the time of his Incarnation. It is the science of salvation,

*the science of saints and of God himself which Jesus drew from the bosom of his Father and brought to us to dispel our darkness, enlighten our hearts and give us the knowledge we need to serve and love God perfectly."*⁵⁴

This light of faith allows us, as it did Jesus, to adhere totally and with love to what the Father makes known to us:

"If we contemplate God with the eyes of faith, we will see him just as he is, although the vision of faith is accompanied by some obscurity. It reveals to us all that is in God and in Jesus Christ. It tells us that God is infinitely true to his word and unailing in his promises, that he is all goodness, all gentleness and all love toward those who seek him and trust in him. It gives us a sure knowledge of the fact that Divine Providence conducts all things and events."

Only faith, enlightened by Christ, can give us true knowledge of God. It is this faith perspective on the Church, the world, and ourselves that makes it possible for us to see, not only with our eyes and minds, but *"in the truth of God and with the eyes of Jesus Christ"*. What are our criteria?

*"The people of the world act according to the rules of the world. Christians must act by the same light by which Jesus Christ, our Head, was led, that is to say, by faith which is a participation in the knowledge and light of Jesus Christ."*⁵⁵

54. O.C. I, 168

55. O.C. I, 170

So that faith might permeate our lives and govern our actions, Saint John Eudes recommends daily prayerful reading of the New Testament in order to acquire the spirit of Jesus and act as he did. Such reading will teach us the knowledge and wisdom of God. The Gospel will thus rule our lives and the Holy Spirit who guided Jesus will inspire us to act as true disciples of Christ.

Being Attuned to the WILL OF GOD

From Saint John Eudes we learn that the life of Jesus was attuned to doing the Will of the Father, as his beloved Son. The first official pronouncement of Jesus when he was only twelve years old in the Temple of Jerusalem reveals just who he IS: *"Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?"* (Luke 2:49) That is the whole secret of Jesus' life: *"My food is to obey the will of the one who sent me and to finish the work he gave me to do"* (John 4:34). That work of love is the salvation of the world. Jesus will go to the extreme limit of love (John 13: 1): *"It is all accomplished"* (John 19:30). This is how Jesus revealed himself the beloved Son of the Father and our Saviour.

Our call, in the footsteps of Christ, is to make of our entire lives a loving YES. Before taking leave of his followers, Jesus said to them:

"You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because a servant does not know his master's secrets. Instead, I call you friends because I have told you everything I heard from my Father." (John 15:14-15).

Conversion consists in going from the mentality of a servant who executes orders, to the spirit of Jesus who is all love for the Father. It is the very spirit of our Baptism:

"The Spirit that God has given you does not make you slaves and cause you to be afraid; instead, the Spirit makes you God's children, and by the Spirit's power we cry out to God.-Abba, Father!" (Rom 8:15).

Since Christian life consists in continuing the life of Christ, being animated by his Spirit, we must, in all things and at all times, seek and do everything that is pleasing to God, our Father. Saint John Eudes likes to recall the formula he found in Holy Scripture: *"Corde magno et animo volenti"* (II Maccabees 1:3) with a big Heart and great generosity. It is in Jesus' YES to his Father that we can find that strength to love so fully.

Saint John Eudes also knows that this is not easy to do. Even Jesus, Son of God that he is, was no stranger to internal turmoil at the time of his Passion: *"Father, not my will, but yours be done"* (Luke 22:42). God respects our human will and expects total commitment from our love. Such filial obedience is genuine Christian obedience: the alignment of our will with God's in accord with Jesus' YES.

"As Christians who ought to share the same sentiments and dispositions as our Head, we must not only submit to God and to all things out of love for God, but we should also find our satisfaction, beatitude and paradise in doing so. This is what we ask for daily when we pray: 'Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'

I am not saying that you should derive tangible pleasure and joy from all that you do or suffer, or from all that happens in the world - that is reserved for the blessed. But I am speaking here of joy and satisfaction of the spirit and the will which may easily be yours with the help of Our Lord's grace if you ask for it in prayer. Frequent repetition of this practice will diminish, even

*destroy whatever pain and natural distaste you may happen to feel in various situations, and will help you to enjoy sweetness and satisfaction in cases where you found bitterness and pain before."*⁵⁶

Here Saint John Eudes is speaking from his own experience. He is also being realistic when he tells us how to discern the Will of God by listening to the Word of God and to the teachings of the Church, as well as paying attention to the people and events which may be for us signs of God's Will:

*"If we make the slightest use of the eyes of faith it will be easy for us, at all times and in all circumstances, to recognize God's Holy Will."*⁵⁷

Seeking and doing the Will of God, as Jesus did, brings unity to our lives: our hearts, attuned to the Heart of God, will be at peace, even in times of trial. When one says YES to God an interior liberation takes place, a door opens onto freedom.

56. O.C. I, 252-255

57. O.C. I, 245-246

PRAYER LIFE

Prayer is not the exclusive prerogative of Christians: many other men and women, all over the world, pray.

Jesus himself prayed, both as man and as only Son of the Father; his entire life is an offering to his Father. He taught his disciples to pray: "*When you pray, say: Father*" (Luke 11:2); "*Abba*" is the Son's cry!

The prayer of Christians is a continuation of Jesus' prayer, with the Spirit united to our spirit, expressing our condition as God's children (Rom 8: 16).

From de Berulle, Saint John Eudes learned that Jesus is the only perfect Adorer of the Father. It is with him and in him that we ourselves can be "*real adorers of the Father, in spirit and in truth*" (John 4:23).

*"We must give ourselves to Our Lord Jesus Christ so that he himself might be the one who prays in us, he alone being worthy of appearing before the face of his Father to glorify and love him."*⁵⁸

Praying "in Jesus' Name", Saint John Eudes explains:

"is continuing the prayer of Jesus while he was on earth. Since all Christians are members of Jesus Christ,

58. O.C. I, 202

*as Saint Paul tells us, they take his place on earth, represent him and so, must do everything they do in his spirit, with his dispositions and intentions, as he did himself and as he would do if he were in our place. That is why, praying in the name of Jesus Christ is continuing Jesus' prayer, in the spirit of Jesus. And that is how Christians must pray. "*⁵⁹

Saint John Eudes is deeply convinced that prayer is important:

- Prayer is the greatest act of humans and of Christians:

*"It is the true and proper function of humans and of Christians, since humans were created only for God, to entertain a relationship with God, and Christians live on earth only to continue what Jesus did in this world."*⁶⁰

It is true that, of all the living beings on earth, only humans are capable of praising and loving God. With Christ, Christians link all creation to God as to its origin.

- Prayer is an indispensable part of Christian living, as necessary, says Saint John Eudes, *"as the earth which carries us, the air we breathe, the bread which sustains us, the heart which beats in our chest."*⁶¹
- Prayer is our joy and happiness:

"since, through prayer the soul is united to God as to its centre, its end and its sovereign good. It is in

59. O.C. I, 200-201

60. O.C. I, 193

61. O.C. I, 191

prayer that it possesses him and is possessed by him. Indeed, God takes his pleasure in us and makes us experience the genuine delights he has in store for those who place all their joy in conversing with him in prayer."
62

Even when prayer is lived in faith and aridity, Saint John Eudes encourages us not to deprive God of the pleasure of our presence, but to find time for him. That, he says, should be our first concern:

"I urge you as strongly as I can, since our lovable Saviour delights in being with you and conversing with you through prayer, not to deprive him of this pleasure, but experience rather the truth of what the Holy Spirit says:

*'His conversation has no bitterness. nor his company any tediousness, but joy and gladness' (Wisdom 8: 16). Consider prayer as the first, the principal, the most necessary, most pressing and most important of all your undertakings and free yourself as much as you can, from all other less important matters to spend as much time as you can in prayer, particularly in the morning and at night."*⁶³

For Saint John Eudes, prayer is:

"a respectful and loving elevation of mind and heart to God. It is the Christian soul's tender dialogue, holy communication and divine conversation with its God. In prayer, the soul contemplates him in his divine perfections, his mysteries and his works. It adores and

62. O.C. I, 192

63. O.C. I, 193

*blesses him, loves and glorifies him, gives itself to him, begs for his mercy and learns to become like him."*⁶⁴

Prayer is obviously a way of expressing love, a contemplative gaze welcoming the love of God which transforms us. The whole body participates in prayer:

"Oh Jesus, I offer you every one of my breaths, all the beats of my heart, willing them to be as many acts of praise and adoration toward you."

In his book *The Life and Kingdom of Jesus*, Saint John Eudes presents us with different forms of prayer:

- *Mental prayer*: it is the silent type of prayer used by the Carmelites who came to France in the 17th century. Jean Eudes, formed at the Oratory under Father de Berulle, learned to contemplate Jesus Christ in his mysteries and virtues. And this form of prayer, for John Eudes, is not reserved for priests and religious; he proposes it to all Christians:

*"The type of prayer we call mental or interior is the one in which the soul communes inwardly with God, the topic of this dialogue being one of his perfections, mysteries or virtues, or else the words of the Son of God or what he did and still does in heaven and on earth, in his Church and in the world."*⁶⁵

Mental prayer can, therefore, touch on a diversity of subjects, based on the Word of God, but it is not so much a reflection or meditation as an "interior colloquy":

64. O.C. I, 192

65. O.C. I, 194

"a sweet and strong attention of mind and heart intent on loving God, adoring and praising him, asking for his forgiveness, offering oneself up to him, as the Spirit of God might inspire you." ⁶⁶

Letting oneself be guided by God is obviously most important. Mental prayer is learned not so much from books as from experience. It is also a grace that we must ask for and receive gratefully:

"Words cannot express how holy and useful this way of praying is. So, if God attracts you to it and gives you this grace, you must recognize it as a very great gift and thank him for it, if you have not been given it, pray him to give it to you, and do all you can to correspond to this holy action by which God will teach you better than all the books and all the knowledgeable people on earth." ⁶⁷

Saint John Eudes who is well acquainted with the phases of spiritual life encourages us to persevere when it becomes difficult to pray: after smooth beginnings, the Lord often makes us progress along the rather obscure routes of faith:

"Do not think that the paths to God are all roses and delight. But no matter what happens, continue loving Our Lord faithfully: being faithful to God when that happens is very important. Do not waste time looking for the cause of this state of affairs but keep yourself humble. When you are in such a state of dryness and distaste that you can barely think about God without

66. O.C. Idem

67. O.C. Idem

*lots of distractions, be careful not to give in to sadness and get discouraged. Rejoice in the fact that Jesus is still Jesus, that is to say, he is always God, always great and lovable, all yours. Rejoice, knowing that you can love him for himself rather than for the consolations he used to give you. Give yourself over to him even more strongly, lift up your mind to him and speak words of love for him without worrying about whether you are doing it fervently enough. What is important under these circumstances is not whether you are pleased, but whether or not Jesus is pleased."*⁶⁸

Prayer is the pleasure I give God; it is also my whole life that I offer him which becomes a prayer.

