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'Study the Blessed Sacrament' The life journey of Pere Peter Julian Eymard **Sister Madeline Grace, CVI** The Priest

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Few individuals know the quest of their life journey at an early age. St. Peter Julian Eymard was one of those unusual persons who was gifted with a great love of the Eucharist at an early age. He was born in 19th century France, in 1811, in the small town of La Mure, at a time when reception of the Eucharist was not that frequent. The fourth child of his father's second marriage yet the first child of that marriage to survive infancy; he was indeed loved by his mother and father.

His desire for the Eucharist is conveyed in the childhood story when his older half-sister could not find five-year-old Peter Julian. Going down to the local church, she found him sitting on the top rung of a stepladder behind the altar, his head resting against the tabernacle. Upon asking what he was doing there, he responded, "Saying my prayers." When she questioned his position, Peter Julian simply responded that he could "listen to Jesus better from here."¹

Greater than the listening was the desire of the heart, for he longed to receive his First Communion. This devotion toward the Eucharist stayed with Peter Julian for the remainder of his life. Despite obstacles from his father and poor health, he pursued a priestly vocation.

Weak Health

Even though his father desired that Peter Julian help him maintain the family business, he consented to his son's entrance into the Oblates of Mary Immaculate novitiate. However, weak health drove him home in three months. Subsequent to his father's death, the young man pursued a diocesan priestly vocation, despite the fact that his true desire was to join a religious order. He was ordained in Grenoble in 1834.²

Initially, his bishop was very sensitive to Peter Julian's health. Therefore, on his first assignment after ordination, he was sent to the parish of Chatte in the district of St. Marcellin. There, the pastor possessed an equal sensitivity to his health. He became known for his zeal in his priestly ministry, specifically in the hearing of confessions and daily Mass. When he found people scattered around the various chapels for daily Mass, he would say, "Come, take your place before the Blessed Sacrament."³ He was known for giving everything to the poor. The housekeepers were always concerned about the essentials for the rectory.⁴

However, this sensitivity toward his health found within the bishop and first pastor did not endure in his priestly life. On his second assignment at Monteynard, the parish, which had a dilapidated church and poor rectory, consisted of a farming community with few people attending Mass. In fact there had not



HERE'S HOW.

been a regular pastor there for some time. The bishop urged Father Eymard's two sisters to move with him to the rectory which they did. In fact, they furnished the rectory, for the parish was very poor. Having been so generous previously with the poor, the new pastor moved into this parish with eight cents in his pocket.

Later on, when the call to religious community became so readily apparent to Father Eymard, he decided to join the Marists. His two sisters were quite devastated as they had dedicated their lives to serving him. It was a difficult separation for all of them. He had served five years as a parish priest.⁵

A Marist

Father Eymard has left notes behind of his years with the Marists. He writes of his years as head of a boarding school when he judiciously chose a bedroom next to the chapel. He made an aperture in the wall so that he would be able to see the tabernacle from his bedroom. He related in his own notes, "As it is forbidden to take one's rest in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, at night I will place an opaque covering over the opening and will fasten it to the wall with a padlock."⁶ When Father Eymard showed this ingenious achievement to a priest friend, the friend's face just lit up because he knew that he too could make many visits to the Blessed Sacrament in this manner.⁷

During his 17 years as a Marist, Father Eymard served as provincial superior and rector of the College of La Seine-sur-Mer and organized the Third Order of Mary. He attempted to promote his devotion to the Blessed Sacrament within the Marists. However, his desire to establish a separate fraternity promoting adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was not seen as part of the charism of the Marists.⁸ This ultimately led him to the vocation for which he is so readily known, that of founder of the Society of the Most Blessed Sacrament.⁹

This Congregation was dedicated to perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, as well as preaching of the Forty Hours, First Communion of Adults and retreats.¹⁰ Father Eymard established a common rule for the members of the society and worked toward papal approval, obtained in 1858 from Pope Pius IX.¹¹

Father Eymard found that the new Congregation was slow in coming by way of membership and a home. His need for monetary support was one motive which led him to preach in various parishes in Paris. He always limited himself to a "study of the Blessed Sacrament." He prepared his sermons very carefully. He would write down his thoughts in logical order and then would go into adoration of the Blessed Sacrament to allow the preparation to come to fruition within him. "For there I knead the dough, and let it bake in the Eucharistic oven."¹²

