

What makes a good quarterback?

It's funny enough that Reverend Father John Eudes Bamberger never spoke much about himself. The sincerity of his relationships was not dependent on his many great accomplishments, which he would accredit to God alone—aside from his handsome visage and his football career, for which he was as proud as the humblest of monks could be.

Like a time capsule preserved from Scete, Father John Eudes embodied the very essence of the desert life—a simple theological rubric with a seemingly infinite vastness and depth. With a heart and mind focused on God, he was and is continually a pillar of faith. He lived his vocation with every action. For this reason, it is impossible to not speak of Father John Eudes in accordance with *The Rule of Saint Benedict's* second chapter: "The Qualities of the Abbot". Father John lived as one who shows what is *good and holy more by example than words*¹. The simplicity of his heart in juxtaposition with the breadth of his soul, he would *show equal love to everyone*. A balancing of symbiotic yet opposing forces, an expanse of practical understanding and self-knowledge, Father John was among many things, director of souls. As "*more will be expected of a man to whom more has been entrusted, Father John must [have] know[n] what a difficult and demanding burden he has undertaken: directing souls and serving a variety of temperaments, requiring him to be stern as a taskmaster and yet devoted and tender as only a father can be. As anyone undertaking the charge of souls must be ready to account for them*¹, Father John did not take his vocation lightly. Radiating love and brightness, yet an ability to speak directly to one's heart with intensity; the joy of the gospel message in harmony with all of its solemn reverence.



Speaking of an individual in such a way is part of the story. To quote Evagrius Ponticus, the concept of ascetical life is described as *the spiritual method whose aim it is to purify the part of the soul that is the seat of the passion*². It can be found in the question Father John would often ask: *why not live for eternity?* To be read as: not to live for self-gratification and worldly standards, but instead to live for something greater than the self—eternity. It was a selfless embrace of Christ's doctrine where Father John Eudes

sought to empty himself for the sake of others. It was, in part, through renunciation that he was able to be wide open and to transform those whom he met—in his community and otherwise. This simple message, *why not live for eternity*, embodied the essence of everything previously mentioned. The simplest message, direct and to the point, yet with an endless depth; a path of joy, yet with a liberating heaviness; the loving advice and wisdom that is so difficult to hear, because it forces one to look within; the simple truth of the gospel in all its fullness.

Father John would share that quarterback story often in his final days. The beauty is that his life is so wonderfully reflected in it. A good quarterback renounces all distractions in order to train and prepare, that he may better serve his team as a whole; a good abbot does the same, where the team is the monastic community; a good monk does the same, where team is the soul, a good Christian does the same, where the team is the world. To use the analogy more specifically, as a spiritual father and director of souls, Father John knew where the man was going to be. In spite of all obstacles, undistracted and against all odds, Father John would throw the ball ahead of the man and always be able to meet him at that very point. He knew where and how to direct people closer to God, in order that they may share in the faith he so humbly radiates.

To close with a personal anecdote from Father John's final days in the hospital. Having been on a respirator for several day, the tube was being removed, Father John's first words were, as I remember them, *by the grace of God*. In literal context, this being that he was alive another day by the grace of God. This acceptance in spite of his condition—the simple idea that because God had willed him another day, so it was another day offered up for God.

If you offer it up to God, every day is a blessing. – Fr. John Eudes Bamberger

Matthew Reid
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References:

1. Fry, Timothy. "Chapter 2. Qualities of the Abbot." *The Rule of St. Benedict in English*, The Liturgical Press, 1981, pp. 21–25.
2. Ponticus, Evagrius. *The Praktikos Chapters on Prayer*. Translated by John Eudes Bamberger, Cistercian Publications, 1972.