After mental prayer, Saint John Eudes discusses other ways of praying:

- **Vocal prayer** which is expressed in words, like the Rosary. This form of prayer, says John Eudes, is good "*provided the tongue expresses what is in the heart*", which is to say that it must not be mechanical, but recited "*with application and attention to God.*"⁶⁹

The Divine Office is of particular importance: it is not just our personal prayer, but our "service" in the name of the Church which praises God and intercedes for the world.

Another way of praying, says Saint John Eudes is

- **Reading good books**, "*doing so not in haste but at a leisurely pace, applying our minds and pausing to consider, reflect, weigh and taste the truths which touch us most,*

68. O.C. I, 280-283

69. O.C. I, 195

*in order to let them sink into our minds and draw from them appropriate acts and affections."*⁷⁰

In this light, Saint John Eudes invites us to read and meditate the Word of God, Sacred Scripture, daily. This is called "Lectio divina". Reading good books or "spiritual reading" also provides important nourishment for our prayer life.

- Speaking about God is another way of praying,

Nowadays, witnessing is popular, but there is also a very simple way of speaking about God in our meetings and conversation.

*"Speaking and conversing sometimes familiarly about God and godly things among ourselves is useful and simple to do and it often inflames the hearts with the love of God."*⁷¹

This should be only natural for Christians: *"since we are God's children, we should delight in speaking the language of our Father"*. It is not always easy to speak about God, whether catechizing, bearing witness or preaching, Saint John Eudes recalls Saint Paul's words: *"because God has sent us, we speak with sincerity in his presence, as servants of Christ"* (II Cor 2: 17), to tell us that *"we must find in God the things and words we have to say, giving ourselves to the Son of God before we speak, in order for him to put in our minds and in our mouths the things and words we should say."*⁷²

70. O.C. I, 196

71. O.C. I, 198

72. O.C. I, 199

As a result, we will speak *"in Jesus Christ, in a spirit of prayer"*.

Prayer is not an isolated act in life: our whole life becomes a prayer when we are united to Christ. But in order *"to pray without ceasing"* (1 Thes 5: 17), there must be moments in our lives reserved for prayer. Prayer is not a goal in itself, but a means of expressing love. The quality of our prayer depends on our faithfulness to God in the little things of everyday living. This is what Theresa of Lisieux understood, never separating love of God from love for her Sisters.

"FORMING JESUS IN US"

Humans were created in the image of God (Gen 1 :27), and that image is Christ in whom we were created (Col 1:15-16).

"To form Christ in us" is God's work in which we are called to cooperate by letting ourselves be molded by God. Through the power of the Spirit, the Father communicates the life of Christ to us and makes us his children. On the day of the Annunciation, Mary welcomed into her womb the Word, who became man in order that he might be given to the world. The Church, filled with the Spirit, forms Christ in the hearts of men and women through the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. Evangelization consists in communicating that life of Christ to the world, as Saint Paul tells the Galatians for whom he has suffered a great deal:

"My dear children, just like a mother in childbirth, I feel the same kind of pain for you until Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4:19).

Saint Augustine wrote that Christian life is the fulfilment of that life of Christ in us:

"Christ is formed in us by faith, in the Christian, in the interior man, called to the freedom of grace, sweet and humble of heart. Christ is formed in the one who takes on the form of Christ; and that happens by uniting

oneself to Christ by spiritual love. It is by imitation that we identify with Christ, each according to his ability. For "whoever declares himself to be living in Christ," says Saint John, "must walk along the road where he walked".

For Saint John Eudes, *"the work of works is the formation of Jesus in us."*

*"Forming Jesus in us must be our wish, our concern and our chief occupation, that is to say, causing him to live and reign in us together with his spirit, sentiments and dispositions. This is the task God puts into our hands."*⁷³

This project which is beyond our human capacity, says Saint John Eudes, is first of all *"the eternal Father's great yearning to behold his Son living and reigning in us. He loves the Son so much that he wants to see nothing but him in all things".*

Thus the Father glorifies the Son who in turn glorifies him in us:

*"Once Jesus is formed and established in us, he loves and glorifies his eternal Father fittingly there, he alone being capable of loving and glorifying his Father eternally as he deserves."*⁷⁴

And what part do we have to play in the realization of this plan of the Father and of his Son in our lives? Saint John Eudes tells us that *"the first step in Christian living"* is to

73. O.C. I, 271-273

74. O.C. Idem.

begin by renouncing self in order to give ourselves over to the Spirit of Jesus and let ourselves be guided by him.

"The Holy Spirit is sent to form Jesus in us and make him live there."⁷⁵

In order for Jesus to be formed in us we also need to learn to see Jesus in all things:

"He is all in all things. He is the being of all that exists, the life of all living things, the beauty of all things beautiful, the power of the powerful, the wisdom of the wise, the virtue of the virtuous, the sanctity of the saints."⁷⁶

We can, indeed, see Christ in all things and do things as he did them, since *"there is hardly an action of our ordinary life that does not find some counterpart in the actions he performed while on earth"*. That is why Saint John Eudes invites us to unite ourselves to Jesus in both mind and heart.

"We will form and establish him in our minds by thinking about him often and seeing him in all things; but we must also form him in our hearts by frequent exercises of his divine love. To that end, we need to acquire the habit of lifting up our hearts to him out of love often and doing all our actions for love of him, consecrating all the affections of our hearts to him."⁷⁷

Saint John Eudes himself, it is well known, lived that union with Jesus in all his activities, filled as he was with the love of God.

75. O.C. II, 172

76. O.C. I, 273

77. O.C. I, 274

SHARING IN THE MYSTERIES OF JESUS

What do we understand by "the Mysteries of Christ"? Saint Paul did not know or meet Jesus in person while the Son of God was on earth, but it was revealed to him on the road to Damascus that Jesus is living in Christians: *"I am Jesus whom you are persecuting"* (Acts 9:5). His missionary experience among the pagans led Paul to discover "the Mystery of Christ" which he proclaims:

"The Gentiles have a part with the Jews in God's blessings; they are members of the same body and share in the promise that God made through Christ Jesus, by way of the Gospel." (Eph 3:2-13).

The Church is that Body of Christ which has not yet reached full maturity: *"We shall all come together to that oneness in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God; we shall become mature people, reaching to the very height of Christ 's full stature"* (Eph 4:13). In the midst of the difficulties of his apostolic work, Paul is conscious of contributing to the growth of Christ:

"I am helping to complete what still remains of Christ's sufferings on behalf of his body, the Church." (Col 1:24).

The Sacraments, particularly Baptism and the Eucharist, make us share today in the Life of Christ, in his Death and his Resurrection. All through the course of the liturgical year we relive for our times the life of Christ. Thus, at Christmas time we sing: "This day Christ is born for us!"

This relevance of the mysteries of Christ for their times was strongly felt by 17th century Christians. Just think of Pascal meditating on Gethsemani: Jesus' agony, he feels, continues until the end of time. With de Berulle, John Eudes adopted that mystical view of Christian life. He shows Christians how Jesus willed to make us share, as Church, in "his states and mysteries":

*"The mysteries of Jesus are not completely perfected and fulfilled. In the person of Jesus they are complete, but not in us who are his members, nor in the Church which is his mystical body. The Son of God wills to give us a share in his mysteries and somehow to extend to us the mystery of his Incarnation, his birth, his hidden life, his public life, his Passion and his other mysteries."*⁷⁸

It is for us, as Head of the Body of which we are members, that Jesus lived his life: today his life is fulfilled in us:

"Jesus, in his mysteries, had a thought, a loving plan in mind for us."

He wants us to share in his life" *by forming himself and, in a sense, taking flesh in us. The life we have here on earth is given to us only for the fulfillment of Christ's infinite designs on us. That is why we must spend all our time, days and years, cooperating with Jesus in the divine task of completing his mysteries in ourselves."*⁷⁹

78 O.C. I, 310

79 O.C. I, 312

But only at the end of time will Christ's desire be fulfilled: "*Thus Jesus' mysteries will be fulfilled in us and in his Church.*"

Then Christ will "*be all in all things*" and will place the Kingdom in God the Father's hands (I Cor 15:24).

How, precisely, can we share in Jesus' mysteries?

- Saint John Eudes first invites us to contemplate what he calls "*the body and externals of the mystery, that is to say, what took place visibly in the given mystery*": for instance, in the mystery of the Nativity, Jesus' nakedness, his poverty...
- Then, "*the spirit and interior of the mystery, that is to say, the particular grace proper to this mystery, for instance all that took place in the mind, the heart and soul of Jesus when he lived the mystery and in the hearts of the people involved*"⁸⁰, particularly in Mary who is associated with Jesus' mysteries in a very special way.

"*The spirit and interior of the mystery*" is what is most important. The event took place at a time in history and that is in the past, but the grace attached to the mystery remains, because Jesus continues to glorify the Father and sanctify us ceaselessly in each one of his mysteries. In this way, Christ makes us share in his life all through the liturgical year. In order to welcome the fruits of Jesus' mysteries in our souls, Saint John Eudes proposes four attitudes:

- adore Jesus - thank him - ask him to forgive us for what stands in the way of his love - abandon ourselves to him.

80. O.C. I, 322-326

And this, we can apply to the reading of any given page of the Gospel: contemplating Jesus in his actions and his words will allow us to enter more deeply into the Mystery of his life and of his love.

SANCTIFYING TIME

On the eve of the third millennium of the Incarnation, if we turn our gaze to Christ, we discover the importance of time:

"When the right time finally came, God sent his own Son who came as son of a human mother to make of us his children" (Gal 4:4).