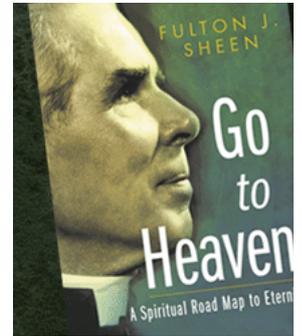
A Society of the Blessed Sacrament

One hour of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament was of more value than a morning of study. Father Eymard normally kept his hour between noon and 1:00 p.m. as he found fewer interruptions then. When individuals asked whether he ever got "stale" on that topic, he responded. that he depended on the Holy Spirit for that.¹³

Father Eymard had previously worked with a Ladies' Adoration Society in Toulon. At their insistence, these ladies moved to Paris, with the hope that a Society of the Blessed Sacrament would be established for women. Father Eymard chose as president of the Society Miss Marguerite Guillot. She had been a spiritual daughter of Father Eymard for years.

Originally seen as a secular association of women, six years passed before the Society was formally recognized as a religious community. They followed the rule written by Father Eymard. On the feast of Corpus Christi in 1864, they received their official title as Servants of the Blessed Sacrament.¹⁴

Father Eymard's ministry was directly connected with Forty Hours Devotion and Perpetual Adoration.¹⁵ Much of his preaching was done in connection with nocturnal adoration societies. At Marseilles, he established what he referred to as the third branch of the Society, the People's Eucharistic association,



which fostered Eucharistic adoration among the laity.¹⁶ The founder was happy to see these groups take on leadership roles in the International Eucharistic Congresses.

Father Eymard's letters and sermons convey a great concern about adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Regarding private piety, he pointed out that there is nothing greater or holier that we can do than Eucharistic adoration. We unite ourselves with Mary, the saints and noble souls on earth. It is the holiest of actions as it is the perfect exercise of all the virtues. Naturally, he always preached that the celebration and attending of Mass is the greatest of all prayers.

The Perfect Exercise

Father Eymard goes on to point out that we should always begin our Eucharistic adoration with an act of love. This beginning brings joy to the soul. "If you begin with yourself, you will stop half way; or if you begin with any virtue other than love, you are taking the wrong road."¹⁷ On the other end, when one brings one's Eucharistic adoration to a close, thank Him for the reception of His love. Ask forgiveness for distractions, offer Him a flower of virtue, a practice of sacrifice. Leave the Church as if it were the Cenacle, that is, as if one were leaving the throne of God to carry out His divine commands.¹⁸

Father Eymard further designed a method of mental prayer used at the time of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament which he referred to as "Mental Prayer according to the Four Ends of the Sacrifice." He is quick to point out that one should choose the method most conducive to one's own needs before the Lord. For those just beginning, he perceived these four ends -- adoration, thanksgiving, propitiation and supplication -- as the means of uniting the individual to Christ.

Ask Your Guardian Angel

The founder urged individuals to unite their praises to the heavenly court. Among his recommendations:

If one finds difficulty, invoke the assistance of your guardian angel. Unite oneself to the adoration of the pious souls on earth, and the angels and saints in heaven. Adore the Father through the Son. Thank the Father for the Son. Thank the Spirit for continuing to bring Christ to our altars each day. One must include in one's prayer reparation for the sins of the world -- we are called to the foot of the cross not only in thanksgiving for the gift of redemption, but also to pray for forgiveness for the sins of the world.¹⁹

Propitiation should be of two kinds: that of honor and that of mercy. Christ is more offended in His sacramental state than He was in His Passion, for in the Eucharist He is denied by those who know Him. He was crucified by hired executioners. And yes, we pray for the forgiveness of sins and the salvation of the greatest sinners. ²⁰ Our prayers of intercession are offered in union with Christ to the Father.

What should one pray for? Those who have fallen away from the faith, and those who have never known Christ are in great need of prayer.²¹ We pray that the crucified love of Christ move the hearts of hardened sinners.²² The leadership of our Church and heads of state should always be included. If new to adoration, establish a holy hour. Lastly, we pray for ourselves, that we remain in a "perpetual state of prayer by never losing sight of the greatness of his needs and of the greatness of the divine bounties."²³

Father Eymard recommends giving 15 minutes to each of these "ends of sacrifice." He saw this method as moving one toward a perfection in Eucharistic prayer as he described the mission of the adorer before the Blessed Sacrament:

Thus adorers at the foot of the Most Blessed Sacrament carry on a universal and perpetual mission of prayer, continue the divine work of propitiation, offer to God ardent and unceasing thanksgiving, adore Him with their whole being, through all beings, through all graces, and thus render to Him the most perfect homage He can receive from a creature.²⁵

'Prolongation of the Incarnation'

Father Eymard writes extensively of the richness of the Eucharistic sacrifice and preparation for reception of the Eucharist. He describes the Eucharist as the "prolongation of the Incarnation."

