

The Prophet Ezekiel speaks of the qualities necessary for a pastor to properly shepherd his flock by pointing out the failures of religious leaders in his own day and age. Today we celebrate the Memorial of Fr John Eudes who as a good and faithful shepherd tended to the many sheep needing pastoral care in 17<sup>th</sup> century France.

Ezekiel chastises the poor shepherd who does not “strengthen the weak nor heal the sick nor bind up the injured” (34:4a). John was born in 1601 and ordained a priest at the age of 24. In the early years of his priesthood, he ministered to the victims of the plague. There were severe outbreaks in 1627 and 1631. In order to prevent the plague from spreading to others in his religious community, he practiced social isolation by living in a huge barrel in the middle of an empty field.<sup>i</sup>

Ezekiel chastises the poor shepherd who does not “bring back the strayed nor seek the lost” (34:4b). Fr John Eudes was concerned for the young women who were exploited as prostitutes. As an initial step, he tried to help them find safe places to live in temporary shelters. With a prophetic voice of her own, Madeleine Lamy, a caretaker at one of the shelters, challenged him to do more. “Where are you off to now? To some church, I suppose, where you’ll gaze at the images and think yourself pious. And all the time what is really wanted of you is a decent house for these poor creatures.”<sup>ii</sup> Taking to heart the need to do more, Fr John Eudes helped to found a new religious community, the Congregation of Our Lady of the Refuge. 400 years later, the order still serves the needs of troubled girls around the world.

“The word of the Lord came to me: Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel” (Ez 34:1). Like Ezekiel, Fr John Eudes recognized that the clergy were lacking in education and he set out to improve their training through good seminary formation. He founded a religious order for men, the Congregation of Jesus and Mary dedicated to promoting good seminary training and forming Christlike priests.<sup>iii</sup> Fr John Eudes’ advice to those studying to be priests applies equally to any Christian:

“Our wish, our object, our chief preoccupation must be to form Jesus in ourselves, to make His spirit, His devotion, His affections, His desires and His disposition live and reign there. All our religious exercises should be directed to this end. It is the work which God has given us to do unceasingly.”<sup>iv</sup>

Fr John’s own seminary formation had been as an Oratorian which placed an emphasis on public speaking and preaching. He traveled far and wide throughout the region of Normandy offering over 100 parish missions. In France, he was known as the greatest preacher of his era.<sup>v</sup>

John Eudes is also known as the Apostle of the Two Hearts, the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. His writings stressed Jesus as the source of holiness and Mary as the model of Christian life.<sup>vi</sup> To help those whose understanding of the critical role of the Blessed Virgin was not as strong as his own, Fr John explained:

If the Church shows respect and veneration for everything that came in contact with the Savior’s Body: the cross, the nails, the thorns, the winding sheet of His burial shroud, the swaddling clothes of His infancy and similar things – what honor must be due to this venerable body of the Blessed Virgin from which the Body of the Redeemer was formed!

This saint’s love for the merciful Hearts of Jesus and Mary spilled over in mercy for all of God’s flock.<sup>vii</sup>

Like Saint John Eudes, we too are called to see in Jesus and Mary examples of how we may live our lives for others so that only goodness and kindness will follow us all the days of our life; and we shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come (Ps 23:6).

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<sup>i</sup> franciscanmedia.org/saint-john-eudes/

<sup>ii</sup> loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/saints/saints-stories-for-all-ages/saint-john-eudes/

<sup>iii</sup> Loyolapress

<sup>iv</sup> anastpaul.com/2017/08/19/quotes-of-the-day-19-august-the-memorial-of-st-john-eudes-apostle-of-two-hearts/

<sup>v</sup> Franciscanmedia

<sup>vi</sup> Franciscanmedia

<sup>vii</sup> taylormarshall.com/2011/08/apostle-to-prostitutes-todays-saint.html