God has prepared the earth for this event, since "the very beginning" (Gen 1: 1). He multiplied the alliances with mankind up to the new and everlasting Covenant realized in his Son. Through the Incarnation, God enters into the time recorded by humans: nine months in Mary's womb, some thirty years in Nazareth, roughly three years preaching, and finally three hours on the Cross. This is how the world was saved. Today, in the Glory of the Father, the risen Christ is beyond the limits of time, but he has said to us: *"I am with you every day until the end of time"* (Matt 28:20). Remember that *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and always"* (Heb 13:8).

Our human destiny is situated in a given time frame. Time has everlasting value and life is unique in the hope of the Resurrection which is just the opposite of reincarnation which would result in the total loss of our identity.

In his book *The Life and Kingdom of Jesus*, Saint John Eudes teaches us to sanctify Christ in our whole life by sanctifying the time given to us:

"Since Jesus is the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, it is fitting that he be the beginning and the end of our lives, of all our years, all our months, all our weeks, all our days and all our actions.

*It is very important to have a good beginning and a good ending to each one of our days, especially from early morning, by offering to Our Lord our first actions because on them depend the blessings of the rest of the day. Let your very first action be the sign of the Cross, offering yourself wholeheartedly to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit that they might own you perfectly."*⁸¹

Saint John Eudes recommends to every baptized person to begin the day with a time of prayer:

*"Of the twenty-four hours that make up the day, give at least fifteen minutes to the one who gave you his whole life, adoring him, thanking him and offering yourself up to him."*⁸²

*"Oh my God, I am all yours! I consecrate to you all my steps, my words, my glances, every movement of my body and every thought of my mind, all my breaths and my actions, intending them to serve in praising you and loving you with infinite love. Not only do I offer you my heart and each one of my actions, but I also offer all the actions of every other created being, especially those which people will not think to offer you."*⁸³

81. O.C. I, 197

82. O.C. I, 105

83. O.C. I, 110-111

In this way, our entire life is offered up in the offering of Jesus to his Father with all of creation.

In the course of the day we might again turn our attention to God and sanctify our ordinary actions, as Saint Paul says: "*whether you eat or drink, do all things in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ*" (I Cor 10:31). Saint John Eudes speaks of "*doing all for Jesus and in Jesus, that is to say, with his dispositions and intentions*".

But, he goes on to explain how we can know with which intentions and dispositions Jesus acted:

"The light of faith shows us Jesus always acting with humility, docility, charily and always seeking to glorify his Father.

*It is enough for you to intend to perform your actions in the spirit of Jesus, beginning by renouncing yourself to give yourself to his Spirit, to perform all your actions with Jesus' intentions and dispositions."*⁸⁴

Saint John Eudes proposes different ways of sanctifying our everyday actions: working, conversing with a neighbour, going and coming from one place to another ... but what counts is to give the Holy Spirit the freedom to lead us:

"I propose these practices to show you how to walk always in God's presence and live in the Spirit of Jesus. That same Spirit will teach you many other ways if you abandon yourself to him at the beginning of your every action. I beg you to note that the practice of practices, the secret of secrets, the devotion of devotions is

84. O.C. I, 443

*to be attached to no particular devotional practice or exercise, but to take great care, in all your actions and exercises, to give yourself to the Holy Spirit of Jesus, with humility and trust, detached from your own spirit, in such a way that he may have full power and freedom to act in you according to his designs and to make you open to welcoming his dispositions, following his impulses, his calls and his guidance."*⁸⁵

Saint John Eudes invites Christians to make a retreat annually. He also suggests we take a few days each year to sanctify the beginning and the end of our lives, meditating on our birth and our death, with our eyes fixed on Jesus who was born and died for us. The Incarnation makes us one with Jesus and with all humankind:

*"Oh Jesus, from the very moment of your birth, you referred and consecrated to the Father your entire being and your whole life, and with it, my whole being, my life and all created beings. Oh my divine Head, I ratify and approve most willingly all that you have done for me in all the states and mysteries of your life. In honour of and for love of the same love which prompted you to do all things for us, your brothers and sisters, I now want all my actions to render to you all the honour and glory possible. I say this for me and for all my sisters and brothers, members of the same Head and Body with me, as well as for all human beings and all your creatures in order to love and honour you for them."*⁸⁶

85. O.C. I, 452

86. O.C. I, 502-503

Saint Paul says: *"None of us lives for himself only, none of us dies for himself only; whether we live or die, we belong to Christ"* (Rom 14:7-9). It is this contemplation of Christ that lets us make of our death a free act, the supreme act of love:

"Oh Jesus, you are Life and the source of all life; yet you chose to die, and die on a Cross. That is why, my Saviour, united to that great love with which you were willing to die in that fashion, I willingly accept the death that will please you, at whatever time and place and in whatever manner you choose, provided you will always be there with me. Oh my dear Jesus, I place myself totally in your hands, asking but one thing: that, just as you died out of love, by love and for love, I too should die of the same love."

"Furthermore, I beg of you, Oh my Jesus, as you performed all your actions for all humankind, especially for your children and your friends, may I, in that same love, render my duties to you, not only for myself but also for all men and women, especially for those for whom you know that I should be especially concerned."

87

Just as Jesus prayed for all his loved ones before offering up his life (John 17), Saint John Eudes surely had a thought for the members of his spiritual family. Death is our Easter, with Jesus, in union with all those we love.

87. O.C. I, 522-524

BECOMING DISCIPLES, “LIVING IMAGES OF CHRIST”

Because of *our* Baptism we are called to *follow* Christ, to learn at his school. It is not so much a matter of knowledge and practices, as of learning to live in his spirit:

"You should have in you the sentiments of Jesus Christ"
(Phi! 2:5),

Jesus urges us: *"Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart and you will find rest"* (Matt 11 :29). When he instructs us on Christian virtues, Saint John Eudes wants to teach us to conduct ourselves *"according to the spirit and grace of Jesus Christ"*.

Wisely, Saint John Eudes cautions us against the tendency to want to acquire virtue solely by *our* own efforts and *for* ourselves in *order* to obtain more merit and more glory ...Christian morality has been greatly influenced by stoicism; while that is not bad of itself, one must not think that holiness and perfection are acquired by will power alone. In the supernatural domain, we can accomplish nothing on *our* own without the grace of God (John 15:5):

*"Those who are guided by the spirit of Christianity know that, since virtue is a gift of God 's mercy, they must ask God for it with confidence and perseverance."*⁸⁸

88. O.C. I, 207

In that same spirit, therefore, far *from* getting discouraged *over our* imperfections, we can always trust in the Lord's power acting in us:

*"Instead of getting perturbed and discouraged, they will remain humbly at peace before God. This will ignite in them a new flame of love and new confidence in his infinite goodness, along with a most fervent desire to seek, by all possible means, to acquire the virtues they need to serve and glorify him."*⁸⁹

The Christian's goal when practising virtue is not to better himself, but to become like Christ *"viewing virtue in Jesus Christ who is the source of all grace"*:

"As Christian life is nothing other than a continuation of the life of Jesus Christ, so too Christian virtues are a continuation and fulfillment of Jesus' virtues.

*To practise virtues in a Christian manner, one must do so in the same spirit in which Christ practised them, that is to say, with the same motives and intentions. Thus, Christian humility is a continuation of Christ's humility, Christian charity is a continuation of his charity, and so on for all the virtues."*⁹⁰

Jesus said: *"Every pupil, when he has completed his training, will be like his teacher"* (Luke 6:40). We will always have to observe the Master, listen to his voice and *follow* in his footsteps:

89. O.C. Idem

90. O.C. I, 208

"If anyone wants to come after me, he must forget himself, take up his cross every day, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

Peter learned to follow in Jesus' footsteps the hard way, by way of the Cross, the way of humility and the royal route of love: *"The greatest love a person can have for his friends is to give his life for them"* (John 15:13).

Peter, after repudiating the Lord, will go to the extremes of love (John 13: 1), by "divesting himself of his life for Jesus' sake" (John 13:38), but only after experiencing his own radical poverty...

Saint John Eudes, whose life was totally given to serving the Kingdom, experienced the Cross throughout his life and his ministry, as he mentions in his *Memorial*, giving thanks for the power of Christ acting in his weakness.

- **Humility and charity** are, for Saint John Eudes, the complementary virtues a person needs to practise in order to live a holy Christian life. Humility is the basic virtue, the "humus" in which the flower of love will blossom in the profusion of its colours. Saint John Eudes, calling to mind Jesus' words: *"Learn from me that I am gentle and humble of heart"*, reminds us of how humble Jesus was:

"Humility is the special virtue of Christians, the one without which it is impossible to be truly Christian. It is the foundation of Christian life and holiness. Humility is what attracts all sorts of blessings on people, for it is in humble souls that the great and most humble Jesus takes his rest and his delights.

This virtue, together with burning love, makes people into saints, great saints, since the true measure of holy-

*liness is humility: give me a genuinely humble person and I will say that, without a doubt, that person is a real saint."*⁹¹

John Eudes distinguishes two kinds of humility: humility of the mind and humility of the heart.

- Humility of the mind *"is a profound knowledge of what we truly are in the sight of God. Calling on our faith, we need to examine ourselves in God's light and truth."*⁹²

This is simply a recognition of our human condition by which, as created beings, *"we have nothing that we can call our own"*. Furthermore, as sinners, we are all radically poor: *"Pride is a vice common to all humans."*

Saint John Eudes, in spite of being heavily influenced by the pessimistic view of human nature prevalent in his day, had a lofty appreciation for human beings restored in Jesus Christ:

*"If humility of the mind will acquaint you with what you are by yourself and in Adam, it must not keep you from discovering what you are in and through Jesus Christ. Otherwise, it would be false humility."*⁹³

Real humility is truth, recognition of the marvel we are, having been made by the hands of God (Psalm 139:14) and so greatly loved by the one who gave us his only Son (John 3:16). Aware of our indebtedness for all that we have, John Eudes constantly maintains a sense of praise and thanksgiving: *"Infinite thanks for his ineffable gifts"* (II Cor 9: 15).

91. O.C. I, 214

92. O.C. I, 215

93. O.C. I, 221

- **Humility of the heart** consists in being pleased with our human condition, with our limitations and poverties, all the while recognizing also that we are always God's beloved children. Saint John Eudes points out that "*humility of the mind without humility of the heart is diabolical...*": the demons indeed know what they are, but are absolutely incapable of loving! True humility, on the contrary, opens us up to love.