The celestial wheat-grain is planted in the womb of Mary; it will grow and ripen; it will be ground to make the Eucharistic Bread. So inseparately are the Incarnation and the Eucharist united in the divine plan that the words of St. John may be rendered: "The Word was made Bread."²⁶

Within the Gospel narrative, the angel announces the mystery of the Incarnation and waits for Mary's consent. The angel who calls us to the Eucharist is the priest. God asks of us a purity of heart and a deep humility. We are called to be faithful, humble and confident. God will do the rest. Father Eymard's conviction in the fruitfulness of the Eucharist is so pronounced that he preaches: "The Eucharist will make you accomplish more in one day for the glory of God than you would in a whole lifetime passed without it."²⁷ We say with Mary "Fiat." At the moment of reception of Communion, the Eucharist becomes the prolongation of the Incarnation.

The founder gives great emphasis in his writings and sermons to preparation for reception of the Eucharist. He reminds his congregations that if we knew the gifts and virtues which Communion brings to us, we would continually long for it. Preparation is of two kinds: that of the body and the soul. The body naturally refers to fasting but also an appropriate appearance before the Lord. Preparation of the soul looks toward freedom from serious sin but likewise recollection and a fervor in prayer. Our love for the Lord ought to make us ready to receive Him in the Eucharist. This love can be aroused through the fourfold purpose of the Sacrifice.²⁸

If one is to be induced to eat, one must be hungry. The keener one's hunger for the Lord in the Eucharist, the more profitable is one's Communion. This hunger is placed in our hearts by God himself. "If you are not growing spiritually, if you are not becoming stronger, you are not eating enough, or else you are eating without appetite."²⁹

Father Eymard's notes provide retreat talks for several different groups, whether religious or lay.

Virtue of Humility

In one of these retreats, he points out that the special and characteristic virtue of adorers is humility. If one does not possess humility, one will not remain pure very long as pride fills the soul. Pride dissipates virtue and prevents consistency.

As the founder of the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament states:

You will be in your Eucharistic grace only through humility. That virtue is the dowry of love; you have need of it to go to our Lord; with every other virtue you can be personified and fix your attention on yourself; by humility you disappear, in order to let our Lord alone show himself.³⁰

Allied to this virtue of humility is simplicity. Father Eymard described it as the "form of humility and its garment; it is that poverty of spirit beatified by our divine Master."³¹ Simplicity is seen as a characteristic of holiness while duplicity is one of the principal signs of spiritual decadence. This virtue enables a person to deal with God in confidence leading toward a sense of abandonment toward God's will.³²

Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament is the principal patron of the Congregation of the Fathers of the Blessed Sacrament and the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament. Father Eymard chose to write a meditation for each day of the month of May centering around an event in the life of the Blessed Mother and relating the event to the Eucharist. Mary is imaged as praying in the Cenacle.³³

Cenacle in Jerusalem

During the latter part of Father Eymard's life, he desired to buy back the Cenacle in Jerusalem from the Turks to turn the Cenacle into a house of adoration for the Lord. He sent two members of the Society to

Jerusalem on the feast of the Epiphany in 1864 for that very purpose. That mission turned out to be unachievable as the Islamic forces believed that King David was buried underneath the Cenacle.³⁴

Father Eymard also devoted an entire month of meditations to St. Joseph because he considered Jesus' foster father to be the most perfect example of an adorer of the Word made Flesh.³⁵

Beyond his ministry of perpetual adoration, the founder gave special attention to First Communion of poor children and the sanctification of priests. He was especially concerned about the veteran priest and thus planned a house of retirement, a "cenacle" in which the priests were to be the guests of the Congregation, without being subject to all the demands of community life. He viewed these two works as the Society's way of ministering to the "poor and the rich."³⁶

Father Eymard lived a scant 57 years. The demands of ministry continued to tax his weakened health. Those who recognized his holiness readily called upon him for spiritual direction. He preached his last sermon in the chapel of Montparnasse in Paris. These last words may be seen as summarizing his entire teaching:

