

Tribute to Father John Eudes Bamberger

“I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.” (Jn 15:15)

The Beloved Disciple, John puts words to what I view as the supreme definition of friendship. I was fortunate to experience something much more than just glimpses of the qualities of friendship, I believe, inspired by God, with this teacher and guide, Fr. John Eudes.

It was easily 30 years ago that I wandered into the Abbey. Not long after that I became aware of who was Abbot and responsible for much of the Monastery as we see it today. That person was Fr. John Eudes. As time went on, I arranged my work schedule so that I could listen to him teach retreatants at Bethlehem retreat house many Thursday afternoons. There was a young woman that would come to these teachings each week and promptly set up a tape recorder at his desk. This would be Minh, and as with any person that demonstrated a longing for God, Fr. John Eudes respected and encouraged her journey.

Immature in my spiritual journey, I was enamored with Father’s grasp of the spiritual life and the humanity of people. I was often puzzled though, as without warning during his talks, he changed subjects and with great intensity spoke about quantum theory and other more technical, scientific topics related to outer space. He lost me quickly, and I frequently made up a story that one of the guests in our group asked a question that challenged his intellect, so he sent us into space. Not only was he intelligent, he was not bashful to show you. An example of this was the known fact that Fr. John Eudes studied foreign languages as a teenager. He shared that by the time he was 15, he had accomplished 8 college hours of 3 languages. Most likely his success as Secretary General of the Cistercian Order, World Wide was the result of his acumen. Interestingly at that time I also discovered that he and my birth father shared the same birthday - day, date and year. They also had shared history of enlisting in the US Navy to serve our country.

Encouragements and nudging came over time for me to consider the monastic life. However after a number of years, I committed my life to my now wife, Penny. Fr. John Eudes often reminded me of the woman with whom he was engaged to marry, and that they both agreed to devote their lives to eternity of time with God, and both joined religious orders.

I reconnected with him in 2016 after accepting a job as a bread store clerk in the Abbey Store. We often greeted each other quietly and casually as we passed in the hallway as he was on his way to meet people for various reasons. Then one day the following year I was looking at a sign up sheet for the sacrament of Reconciliation, on a desk just outside the store entrance. It was not a desk I spent much time at. After playing basketball for many years while attending school I became keenly aware when someone was in my proximity even though I couldn’t see them, and someone was standing right behind me. I glanced right and then left to see if there was a doorway to escape from and then the question came.....in his low, gravelly, voice, distinguished in character and smoothly delivered, “Why don’t you come to confession today?” A bead of sweat immediately formed on my forehead, and my throat became tight. Fr. John Eudes led me to a cubicle-sized room with no ventilation. It was a typical day in the summer 85 degrees here and high humidity. It was even hotter in my chair. Those of you

reading this won't know the outcome of the Sacrament of Reconciliation I received that day, however, know that he was praying for me before it was over. In fact, he prayed with me and for me many times after this.

Providence arranged, later I became a nurse's assistant and had the grace to care for him in the Abbey Infirmary. When I would say my own grace before eating my meal after serving him food, he would bless our food and tell me that my food was blessed twice (after he prayed and pastorally made the sign of the cross over it). He also invited me to pray the Divine Office with him on many occasions.



He taught me to be dependent on God in a unique way. Fr. John Eudes maintained that you could challenge someone to grow if you were diplomatic about it. His second act of diplomacy with me took place about the third week that I was assigned as his personal health aide. I walked into his room and without warning he informed me that I could stand to lose 30 pounds. Many responses came to my mind. None of which I replied in words to him. I smiled and thanked him for his advice. "Impossible!" was the word stuck in my head. About 3 months later, two or three major issues in my life converged at the same time. As if the winds of time shifted, I realized God was calling me at a deeper level to depend on Him. For consistent everyday reminders of this, I chose to change my practices with food. Portion size was reduced, and there was no eating between meals. The hunger I experienced reminded me of a call to faith and I eventually looked forward to it. I lost 40 lbs in this process.

Fr. John Eudes was motivated to engage in life with God. He absolutely loved to pray in the Abbey Church. He told me one day that he would be happy if he died in Church. His attitude and often words at 3:00am were "*Lets get going!*" as he was waking up for Vigils. Paradoxically he was aware when he needed to just rest where he was, which was with God. "*Please leave me alone as I need to be alone*", a request made two days before he died.

Fr. John Eudes was a beautiful man and a man that I loved dearly. I was humbled with grace beyond compare to be able to take care of him. Secondly, I was humbled with grace beyond compare to be one of the seven that were praying around his bed when he took his last breath. I consider this the most sacred of spaces to be in. So this is what I want you to know Fr. John Eudes~ You taught me well with patience, loyalty and a measure of enlightened wisdom, gifts from God. You accepted me as an equal and at the same time as a son. To me ours was a friendship like none other. Thank you for your Friendship!

Love,
Charlie
February 11, 2021



p.s. Today, February 12 there is a new thin space next to where my car is parked. Somehow a cross has appeared on a tree!