*"Humility of the heart consists in being humble as Jesus was in his Incarnation, his life, his passion and his death."*⁹⁴

Saint John Eudes shows us concretely how to "*love our lowliness and be content with being little and unimportant, how not to look for excuses or try to justify ourselves except in cases of grave necessity, never complaining about anybody...*"

*"Sometimes God permits that we work a long time to overcome a passion and acquire a virtue without our making much progress toward our goal. He does this so that we may learn from our own experience just what we are and what we can accomplish on our own. This forces us to try to find in Our Lord Jesus Christ what it takes to serve God faithfully."*⁹⁵

Far from leading us to get discouraged, humility makes us bolder:

"Humility is the mother of trust since, seeing that we are devoid of everything forces us not to rely on ourselves, but to trust in Jesus, as in the one who was given

94. O.C. I, 225

95. O.C. I, 228

*to us as our redeemer, our virtue, our sanctification, our treasure, our strength, our life, our all."*⁹⁶

From Holy Scripture, John Eudes assembled a number of quotes which invite us to *trust* in him who is for us *"all love and all mercy"*.

*"Although we are capable of nothing on our own, there is nothing we cannot do in him, and he will always be there to help us if we trust in his goodness. Let us place in his hands and totally abandon to the paternal care of his divine Providence all that concerns us, body and soul, all matters temporal and spiritual, our health, our reputation, our belongings, our business affairs, the people close to us, our past sins, our progress in virtue and in his love, our life and our death, even our eternal salvation, and generally all things, knowing that in his goodness he will take care of them in a special way and will arrange all things for the best."*⁹⁷

Such total trust does not mean doing nothing while leaving it all up to God. With his Normand practicality, Saint John Eudes also reminds us that *"we must be just as diligent on our own as if we expected nothing from God. On the other hand, we should rely on our own ability no more than if we were to do nothing and expect God to do it all for us out of his great Mercy."*⁹⁸

Let us now consider **charity**, remembering that John Eudes said: *"Humility, when allied with charity, makes great saints"*

96. O.C. I, 233

97. O.C. I, 241

98. O.C. I, 242

The entire Bible speaks about the primacy of love: "You will love". These are the words every young Jew was taught to say on awakening: "Israel remember this: The Lord - and the Lord alone - is our God. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength ..." (Deut 6:4). What human heart has ever loved God as Jesus, the beloved Son, has? Jesus' whole message is summed up in the inseparable love of God and of neighbour (Matt 22:34-40). Jesus, after first living it, left his "last will and testament" to his disciples, before giving his life for us:

"My little children, I give you a new commandment: love one another as I have loved you; this is how people will recognize you as my disciples" (John 13: 34-35).

Having experienced this love himself, Saint John Eudes invites us to contemplate Christ:

"Christian charity consists in loving one another as Jesus loves us. He loves us so much that he gives us all that he possesses, all his treasures, even his own self and uses all the resources of his wisdom and love for our well-being. So great indeed is his love for us that he endures our faults very patiently and is the first one to seek us out when we have offended him, the one who has been so good to us. He makes use of his entire life, his body and his soul, his time and his eternity, his divinity and his humanity, all that he is, all that he has and all that is in his power for our benefit. He is all charity and love for us." ⁹⁹

99. O.C. I, 258

For Jesus, love for his Father and love of neighbour are one and the same thing:

*"Jesus loves us in his Father and loves his Father in us, and wants us to love each other as he loves us."*¹⁰⁰

To love as Jesus loves is to learn to see others as Jesus sees them:

*"See your neighbour in God and God in your neighbour, that is to say, see him as coming from God's heart, sharing in his life, loved by God no matter what condition he may be in, since God loves everything he created. Consider him to be a child of the same Father as you, redeemed by the blood of Christ like you, a member of his Body, a temple of the living God. See him as a person for whom Jesus Christ spent so much of his time, even gave his life, as a person Jesus recommends to you as equal to himself. 'Whatever you do for the least of my brothers, you are doing for me'. Oh, if only we weighed the importance of these truths, what charity, what respect we would have for one another! With what charity and patience we would endure and excuse the faults of others! With what gentleness we would converse with each other! Oh Jesus, God of love, imprint these truths and dispositions in our minds and our hearts."*¹⁰¹

Saint John Eudes shows us how we can practise charity in everyday life by seeing Christ in others:

100. Idem.

101. O.C. 1, 259-260

- *"When you render a service to someone, you can lift up your heart to Jesus to love and serve him in that person."*
- *"If you harbour resentment or envy regarding your neighbour, pray Jesus to put his charity in your heart. Try to talk to the person and be charitable in his regard until the aversion goes away."*
- *"If you have been offended, do not wait for the person to come to you. Remember the word of Our Lord:*
- *"If you remember that your brother has something against you, go at once and make peace with your brother." (Matt 5:24)*
- *"If someone is disparaged in your presence, prudently and gently turn the conversation around if possible, trying not to incite people to say more; if there was any risk of that happening, it would be better to remain silent."*
- *"Pray Our Lord particularly to imprint in your heart charity and tender compassion for the poor, for strangers, widows and orphans."¹⁰²*

In community life, Saint John Eudes, considered charity to be of prime importance: *"Charity takes priority over all other rules."*

He reminds us also that charity begins "at home," taking care to look after ourselves:

"When you give some rest or food and drink to your body, consider your health, your life and your body, not as belonging to you, but as Jesus' property; as such,

102. O.C. 1,261-263

you need to take care of it, not for yourselves, but for Jesus, for his service. " 103

The greatest service of love, the one to which all Christians are called, consists in participating in the salvation of the world. This is what Saint John Eudes brings to the attention of all the baptized when he speaks about **"zeal for the salvation of souls"**,

"Especially have a singular charity for the souls of all men and women, but more particularly for those who are close to you or depend upon you, working for their salvation in every conceivable way. " 104

Every Christian can make his own Jesus' prayer: *"Father, I pray for all those you have entrusted to me"* (John 17:9). Let us remember especially those close and dear to us and those for whom we are responsible.

Saint John Eudes sparks our apostolic zeal by reminding us at what price we were redeemed:

"The greatest and holiest thing which we can accomplish on earth, the one which will please Jesus most is to work at the salvation of the souls that are so precious and dear to him.

If the opportunity to do so should arise - and it will if you watch for it - do no let it pass by, but ask Our Lord for the grace to engage in it, according to your condition and ability, with all the care and affection possible. Do it out of pure love for Jesus and so that God may be loved and glorified eternally. " 105

103. O.C. I, 261

104. O.C.I, 264

105. O.C.I, 264-265

With his entire life given over to the missions, Saint John Eudes communicated his apostolic zeal to the men and women who worked with him. To the Religious of Our Lady of Charity, a Congregation he founded in 1641 to welcome prostitutes who wanted to turn their life around, he wrote:

"The first grace of your vocation, my dearest daughters, is zeal for the salvation of souls. Your Congregation was founded for the same purpose for which the divine Saviour came into the world, namely: to seek out and save what was lost.

*Just as in the Church there are nursing Religious to care for sick bodies, it is necessary to have Religious whose monasteries be like hospitals to receive sick souls and help them recover their spiritual health. A soul is worth more than a whole world."*¹⁰⁶

Saint Mary Euphrasia Pelletier, foundress of the Religious of the Good Shepherd of Angers, was a true daughter of Saint John Eudes, filled with the same apostolic zeal which inspired her to send her daughters all over the world to imitate Jesus in seeking out the lost sheep. She wrote:

*"I belong to every country where there are souls to be saved. We must not be afraid to pitch our tents on faraway beaches when we see that there are sheep to be brought back into the fold. Sheep of Italy, Bavaria and all parts of Europe, sheep from America, Africa, Asia, Indonesia, we must go after them all."*¹⁰⁷

106. D.L. of Charily Annals, III, 24 – O.C. X, 80-81

107. Eudist Lectionary, 248

MARTYRDOM: LOVE'S SUMMIT

Theresa of Lisieux would have liked to bring the Gospel message to the ends of the world and give her life for Jesus as a martyr. John Eudes, at the age of 30, when he was an Oratorian, at Caen, wrote his *Vow of Martyrdom*, of which this is an excerpt:

*"In honour of and-in union with the very great love by which you offered yourself to your Father from the very first moment of your Incarnation, as a victim to be sacrificed for his glory and out of love for us by the most painful martyrdom of the Cross; in union as well with all the love of your Mother and of all your holy martyrs, I offer and give myself to you, Oh Jesus, my Lord, as a victim, to suffer in my body and soul, with the help of your grace, all sorts of pain, even to shedding my blood and sacrificing my life by whichever kind of death may be pleasing to you; all this I offer for your sole glory and out of pure love for you."*¹⁰⁸

Surely it was this burning love that was consuming him and not a love of suffering that caused John Eudes to want to offer his life for Christ. At this time in France, many had their eyes turned towards Canada, a mission land that would soon be sanctified by the blood of Jesuits, its first martyrs. John Eudes, an alumnus of the Jesuits of Caen, corresponded with some of them in Canada.

108. O.C. XII, 136

In *The Life and Kingdom of Jesus* he does not hesitate to say to the baptized:

*"The summit and perfection of Christian life is holy martyrdom. It is the greatest favour Jesus Christ grants to those he loves particularly to make them most like him in their life and in their death, to die as he died for his Father and for them. It is in the holy martyrs that he best displays the marvellous power of his divine love. Among the saints, the holy Martyrs are the most admirable before God."*¹⁰⁹

In all the periods of history and always in some part of the world, the Church is sanctified by true martyrs. But, Saint John Eudes adds, there are other ways of giving one's life for Christ, of bearing witness to him:

"They too are martyrs, in a way, before God who are truly disposed and willing to die for Our Lord.

"Mortifying one's passions, resisting unruly urges, and persevering thus to the end out of love for Our Lord, is a kind of martyrdom.

*"Suffering patiently the privations and miseries of poverty or some other affliction out of love for God, or suffering insults, calumny and persecution, patiently without paying back evil with evil, loving those who hate us are all forms of martyrdom."*¹¹⁰

The disciple is not great than the Master, but it is in his daily life that he also displays what Martin Luther King called "the strength to love".

