
« LIVING WITH THE HEART » (2)



In my 2001 pastoral letter I wanted to look back on the pastoral year, with the spirituality of Saint John Eudes as a backdrop. This year we are celebrating the saint's four hundredth birthday, and it is a good idea to consider what he wrote on the Christian life.

HIS LIFE CONTINUED

So focussed was he on Jesus that John Eudes discovered that Christian life consisted in being an extension of Jesus' own life. In the following text he gives us his perception, his deep conviction regarding the Christian life. More than the writer, what comes out is the apostolic preacher who instructs and teaches:

Jesus, Son of God and son of man, King of men and of angels. God, 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 [Christ] in the most intimate union possible, comparable to the link there is between members and their head. Spiritually, we are united to him by faith and by the grace he gave us at holy Baptism. Bodily, we are united to him by the union of his most holy body with ours in the Blessed Eucharist. 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, clothe ourselves 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, religion and devotion which he had on earth. [The Kingdom of Jesus, in Lectionary Proper to the Congregation of Jesus and Mary. Charlesbourg Québec 1989, p. 32]

A keen student of Holy Scripture, St. John Eudes repeats the same ideas using Gospel passages:

This proposition is based on the sacred words of the one who is Truth itself: «I am the Life. I have come that you might have life. I live and so will you. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me and I in you» (Jn. 14:6, 10:10, 14:19-20). In other words, just as I am in my Father, living of his life that he communicates to me, so are you also in me, 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. All these sacred texts teach us that Jesus Christ must live in us, that we must have no life but in him and that our life must be a continuation and expression of his. [...] St. Paul writes that he is fulfilling the sufferings of Jesus Christ. We can also rightly say that a true Christian, as a member of Jesus Christ united with him by grace, continues and fulfills the actions that Jesus performed while on earth by every one of the actions he performs in the spirit of Jesus. So, when a Christian prays, he continues and fulfills the prayer of Jesus; when he works, he continues and fulfills Jesus Christ's 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 fulfilment of the life of Jesus. You see that our actions must be a continuation of Jesus' actions and that we must be so many other Jesuses on earth, in order to continue here his life and work, to do and suffer everything he wants us to do and suffer in a holy and divine way, in the spirit of Jesus, that is, with the divine and holy dispositions and intentions which Jesus had in all his actions and sufferings. [Ibid, pp. 32-33, 34]

GROWTH EXERCISES

This was the basis of St. John Eudes' teaching throughout his life. In 1637 he had already published a book called *The Life and the Kingdom of Jesus in Christian Souls*. The book quickly became known as "The Kingdom of Jesus". In the book, its author condensed with penetrating clarity his ideas on Christian living, on the nature of Christian life, its basis and its complete development through practice of the virtues. If an athlete must perform specific physical exercises daily, so must the Christian perform spiritual exercises on a daily basis. John Eudes suggests spiritual exercises for each day, in the morning, during the day, and at night. His book contains "a few principal and more necessary exercises to help one live in a Christian and holy way, and to develop, sanctify, and establish the reign of Jesus among us." It was quite a challenge to recommend such exercises. *The Kingdom of Jesus* also contains "what must be done throughout life, each month, each year, each week... to live in a Christian way." Here is what he suggests at the beginning of a task:

Oh Jesus, may my work be accomplished in honour of the works you shouldered while on earth, and Oh Jesus, nothing for me, nothing for the world, but everything for you, Oh my Saviour, all for your greater glory and for your pure love. [Ibid.]

AT THE HEART OF LIFE

In a world where everything seems to go so fast, the significance which Saint John Eudes gives to our smallest actions can charge them with meaning. Hence we would be very far from the pessimistic declaration, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity" (Eccl. 1:2). All our actions, whether at school or at work, in health centres, in pastoral work, in the economy, in politics, etc. all our daily actions are an extension of the very life of Jesus. This can energise our whole days. Our "Christian practice" is to be understood and extended throughout the day and the night: even our rest extends the rest that Jesus took. St. John Eudes often uses a surprising expression: "How to form Jesus within us."

We must acquire the habit of seeing [Jesus] in all things, and having no other objective in mind than him and all his states and mysteries, virtues and actions, in all our devotions and actions. He is, indeed, 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 virtue of the virtuous, the sanctity of the saints. There is hardly any action of our ordinary life that does not find some counterpart in the actions he performed while on earth; so we must keep our eyes on his actions and imitate them when performing our own. By this means, we will fill up our understanding with Jesus, as we form and establish him in our own mind and by thus thinking of him often and seeing him in all things.) [Ibid ., p. 74]

+ François Thibodeau

+ François Thibodeau
Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (394) (18 July 2001)