We believe in the love of God for us. To believe in love is everything. It is not enough to believe in the truth. We must believe in love, and love is Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. That is the faith that makes our Lord loved. Ask for this pure and simple faith in the Eucharist. Men will teach you; but only Jesus will give you the grace to believe in Him. Come and receive Communion in order to have the strength of faith, not merely the satisfaction, the feeling of faith. You have the Eucharist, what more do you want?³⁷

Father Eymard entered into his eternal adoration of the Eucharist, Aug. 1, 1868. By 1868, he had established for the Blessed Sacrament Fathers seven houses in France and two in Belgium, in addition to a cloistered contemplative congregation for women, the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament, and a lay group, the Blessed Sacrament Confraternity. He was beatified July 22, 1925 and canonized Dec. 9, 1962.³⁸

Yet the mission of St. Peter Julian Eymard continues on through the example of his life, writings and intercessory prayer, pointing to the Eucharistic Christ who raised him to be His herald that all may know, love and serve the Lord and find in Him that sanctity which leads to eternal happiness.³⁹

Three months before his death (in May of 1868), Father Eymard provided that road map to eternal life in a letter written to Edmee Brenier de Montmorand:

Nourish yourself on our Lord, on His spirit, His virtues, His evangelical truth, on the contemplation of His mysteries. Do not leave Him. He said: "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, everything that you want will be done." . . . In everything you do, discover the bread of life of Jesus. . . .

Be happy when Jesus shows you the reason for His goodness, His love, His virtues, even, or rather, especially for the trials and sacrifices which He imposes on one He loves. . . . study, study our Lord, and try to understand Him to discover His secrets, the motives of His heart.⁴⁰

St. Peter Julian Eymard has furnished a roadmap that is certainly current for today's world!

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2 Roy, J., "Eymard, Pierre Julien, St." *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2002 edition.

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4 Dempsey, 35.

5 Roy, "Eymard, Pierre Julian, St."

6 Dempsey, 96.

7 Dempsey, 96.

8 Roy, "Eymard, Peter Julian, St."

9 Now know as Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament; See Michael O'Carroll, C.S.Sp., "Eymard, Saint Pierre Julien," *Corpus Christi: A Encyclopedia of the Eucharist* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1988).

10 Dempsey, 117.

11 Dempsey, 161.

12 Dempsey, 186.

13 Dempsey, 186.

14 Dempsey, 150.

15 O'Carroll, C.S.Sp., "Eymard, Saint Pierre Julian," *Corpus Christi: A Encyclopedia of the Eucharist*.

16 Dempsey, 173.

17 Father Peter Julian Eymard, *In the Light of the Monstrance* (Cleveland, Ohio: Emmanuel Publications, 1947), 181.

18 Eymard, *In the Light of the Monstrance*, 182.

19 St. Peter Julian Eymard, *In the Light of the Monstrance*, 183-191.

20 St. Peter Julian Eymard, *Eucharistic Handbook: For the Members of the People's Eucharistic League* (Cleveland, Ohio, Emmanuel Publications, 1948), 160-164.

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24 Father Peter Julian Eymard, *In the Light of the Monstrance*, 183-191.

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26 Father Peter Julian Eymard, *Holy Communion*, Clara Morris Rumball, trans. (Cleveland, Ohio: Emmanuel Publications, 1940), 58.

27 Father Peter Julian Eymard, *Holy Communion*, 60.

28 Father Peter Julian Eymard, *Holy Communion*, 6.

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30 St. Peter Julian Eymard, The Eucharist and Christian Perfection, Part I, Mrs. Amy Allen, trans. (Cleveland, Ohio: Emmanuel Publications, 1948), 274.

31 St. Peter Julian Eymard, The Eucharist and Christian Perfection, Part II, Mrs. Amy Allen, trans. (Cleveland, Ohio: Emmanuel Publications, 1948), 208.

32 St. Peter Julian Eymard, The Eucharist and Christian Perfection, Part II, 208-209.

33 For this month of meditations, see St. Peter Julian Eymard, Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament (Cleveland, Ohio: Emmanuel Publications, 1930).

34 Dempsey, 225-231.

35 For this month of meditations, see St. Peter Julian Eymard, Month of St. Joseph (Cleveland, Ohio: Emmanuel Publications, 1948).

36 Dempsey, 198.

37 Father Eymard as quoted by Dempsey, 261.

38 Roy, "Eymard, Pierre, Julian, St."

39 Dempsey, 280.

40 From the Life and Letters of St Peter Julian Eymard, 2171 as quoted in "Eymard. . .In His Own Words," Emmanuel 106:10 (December, 2000), 621. TP

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