109. O.C. I, 284

110. O.C. I, 288

MARY: Model of Christian Living

Christian living, says Saint John Eudes, consists in continuing the Life of Christ in us. Who, better than Mary, lived this life totally with Jesus? That is what makes Saint John Eudes present her to us as the prototype, the exemplar of Christian living. Paul VI called Mary *"the first among Jesus 'disciples' "*. According to Vatican II, the Church in its pilgrimage of faith, sees itself in Mary, Mother of the Redeemer. *"The Church, in its apostolic work, rightly looks to her who gave birth to Christ in order that, through the Church, he could be born and increase in the hearts of the faithful"* (L. G. 65).

Saint John Eudes, like Saint Bernard and Saint Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort, was particularly blessed by Mary so that she has a special place in his life and his ministry. We have seen how, in his *Memorial*, he likes to recall *"the favours received from God through his Son Jesus and his most holy Mother"*. From the day he was conceived, through his childhood and even regarding his vocation, he could say: *"I am all yours"*. The Oratorian motto: **"Live Jesus and Mary"** will always be his own. This fervent missionary communicated his love for Mary especially by instituting the first liturgical celebration in honour of the Heart of Mary, in Autun, in 1648. He took pride in having established the first church dedicated to the Holy Heart of Mary, in 1653, at the seminary in Coutances. He thanked

God for having been able to complete his major work *The Admirable Heart of the Mother of God* (1680) before dying. This man who preached a lot and wrote a lot, had a spiritual life filled with love. Very discreet about himself, John Eudes seldom spoke about the graces with which he was blessed; but his contemporaries tell us that he habitually lived in the presence of God and Mary. Prayers of praise leaped spontaneously from his heart on every occasion, as is evidenced in his writings. Saint John Eudes enjoyed mystical graces of union with Mary: in his *Wedding Contract with Mary*, he writes:

*"Oh admirable and most lovable Mary ... how marvellous it is that you should want to be the spouse of the least of all men and the greatest of sinners who dared to choose you, from his earliest years, to be his most unique Spouse and consecrate totally to you his body, his heart and his soul."*¹¹¹

In his *Last Will and Testament*, he bequeathed to his spiritual family that Heart which was given to him in a special way:

*"To the fullest extent of my will, I give myself to that incomprehensible love through which my Jesus and my all good Mother gave me their most lovable Heart in a very special way. In union with this same love, I bequeath this Heart as something which belongs to me and of which I can dispose for the glory of my God."*¹¹²

During his formation, John Eudes learned from Father de Berulle never to separate Mary from her Son, Jesus.

111. O.C. XII, 160

112. O.C. XII, 172

Furthermore, in *The Life and Kingdom of Jesus*, John Eudes indicates Mary's place in the life of every baptized person:

"We must never separate what God has so perfectly united. Jesus and Mary are so closely linked that whoever sees Jesus sees Mary, whoever loves Jesus loves Mary. No person is really a Christian if he has no devotion to the Mother of Jesus and of all Christians."

Since being a Christian consists in having in us the sentiments of Jesus Christ, we must continue to have for Mary the sentiments Jesus had for his Mother:

"He loved and honoured her, chose her for his Mother, gave himself to her as her Son, took from her a new life, willed to be closely related to her, was subject to her during his childhood and his hidden life, established her as Sovereign Queen of heaven and earth."

John Eudes points out further that it is always in relation to Jesus that we must approach devotion to Mary:

"We must see and adore her Son in her and see and adore only him. For this is how she wants to be honoured since, of herself and by herself she is nothing, her Son being everything in her: he is her being, her life, her holiness, her glory."

De Berulle used a beautiful expression, describing Mary as *"pure capacity of Jesus"*. Shouldn't that be every Christian's ideal: to be totally inhabited, transformed by him?

John Eudes tells us in another passage that *"we must recognize and honour Mary first as the Mother of God, then as our own Mother. We must thank her for all the love,*

glory and perfect service she rendered to her Son, Jesus; refer to her, after God, our being and our life, subjecting ourselves entirely to her, imploring her to assume full power over us for the glory of her Son and to associate us with all the love and praises she ever has given him, and ever will throughout all eternity."

This is what John Eudes did himself; any life given over to Mary advances in holiness and bears fruit for the salvation of the world. Mary cannot but turn us toward Christ: "*Do whatever he tells you to do*" (John 2:5). When John Eudes speaks about devotion to Mary, it is not a sentimental kind of devotion he advocates, but a real consecration, in the etymological sense of the word. The only one we really belong to is God, but Mary's presence transforms our Christian life as it did for the beloved disciples: "*From that day, the disciple took her to live in his home*" (John 19:27).

Here is how John Eudes invites us, in prayer, to see Jesus in Mary and Mary in Jesus:

"Oh Jesus, only Son of God and Son of Mary, I contemplate and adore you living and reigning in your most holy Mother and as the one who is all and does all in her. You are her life, her soul, her heart, her spirit, her treasure. You are in her, sanctifying her on earth and glorifying her in heaven. You are in her, clothing her with your qualities, imprinting in her a most perfect image of yourself.

Blessed are you, Oh Jesus, for all that you are and all that you accomplish in your most holy Mother! Blessed are you, Mary, for all the honour you have given your beloved Son throughout your entire life. I offer you all my life, Oh Mother of life and grace. With my whole heart, I beg your Son, Jesus, the God of life and love,

*to grant that my entire life may pay; continual homage to his most holy life and yours."*¹¹³

The necessary effect of true devotion to Mary, as Saint John Eudes proposes it, is growth in the life and love of Christ. Finding Mary present in our lives is a grace to be prayed for and welcomed with thanks.

THE HEART OF MARY

John Eudes has the distinction of having been the first person to have celebrated a Feast in honour of the Heart of Mary, on February 8th 1648, at Autun. When he was canonized in 1925, the Holy Father proclaimed him: "the Father, Doctor and Apostle of the liturgical worship of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary".

Nowadays, in the Church, everyone speaks about the Heart of Mary, especially since the apparitions at Fatima (1917), but the idea advanced by Saint John Eudes was an innovation and met with a great deal of resistance on the part of those who claimed he was proposing something new and hardly orthodox ... In his master work *The Admirable Heart of the Mother of God*, he set the doctrinal foundation for his spiritual teaching.

When John Eudes wrote *The Life and Kingdom of Jesus*, in 1637, he mentioned only in passing the Heart of Mary which is one with the Heart of Jesus, as Father de Berulle had stated earlier. In the space of eleven years, his thoughts

113. O.C. I, 432-433

on the subject developed considerably. In 1648, he composed a Mass and Office in honour of the Heart of Mary which received episcopal approval for a celebration in the seminaries directed by the Congregation of Jesus and Mary.

Why choose the heart? It was a popular theme in contemporary literature and literary circles. John Eudes was not an adept of the fashionable "salons" where sentiments, feelings, "the fire and flames of love" were customarily discussed. But he was a contemporary of Comeille, he too a Normand, the poet who with his hero, Rodrigue, the man of the chivalrous heart, had aroused the admiration and enthusiasm of all France. In the popular parish missions, a Breton rector, Michel Le Noblez, made use of "tableaux" with an abundance of hearts to depict the life of a Christian, with its vices and virtues, as well as a whole road to perfection. An illustration in *The Life and Kingdom of Jesus* displays a heart, that of the Christian, containing the image of Jesus and Mary, and the inscription: "*Oh Lord Jesus, O Virgin Mary, we want you to reign over us*".

John Eudes, the apostle of love, wants to communicate to the Christian people that fire of Love which he himself has experienced: "*God so loved the world that he gave us his only Son*". The heart is symbolic of that love, the antidote to Jansenism. Why then speak about the Heart of Mary? Because by looking at Mary we too will learn to welcome Christ so that he might live and reign in us:

*"Indeed, this incomparable Heart of the Mother of our Redeemer is a flawless mirror in which Jesus, the Sun of eternity, is reflected perfectly, in all his beauty and perfections."*¹¹⁴

114. O.C. VII, 279

In this way, we too, following Mary's lead, will become icons of Jesus, Mary's Heart is indeed her humanity, fully inhabited.

In the Bible, the word heart often is used to designate the whole being with all its qualities: "You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your strength" (Deut 6:4). Saint John Eudes frequently meditated on Saint Luke's text: "*Mary kept all these things in her heart*" (Luke 2:19; 2:51).

"The Heart of the Blessed Virgin is the depository and faithful guardian of the marvellous mysteries of the Saviour: She kept all the marvels of the life of her Son, in a way, in her bodily heart, the source of her life and the seat of all her impulses; all the movements and beats of her heart were for Jesus.

She kept them in her heart, that is to say, in her memory, her intelligence, her will and in the deepest recesses of her mind, since all the faculties of her soul were ceaselessly applied to remembering, meditating, contemplating, adoring and glorifying all that was happening in the life of her Son.

*She kept them in her Heart, according to the divine words: 'Place me as a seal on your heart' (Song of Songs, 8:6); that is to say, she focused on engraving in her soul and her interior life a perfect image of the holy life of her Son. She kept them in her Heart with the help of the Holy Spirit who is the spirit of her spirit, the heart of her Heart, who reminded her of these things to nourish her contemplation and relate them to the Apostles and disciples."*¹¹⁵

115. O.C. VIII, 429

John Paul II said that Mary *"was a unique witness of the mystery of Jesus. From the very first moment, the Church 'looked' at Mary through Jesus, as she 'looked' at Jesus through Mary"* (*Redemptoris Mater*: 26). Mary is a living Gospel, as Saint John Eudes used to say.

Our saint liked to quote Saint Augustine who said: *"Mary bore Jesus in her Heart before carrying him in her womb"*:

"Happy are you, Virgin Mary, for having borne in your body the Lord who made the world; happier still for having borne him in your Heart."

*Indeed, "Mary bore him in her womb for only nine months, but she carried him in her Heart from the very first moment of his life and will continue to carry him eternally."*¹¹⁶

*"Jesus, the first fruit of the adorable Heart of his Father, is also the fruit of the most lovable Heart of his Mother."*¹¹⁷

Vatican II proposes Mary as the model of our faith: *"Mary, giving full consent to the Word of God, became the Mother of Jesus, espousing wholeheartedly the divine Will of Salvation"* (L. G. 56). Mary's entire life is this YES to God, spoken with all her Heart.

