

## **ST PETER JULIAN EYMARD ON OUR APOSTOLATE**

A Christian organisation was lacking in Paris, i.e., an organisation for the First Communion of Workers.

Scarcely old enough to work, the poor children are farmed out to factories to gain a few pence, raised later to ten, then later to a whole franc, that helps to alleviate hunger and to pay the forty francs weekly rent.

If there are no vacancies in the button or paper factories, etc., the child with his little basket sets out morning or evening to rummage for rags in the city. How many children are at this point in Paris?

Like withered plants which lack air and light, these poor children carry on their faces the evidence of their privations.

It would be something if religion compensated for their bodily lives! But alas, it is even worse.

The little worker does not go to the church to learn to know, love and serve God; their parents do not speak of these things; they have been raised in the same way, or poverty has made them disreputable and has brutalised them.

Paris has its foreign mission territory, its nomads, having no religion other than the cult of the dead. How many children remain unbaptised, knowing neither church nor priest? How many illegitimate and temporary living together! What religious benefits can come from this?

Nothing equals this Paris of misery and indifference! As a consequence of this how many workers will grow up without making their First Communion? A young man who has not made his First Communion falls victim to the first evil encountered.

In addition, marriages are contracted without the sacrament because the parties have not made their First Communion. What would become of such a union? What will become of this young man, without religious principles, without faith or love of God? He will become dissolute, a thief, a revolutionary. What happens to a ship without sails or rudder? To search out these young men, to get hold of them in the evenings as they leave the factories (it is impossible to have them in the daytime, they have no time); to instruct them with the basic principles of religion, and to give them the parish catechism, since they can't go to the parish church. This is the most important work of the Religious of the Blessed Sacrament. When this idea was first presented for approval to Mgr. Sibour [The Archbishop of Paris in 1856] he cried out in joy: "This organisation I am lacking in Paris!"

For the last eight years [1856-64] the Society of the Blessed Sacrament has dedicated itself heart and soul to this work and has had the consolation of presenting 100-150 young workers at the Eucharistic banquet and for the sacrament of confirmation each year.

### **Eymard's Method:**

Setting up this work was fraught with difficulties. We began with very few candidates and for two years the work languished. It was eventually decided that a visit to the factories and workshops in the Fontainebleau, Maison Blanche, Petit Montrouge and Plaisance areas would help and bear some fruit, as would a visit to the ragpickers of the Mouffetard areas.

As a result some thirty young workers handed in their names and promised to come to catechism classes at the rue du Faubourg-St Jacques 68.

The hour of the *rendez-vous* came; the priest [Eymard himself] waited and waited for them; the time passed and he was still alone.

The little savages had, however, assembled in the street but were afraid to come in. The priest went out to them, speaking to them kindly; he encouraged them and they decided at last to come in.

There inside you had a curious laughable sight. They looked at the priest as if they had never seen one before; several of them even began to make fun of the affair. The priest, in their midst, told them how pleased he was to see them and how happy he would be to prepare them for a good Holy Communion. He had not finished speaking when the older boys burst out laughing and ran away. The others, be it from example, human respect or fear, jumped to their feet, shouting and looking about to see if they were being followed.

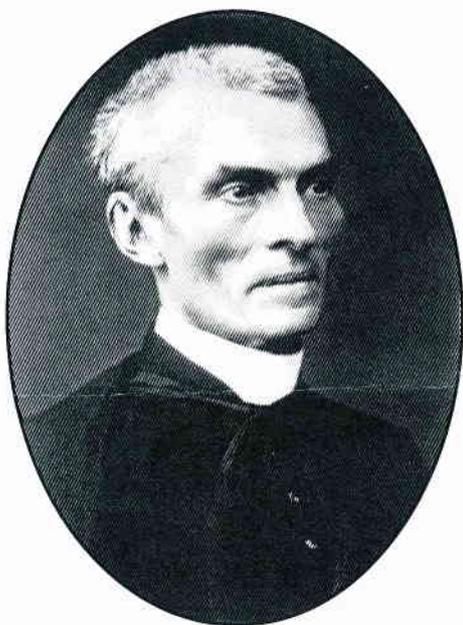
The religious remained alone. What was to be done? To accept this meant the work was a failure; it was no use to wait for them, they would not come back. He knelt down, commended himself to God and the Blessed Virgin, and went out.

The priest tried to join the boys, but the more he approached the more they ran away. He was however able to join several of the younger ones. "Come children," he said. "I wish you no harm; I want to give you a beautiful medal, and get to know you; you will find that you will be quite happy.

They came back. The others crept back slowly close to the walls, and from the doorstep watched what was going on. The priest waited. He invited them to return to their seats, and there you have it, all returned...

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(Lack of space prevents us from including the rest of Eymard's description. You will find the entire document in Don Cave's *The "Writings" of St Peter Julian Eymard 1811-1868*, pp. 495-498)



St Peter Julian Eymard



Mother Marguerite Guillot SSS