For Saint John Eudes, the Heart of Mary is Mary in all her humanity:

- her physical Heart, "the principle of two most precious lives", when she was carrying and forming Jesus inside

116. O.C. VII, 245

117. O.C. VIII, 125

her; that Heart on which Jesus, nourished by Mary, rested as her Child; the Heart of the Mother which was "pierced" at the sight of her Son dying on the Cross; that Heart now transfigured, always alive, in the glory of Jesus, her motherly Heart with respect to all of us.

- her Heart, says John Eudes, also means all her human sentiments and feelings, her joys, her fears, her humility, the ardour of her love, all that being made one by the Spirit, at the very heart of her Heart.
- lastly, *"the Heart of Mary is Jesus himself"*, because Jesus lives and reigns so fully in Mary "that he is the soul of her soul, the spirit of her spirit and the heart of her Heart".

The heart then clearly expresses the entire maternal mystery under the sign of love.

Mary who is totally loved by God is never far from us, her children:

*"The Heart of Mary is a Heart afire with love for God and for us. She loves us with same love with which she loves her Son, Jesus. She sees and loves us as her own children, since our Saviour on the Cross gave us to his mother as her children, saying to each one of us what he said to the beloved disciple: 'Behold your Mother'. That is why, in all your undertakings, all your needs, perplexities and afflictions, you must have recourse to that Heart of our most charitable Mother. It is a Heart constantly watching over us and all the least things that touch us."*¹¹⁸

118. O.C. VII, 461; VIII, 114

Mary is *the Mother of Mercy*. John Eudes, the missionary, came across a great deal of suffering and misery and his own experience is reflected in this prayer to Mary:

"Oh most meek and pious Virgin, cast your eyes kindly upon the misery that fills the world and on all the people in it who are deserving of your concern. There are so many poor people, widows, orphans and all sorts of sick people, so many captives and prisoners, so many who have been subjected to the malice of men, so many defenceless people oppressed by the violence of those who lord it over them, so many labourers for the Gospel exposed to thousands of hazards to save souls in peril, so many anguished hearts; above all, so many souls in a state of sin, which is the greatest of all tribulations.

Oh Mother of Mercy, consoler of the afflicted and refuge of sinners, open the eyes of your kindness to our supplications. Show yourself to be the Mother of Mercy."

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Mary is for us a living model of the life of Christ. John Eudes liked to call her *"the Mother of sweet love"*, entirely filled with love for God and for us. To observe Mary is to learn how, like her, to welcome the Word, to let ourselves be transformed by Jesus, led by his Spirit and become ourselves living images of Christ.

Mary who formed Christ is still associated with that particular work of God in the hearts of men and women today:

"As the eternal Father granted that Mary should conceive his Son, first in her heart then in her womb, in

119. O.C. VII, 32

*the same way he gave her the ability to form Jesus in the hearts of the children of Adam. That is why she participates in the work of our salvation by the use she makes of this power with incredible love. And, just as she carried and will eternally carry her Son Jesus in her Heart, so too she has carried and will forever carry in that same heart all the members of that divine Head, as her beloved children and the fruit of her maternal Heart which she is continually offering up to God's divine Majesty."*¹²⁰

Mary cooperates with the Church in this regeneration of humankind in Christ. It is from the brazier of this love, the Heart of Jesus and Mary, that Saint John Eudes drew all his apostolic zeal.

It is from this marvellous fountain of the Heart of Mary, the real Jacob's well, that Jesus invites us to draw:

*"Come to me here, not at Jacob's well, but in Mary's Heart where you will find me because that is where I have set up my dwelling place. I am the one who made this beautiful fountain. I made it for you and filled it with countless blessings for you. I am there to refresh and strengthen you, to give you a new life through its overflowing waters. Come to me, therefore, all you who thirst, come and drink this fountain's beautiful waters."*¹²¹

120. O.C. VI, 148

121. O.C. VI, 187

THE HEART OF JESUS

The first liturgical feast of the Sacred Heart

In an enthusiastic letter, dated July 29th, 1672, John Eudes announced to his "dear and beloved Brothers" that the first celebration of the Feast of the Heart of Jesus would take place in all the houses of the Congregation. The Feast of the Heart of Mary, already celebrated at Autun in 1648, he said, had "*prepared the way in the hearts of the faithful*". John Eudes spoke in the singular of the Heart of Jesus and Mary which form but one heart. Many years of meditating on Holy Scripture and on the writings of mystics like Saint Bridget and Saint Gertrude, led John Eudes to base his spiritual teaching on the Heart of Jesus. Although this feast was new at the time, John Eudes had it celebrated in the seminaries entrusted to his Congregation, with the approval of the bishops concerned. Even before the apparitions at Paray le Monial, the feast was celebrated in several religious communities, particularly by the Benedictines of Montmartre, in 1674. Today, the Church all over the world celebrates the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

While John Eudes was an innovator, he is very much in step with the tradition of devotion to the humanity of Jesus, along with Saint Francis of Assisi, followed by Saint Francis de Sales and de Berulle who exclaimed: "*Oh Heart of Jesus and Mary!*".

To speak about the Heart of Jesus is to celebrate the Love of God in the astounding mystery of the Incarnation; *"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son"* (John 3:16), and it is this humanity of God that is manifested to us in Jesus Christ. God spoke a language of love to his people: *"How could I abandon you, Ephraim? My heart recoils and my whole being trembles at the thought"* (Hosea 11 :8-9). It is with fatherly and motherly love that God wants, above all, to save his people. This is all the more true now that *"the Word has become man"* (John 1:14). Now God has *"a human heart"* (Ez 36:26), beating in the chest of Jesus: the Heart formed in Mary's womb, the Heart on which the beloved disciple rested, the Heart pierced by a lance for us on the Cross, the same heart which is living today in the glory of the Risen Christ:

"Thus you will be able to know the love of Christ - although it can never be fully known and so be completely filled with the very nature of God" (Eph 3:19).

Why the Heart?

Saint John Eudes' starting point is the Incarnation: *"What heart is more adorable, more admirable, more lovable than the Heart of the God made man called Jesus?"*

*"The Heart of Jesus is the most holy heart of his body united hypostatically to the Person of the Word, that heart which the Holy Spirit made from the virginal blood of the Mother of love and which, on the Cross, was pierced by a lance. It is his humanly divine and divinely human Heart."*¹²²

122. Eudist Lectionary 149 and O.C.. VIII, 263

For John Eudes, the heart is the whole Person of Jesus, under the sign of love: his human sentiments and feelings, as we can see in many instances in the Gospel: Jesus, *"moved with compassion, touched the leper"* (Mark 1:41), was indignant in the face of evil (Mark 3:5; John 2:15), *"had pity on the crowd who were like sheep without a shepherd"* (Mark 6:34); was moved by the tears of the widow of Nairn (Luke 7:13); was deeply moved and shaken by the death of Lazarus (John 11 :33); and by his own imminent death (Mark 14:33-34).

His Heart was also *"filled with joy"*, at the sight of the humble and simple people to whom God reveals himself (Luke 10:21). He is full of love for those who are despised or rejected by society and for the urchins of the streets (Luke 18: 15-17), as well as for sinners (Luke 15: 1). In fact, this love is what will lead to his death ...

John Eudes loves to tell us that *"this Heart is the source of our salvation, an immense fountain of love for us, wanting, night and day, nothing more than to do us an infinite amount of good."*

The Heart of Jesus is a fountain of love:

"He loves his divine Father with an eternal, immense and infinite love.

He loves his Mother, and the inconceivable graces with which Our Saviour gratified her show clearly that his love for her is limitless.

He loves the Church whose Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, summaries of all God's marvels, are inexhaustible fountains of grace and holiness which have their source in the immense ocean of the Sacred Heart of Our Saviour.

*He loves each and every one of us as his Father loves him. "*¹²³

Jesus loves the Father and us with the same love:

"I love you, Jesus said (John 15:9). Let us weigh these words. The only Son of God, the only Son of Mary, came to earth to tell us that he loves us. I, the creator of all things, love you. But in what way does this adorable Saviour love us?

Just listen: I love you as my Father loves you (John 15:9). I love you with the same love with which I am loved by the Father, an eternal, immense, essential love.

*After that, he tells us: Remain in my love".*¹²⁴

To "remain" is to live at the heart of that Love, abide in God who abides in us: *"If anyone loves me, he will keep my word; my Father will love him and we will make our dwelling place in him"* (John 14:23).

That Heart which is given to us

Saint John Eudes teaches us to not only look at the Heart of Jesus, but to welcome such a marvellous gift: the Heart of Jesus is given to us to be our heart.

He places a great deal of importance on the text from Ezechiel: *"I will give you a new heart, I will place in you a new spirit"* (36: 26).

123. O.C. VIII, 213, 242, 246

124. O.C. VIII, 276

"So that we might know what that new heart and new spirit which you promised are, you added: I will place my spirit, which is my Heart, in your midst. Only the Spirit and the Heart of God are worthy of loving and praising God. That is why, Lord, you gave us your Heart which is the Heart of your Son, Jesus." ¹²⁵

In the light of Pentecost, we can deduce that this "new heart", this "new spirit" given to us, is also the Gift of the Spirit: "the love of God emptied into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rom 5:5); it is the Spirit of Jesus shouting in us: "Abba, Father!" (Gal 4:6).

This makes it possible, says John Eudes, to finally **"render to God love for love, heart for heart."**

"Let us offer and give him our hearts, just as he gave us his. He gave his without reservation: let us give him ours totally and without restriction".

Our poor human hearts, thus plunged into Christ's love, can already love God with a love that is infinite:

"Not only is the Heart of Jesus the Temple, but it is also the Altar of divine Love. He is the Sovereign Priest who offers himself continually with infinite love - Let us offer ourselves with him so that he may consume us entirely in the fire of love of his Heart." ¹²⁶

The Heart of Christ is revealed to us by the mystery of the Cross. John Eudes expressed it beautifully when he wrote: "At the centre of the Cross is the Heart". It is the

125. O.C. VI, 261

126. O.C. VIII, 338

mystery of love: *"God so loved humankind"*. John Eudes tells us that, on the Cross, *"Jesus' Heart was broken out of love for us"*.

The Eucharist is the offering of Jesus to his Father, Jesus "given up" for us: his Body, his Heart, his Soul. Even if we sometimes receive Holy Communion in arid faith, we can never approach this Furnace of love with indifference:

"The Heart of our Saviour is a glowing furnace of love:

- *purifying love in which our hearts are rid of all impurities more perfectly than gold in fire,*
- *enlightening love which dissipates the darkness and makes us enter into the admirable light of heaven (I Peter 2:9),*
- *cleansing love which destroys sin in our souls,*
- *transforming and sanctifying love.*

*Oh, who will let me be plunged into that fire?"*¹²⁷

Jesus makes it possible for us to answer the call of our vocation: *"You will love God with all your heart"* (Deut 6:4). The great Heart which is given to us, says Saint John Eudes, is the Heart of Jesus, it is his Father's Heart, it is the Holy Spirit; it is also his Mother's Heart and the hearts of all human beings, since by giving us his Son, God gave us everything (Rom 8:32):

"Let us offer him his own Heart since he gave it to us; he is all ours and there is nothing we could offer him that could please him more."

127. O.C. VIII, 350

This is how we can love God limitlessly to the ends of the world: *"Love and you will live "* (Deut 30:20). Like Jesus, the Apostle John reminds us that one cannot love God without loving one's neighbour (I John 4:20-21). Jesus left us a new commandment: not only *"love one another"*, but he added: ***"as I have loved you"*** (John 13:34). We can love this way only with that "new Heart" which is the Heart of Christ, the love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit: that is true charity, the very love of God which is given to us.

We might risk forgetting that love of neighbour is also tied into love of self: *"You will love your neighbour as yourself"* (Matt 22:39). Loving ourselves, accepting ourselves for what we really are, with our limitations, our poverty and our gifts is a permanent conversion: *"Didn't God give you everything you have?"* (1 Cor 4:7). Do I have a right not to love after God has loved me so?

John Eudes teaches us how to love with "that great Heart" which is the Heart of Jesus:

"Do not be satisfied with loving God with your human heart for that is too little. Love him rather with all the love of your great Heart, the Heart of Jesus which is given to you.

*For that purpose, renounce your own heart, that is to say, your own spirit, your will and self-love. Give yourself to Jesus to enter into the immensity of this great Heart to lose yourself in this abyss of love, charity, mercy, humility, purity, patience, submission and holiness."*¹²⁸

128. O.C. VI, 264

There is, in Saint John Eudes, an enthusiasm which he draws from the Heart of Jesus and Mary, Furnace of Love. He likes to recall the slogan he found in Holy Scripture:

"Corde magno et animo volenti" (II Macc 1:3), in order to stimulate us to love and serve God wholeheartedly by a life given entirely to him. This makes us enter into the joy of Christ, as John Eudes tells us also:

"I told you these things so that I might rejoice in you and your joy might be perfect (John 15:11). Do you want to give great joy to our Saviour and always be happy? Love your most lovable Saviour more than anything or anyone else and love your neighbour as yourself, that is all there is to it." ¹²⁹

Ignite the world with the love of Christ

John Eudes, who signed his letters "missionary priest" bequeathed the Heart of Jesus and Mary to his Congregation as its spiritual inheritance and Rule of Life. On the pediment of the seminaries and houses of the Congregation could be seen the coat of arms consisting of a Heart inside which Jesus and Mary are looking at each other, bearing the inscription: *"Live Jesus and Mary"*.

To the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity, Saint John Eudes gave the Heart of Mary so that they might draw from the Heart of the Mother of Mercy all the apostolic zeal needed to help women victims of prostitution to turn their lives around:

"Live of the life of that Blessed Heart; have in you its sentiments; give yourselves ceaselessly to the spirit which animates it, so that he may guide you in all

129. O.C. VII. 281

*things, his charity may inflame you and especially his zeal for the salvation of souls devour you."*¹³⁰

A painting of John Eudes' day, titled "Our Lady of the hearts", symbolically illustrates his view of the apostolate. It depicts a large Heart in which reside Jesus and Mary. Fire is coming out of the Heart with the Spirit blowing on it. Under the Heart is a globe surmounted by a Cross and on each side a priest is kneeling, holding a large candle. One of them lights his candle at the "Furnace of love," while the other places his lighted candle on the globe ... Did not Jesus say:

"I came to set the earth on fire, and how] wish it were already kindled!" (Luke 12:49).

130. O.C. X, 75

PASTORS AFTER THE HEART OF GOD

Saint John Eudes was one of the artisans of renewal of the life and ministry of priests in the 17th century, along with de Berulle, Vincent de Paul, Olier and many others. In those days there was no lack of priests; quite the contrary, but many of them had no other duties than to say mass. While the bishops were chosen among the nobles, most priests had rural roots and, although they enjoyed an honourable place in society, they had no serious spiritual and pastoral formation. A century earlier, the Council of Trent had called for the creation of seminaries. In the course of the many missions he preached, John Eudes recognized that the Christian people, in spite of their good will, could undergo no real renewal without their priests becoming true pastors: hence the urgent need for forming the clergy. Like Vincent de Paul before him, John Eudes began, at the mission at Remilly, in 1641, "*to give special talks for the clergy*". In 1643, with his new Congregation, he opened the first seminary in Normandy, at Caen. In the beginning, the young men spent only a few weeks at the seminary to prepare for ordination; it was a place for retreats and basic formation where they got acquainted with Holy Scripture and learned how to preach and administer the Sacraments. Some pastoral formation was given when they participated in parish missions during the summer.

What was John Eudes' project and his concept of priestly life?

A practical man, full of love for God, John Eudes was fully aware of the urgent need to provide the Church with "*pastors after the heart of God*" (Jeremiah 3:15). His chief concern was to impress upon priests the holiness of their vocation and make them truly apostolic. That is, indeed, what Saint John Eudes accomplished through his Congregation which directed all the seminaries of Normandy, as well as those of Rennes and Dol in Brittany, until the days of the French Revolution.

There are some who have criticized the French School of spirituality for its perception of the priest as "the religious of God". This distorted image of one type of priestly spirituality was passed on by seminaries, in the 19th century up to Vatican II. The term itself is ambiguous. In the thinking of de Berulle, John Eudes' spiritual mentor, Jesus is the one true "Religious of God", the one who serves as a link between humans and God. The Incarnation made Jesus the perfect, unique Priest, the sole mediator between God and humans (1 Tim 2:5-6), the one who saved us by his unique Sacrifice (Heb 7:27).

De Berulle founded the Oratory with the idea of restoring the "Priestly Order", by establishing a Society of priests who are not religious and pronounce no vows (the same is true of the Eudists and the Sulpicians). Holiness is their vocation stemming from the commitments of their Baptism and Ordination. Community life is but a means to holiness and is subordinated to the mission.

After Father de Berulle, John Eudes speaks about *Jesus as the "Sovereign Priest"*:

"Strictly speaking, there is but one priest and that is Jesus Christ, the Sovereign Priest.

His incomparable goodness forced him to choose among men some who are fragile and sinners like all

*other men, endowed them with his power and made them his associates to make sin die in souls."*¹³¹

The priesthood of Jesus Christ is the priesthood of the New Testament, with which all Christians are invested; they are all one priest with the Sovereign Priest. *The priests*, chosen from among the people of God, have received the sacrament of Holy Orders which consecrated them to *God for the priestly service of the baptized*. Three centuries before Vatican n (L.G. 10), Saint John Eudes reminded Christians that they are a priestly People:

*"The Son of God, when he incorporated you to him in holy Baptism, made you sharers of his divine priesthood so that you might offer to him a perpetual sacrifice of praise and love and continually immolate yourselves and all that belongs to you to the glory of his divine Majesty. That is why Saint Peter calls Christianity 'a royal priesthood', and why all Christians are truly kings and priests."*¹³²

The holiness of priests

It has already been mentioned that John Eudes told the baptized of his day that *"being Christian and being a saint are the same"*. He will be all the more concerned about forming holy priests: holiness is their vocation, because of both their Baptism and their Ordination, as sanctifiers of their brothers and sisters. Vatican n will take up the same idea:

131. O.C. III, 9 and 199; IV, 204

132. O.C. II, 231

"Like all Christians they have already received in the consecration of Baptism the sign and gift of their great calling to perfection of which the Lord speaks (Matt 5:48). But priests are especially bound to attain perfection. They are consecrated to God in a new way by their ordination and are made the living instruments of Christ, the eternal priest." (P.O. 12)

Saint John Eudes did not want to idolize the priest who is also a sinner, but he strongly reminded the priests of his day of their vocation: it does not make them superior to others nor is it a means of personal sanctification; it is a response to God's call: *"You did not choose me, I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit, the kind of fruit that endures"* (John 15:16). Jesus chose to give his Church pastors so that all the baptized might cooperate in the evangelisation of the world.

The formation of pastors

It is easy to understand that John Eudes, zealous missionary that he was, was primarily concerned with forming priests who would be apostolic men. If John Eudes reminded Christians that the perfection of love is *"zeal for the salvation of souls"*, he also pointed out that it is the very mission of priests:

"The first and greatest obligation a priest has is to work at the salvation of souls. It is the sole purpose for which he must embrace this calling. It is the greatest and sole concern of pastors.

It is the work in which Our Lord engaged every moment of his time, all his thoughts, words and actions, all his undertakings, the sweat of his brow, his tears,

*his blood, his very life. It is also in this work that priests, and even more those among them who are pastors, must give their heart and spirit, their thoughts and affections, all their time, their possessions and their strength."*¹³³

There are different ways of ministering to the People of God, depending on one's duties or age, but what is essential remains, as the Vatican Council reminded all priests, *"to strive always by the use of all suitable means toward that greater holiness that will make them daily more effective instruments for all God's people."* (P.O. 12).

Priests, servants of the Word

John Eudes had a special gift for preaching the Word of God. During more than fifty years, he preached "missions" in the country, in big cities and at the royal court. With that experience to back up his teaching, he wrote *The Apostolic Preacher* (1673). Here is how he describes this ministry:

"Preaching is making God speak. Preaching is giving God's children the bread of life.

*Preaching has its origins in the bosom of God himself from which emanated the eternal word, Christ our Lord, the first preacher. The end and purpose of this heavenly office is to give birth to Jesus Christ and form him in the hearts of men and women, as well as to cause him to live and reign there."*¹³⁴

133. O.C. III, 188; IV, 165 and 185

134. O.C. IV, 12-14

The service of the Word is demanding: it is the Word of Another, with which we must be filled in order to pass it on to others. John Eudes wrote:

*"Priests should guard against advancing their own thoughts or ideas when preaching. Their material and subject matter should be Holy Scripture. They are allowed to preach only the truths which the Holy Spirit has made known to us, which are to be found in Holy Writ, or those he has declared to us through the oracle of the Church or the mouth of the Fathers of the Church whose writings contain nothing but explanations of Scripture."*¹³⁵

Close to the ordinary people, John Eudes was imbued with the Word of God. Here is the advice he gives to preach effectively, recalling Saint Paul's words: *"We speak as ambassadors of God and in his presence, we speak in Christ"* (2 Cor 2: 17).

"As God's ambassadors means preachers should draw from God, by reading Holy Scripture and meditating on it, what they must announce to others. In God's presence means that preachers should have no other aim or objective in mind save God and his glory and the salvation of souls."

*"In Christ means preachers should make a complete renunciation of self and give themselves to Christ in order to speak in him and preach in his spirit."*¹³⁶

135. O.C. IV, 14

136. O.C. IV, 15

As Vatican II puts it, the priest is sanctified by exercising his functions:

"Since they are ministers of the Word of God, they read and hear every day the Word which they must teach to others. If they endeavour at the same time to make it part of their own lives, they will become daily more perfect disciples of the Lord ... By keeping in mind that it is the Lord who opens hearts ... they will be more intimately united with Christ the Teacher and will be guided by his Spirit in the very act of teaching the Word."
(P.O. 13)

Ministers of the Sacraments

A priest acts "in the person of Christ" when he administers the Sacraments, the signs by which Christ, in the Church, communicates his Life. Listen to John Eudes speaking to the priests:

"You are the ones he chose specifically to render a very apostolic service and to be the 'good and faithful dispensers of his grace' (1 Peter 4: 10).

*He associates you with him in his divine Priesthood and gives you the power to exercise the same priestly functions he exercised while on earth: preach the same Gospel, do the same thing he did when consecrating his body and blood, offer the same sacrifice and administer the same sacraments he instituted."*¹³⁷

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is one John Eudes administered a great deal during his missions, the one which

137. O.C. IV, 146 and 156

illustrates God's Mercy for sinful humans. Based on this experience, John Eudes wrote *The Good Confessor* (1661). The first quality of a confessor, he writes, is kindness:

"Welcome all those who come, not with a sad face and a grouchy disposition, or with an austere attitude, but graciously and with open arms. Welcome all sorts of people without making any distinctions, each one in turn, poor or rich, good or bad; and always with the utmost discretion." ¹³⁸

John Eudes sees confession in the concrete context in which people live, be they governors or magistrates, captains or soldiers, merchants, tavern owners, butchers ... chaplains, clergy or religious.

The confessor will not be satisfied with giving absolution, but will also serve as counsellor and father, carrying in prayer those he will have heard.

Pastors after the Heart of God

God reveals to his People how much he loves them by being the pastor of Israel (*Jer* 23: 1-6; *Ez* 34). Jesus was able to say: *"I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep and mine know me; I give my life so that they may have life and have it abundantly"* (*John* 10: 1-18).

Pastoral charity is that same love of a life entirely given over for others. It is the unifying force of the life of a priest:

"By adopting the role of the Good Shepherd, they will find in the practice of pastoral charity the bond of priestly perfection which will harmonise their lives and

138. O.C. IV, 212

activity. Such pastoral charity is derived chiefly from the Eucharistic sacrifice which is the centre and root of the priest's entire life." (P.O. 14)

This is what Saint John Eudes wrote for the priests of his day in the *Memorial of ecclesiastic life* (1679):

"What is a pastor after God's heart?

He is a real father to God's people. His heart is filled with truly fatherly love for his children. That love prompts him to work unceasingly to nourish his flock with the bread of the sacred Word and of the holy sacraments, to clothe the faithful with Christ and with the Holy Spirit.

He is an evangelist and an apostle whose chief work is to preach, both publicly and privately, by word and example, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

He is an ever burning and glowing lamp: burning before God and glowing before humans; burning with love for God, glowing with charity for his neighbour.

A good pastor is a saviour and another Jesus Christ on earth, representing him, acting in his name. In imitation of the Redeemer, he gives himself his mind, heart and affections, his strength and his time, all for God. He is ever ready to sacrifice his life to bring about in whatever way possible the salvation of the souls God entrusts to him.

He is a living image of Christ in this world, the Christ who watched, prayed, preached, catechized, worked, went from town to town and village to village, suffered, died, and sacrificed himself for the salvation of all the souls created in his image and likeness." ¹³⁹

139. O.C. III, 24-31

John Eudes was that very priest he describes, consumed by love for God and filled with mercy for those in need of help. It is this concern for the poor that he mentions to the priests:

*"A priest must be a defender and refuge of the poor, the defenceless and the oppressed. He must assist them in times of need, but especially see that they are catechized and instructed in the faith. He must visit prisoners, greet the sick with great charity seeing in them members of Jesus Christ and treating them as brothers and sisters."*¹⁴⁰

The Kingdom of God comes about every day in the ordinary events and meetings of the day, the little things that become important in the eyes of God, as Saint John Eudes tells us, referring to events of his own times:

*"Building palaces, raising armies and leading them into battle, what does all that amount to? It is nothing but smoke and vanity. But teaching a child to make the sign of the Cross, providing the least bit of instruction in the faith to the least of mortals is of much greater value before God."*¹⁴¹

When he opened seminaries, John Eudes intended to form priests who would be pastors, men afire with love for God and their flock. Very much the pragmatist, but also very much a mystic, John Eudes, as is reflected in the following text, invites priests to "renew their priestly vows" on the Feast of the Presentation of Mary:

140. O.C. III, 40 and 85

141. O.C. IV, 189

*"Oh most holy and most adorable Trinity, you are the source and holiness of Christian priesthood. You are the consecration and sanctification of priests. It is by sharing in your admirable paternity, Oh Father most holy, that they are made fathers of the children of light. It is by sharing in your divine priesthood, Oh Jesus, only Son of God, that they are the sacrificers of the Most High. It is by a special effect of your infinite holiness, Oh Divine Spirit, that they are the sanctifiers of souls ..."*¹⁴²

It is interesting to note how John Eudes insists on this paternity of priests which has its source in the very paternity of God, the apostolate consisting in giving birth and forming Christ in the hearts of men and women.

We understand then, why in John Eudes' mind and based on his experience, Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, is associated with the life and ministry of priests:

*"Because priests have such a close alliance with Mary and such a marvellous conformity to the Mother of the Sovereign Priest, they have a very special obligation to love and honour her, to clothe themselves with her virtues, her spirit and her dispositions."*¹⁴³

142. O.C. III, 443

143. O.C. III, 215 and 217

IN THE LOVE OF THE FATHER, THROUGH THE SON, IN THE SPIRIT

Saint John Eudes was the prophet of Love. When he shows us the Heart of Jesus, he invites us to draw from Christ, the fountainhead of Christian life. To be a Christian is to continue today the life of Christ in us in the dynamics of our Baptism.

Faith leads us to marvel at God's Gift:

- marvel of the Incarnation: see how great the love of God is that he became man in the person of his Son, Jesus;
- marvel of our divine adoption: it was to make of us his children that God gave his Son!

"When came the fullness of time, God sent his own Son. He came as the son of a human mother so that we might become God's sons and daughters. To show that you are his children, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the spirit who cries out 'Abba, Father!' (Gal 4:4-6)"

Having learned from de Berulle, John Eudes teaches us to center our Christian life on Christ, without ever forgetting the mystery of the Trinitarian life:

"When I say that, in imitation of the heavenly Father, Jesus must be the sole object of our hearts, this does

*not exclude the Holy Spirit, since he is the Spirit of Jesus and is one with Jesus. Christ himself assured us that anyone who sees him sees the Father, anyone who honours and loves him honours and loves the Father in like fashion."*¹⁴⁴

God is but One in the mutual relationship of love of the three Persons:

*"These three Persons are constantly engaged in mutual contemplation and are perpetually occupied in an exercise of praise, love and glorification of each other. "*¹⁴⁵

All through his life Jesus reveals to us the Father he loves and who loves him as his Son. When Philip asked: "Show us the Father", Jesus replied: "Whoever sees me, sees the Father. I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no one goes to the Father except through me" (John 14:5-9).

It is through Jesus that we are able to call God "Father", in communion with the Holy Spirit who communicates to us the very Life of God. Christian life is Trinitarian because we have been baptized "in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit":

"Oh most holy Trinity, I adore you as present at my Baptism. I adore all the plans you made for me. I give myself to you, Oh divine Trinity, that those plans might be fulfilled.

Oh eternal Father, Oh only Son of God, Oh Holy Spirit of the Father and the Son, come into my heart and

144. O.C. I, 115

145. O.C. II, 165

my soul, separate me from all that is not you, draw me to you, live and reign in me and let all my being, every moment of my life be totally consecrated to your pure glory. " ¹⁴⁶

Saint John Eudes marvels at the dignity of Christians, in the joy of being called children of God. The Father loves us with the same love with which he loves his Son. He is constantly at work "forming Jesus in us", with the power of the Holy Spirit that John Eudes likes to call the Spirit of Jesus:

"The Holy Spirit was given to us to be the spirit of our spirit, the heart of our heart.

Oh divine Spirit, I give myself to you, take possession of me, guide me in all things and let me live like a child of God, a member of Jesus Christ, born from you, animated and led by you." ¹⁴⁷

Because of the mystery of the Incarnation, Mary has a unique relationship with each Person of the Blessed Trinity. Saint John Eudes composed a salutation to her that begins this way:

*"Hail Mary, Daughter of God the Father,
Mother of God the Son,
Spouse of God, the Holy Spirit..."*

Mary is the Ark of the New Covenant. She will always carry in her Heart the eternal Son of the Father.

Saint John Eudes never lost sight of the mystery of the Incarnation, the foundation of Christian life: incorporated to

146. OC. I, 518

147. O.C. II,172

Christ by Baptism, we live of the same Life with him, that Life which comes to us from the Father and is communicated to us by the Holy Spirit who joins us in saying: "Abba, Father!" (Rom 8:16). This, indeed, depicts what our Christian life is all about, the life in the Spirit.

This Life which is already given us to live in Christ will never stop astounding us, nor will we ever stop helping people discover that hidden Treasure: "The Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21).

"Come, **Lord** Jesus!"

**UNIONE DI NOSTRA
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