

The Life and Letters of Saint Peter Julian Eymard

Translated and arranged chronologically
by Sr. Catherine Marie Caron, S.S.S.

General Introduction to Saint Peter Julian Eymard — His Life and Spirit

Peter Julian Eymard was born in the French Alps on February 4, 1811. He lived very close to the church, and his mother would take him there every day for visits to the Blessed Sacrament.

Even at an early age, he was sensitive to spiritual things. However, it was to be a long, long journey before Peter Julian could finally realize his vocation to spread a love for the Holy Eucharist in the church of France and found two religious congregations and an association for the laity.

Although he always wanted to become a priest, the way was not easy. His own father bitterly opposed his vocation and Peter Julian began studying Latin in secret. After the death of his father, he was free to follow his vocation. He entered the seminary for Diocesan priests at Grenoble, and at the age of 24 he was ordained a priest on July 29, 1834.

He was sent to the town of Chatte as Assistant Priest, and three years later became the Pastor at Monteynard, where he was greatly loved by the people. After two years among them, every parishioner received Communion at Easter time.

During the time he had assistant at Chatte, an event had occurred which marked his spiritual life very profoundly. While he was spending an afternoon of prayer, he was overwhelmed by a sense of the goodness of God. He referred to this event until the end of his life. Meanwhile, his desire for the religious life kept haunting him. He was attracted to the newly-founded Marist Society and sought permission from his bishop to join it.

He held many positions in the Marist Society. While he was serving as Provincial, he was asked to carry the Blessed Sacrament through the streets of the city of Lyons on the feast of Corpus Christi. During this two-hour procession, he confided

all the needs of the church, of France, and of the world to Christ the Lord. This was another important moment in his life. He wrote in his private notes: "Since the beginning of this month, I feel a very strong attraction towards the Eucharist. It was never so strong before. This attraction impels me to bring everyone to love our Lord, and to preach only Christ and Christ in the Eucharist."

One day, as Father Eymard was praying in the chapel at the shrine of Notre Dame de Fourvière, he was strongly moved by the spiritual needs of priests and religious. He was also struck by the fact that all the mysteries of our Lord's life had religious orders to honor them. The Holy Eucharist alone, the greatest of mysteries, was without its own religious group to honor and glorify it. There should be one. From then on, he was haunted by the call to work for the Eucharist.

Little by little, he came to consider the foundation of two congregations, one for men and the other for women — the Congregations of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers and Brothers, and the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament — destined to make the Eucharist the center of their life and spirituality, to adore the Blessed Sacrament perpetually exposed and spread the fire of Eucharistic love to all. He wanted this grace to extend to the laity as well and inaugurated an association for them.

Having consulted the Holy Father to know whether such a work would receive his blessing, he also consulted three bishops in Paris to know whether the idea came from God. He received a favorable answer from both quarters and he left the Marists to begin this Eucharistic work.

With only one companion, he began exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in Paris in 1856. Many of those who had promised to come did not do so. Two years later, he invited Marguerite Guillot and a few other women to join them to begin the women's branch. Marguerite Guillot, his principal collaborator, had been guided by him for many years in the Third Order of Mary, while he was with the Marists.

Fr. Eymard began his two Congregations in the midst of great difficulties of poverty, loss of credibility, rash judgments, and misunderstandings. Nevertheless, when he died, the Blessed Sacrament Fathers and Brothers were located in Paris, Angers, Marseilles, and Saint Maurice in France, and Brussels in Belgium. The sisters numbered 60 and were located only in Angers, after failing in their efforts to establish a new foundation, which had caused Fr. Eymard many heartaches.

Fr. Eymard was a friend of the poor and the lower classes of French society. During the French revolution, he visited the jails and the workers in their factories. They made it a point to protect him from danger, recognizing him as a friend. In Paris, he began an apostolate among young uneducated workers, providing them with opportunities to learn catechism and make their First Communion.

He died August 1, 1868. On July 12, 1925, Peter Julian Eymard was beatified by Pope Pius XI, and on December 9, 1962, at the close of the first session of Vatican II, he was declared a saint by Pope John XXIII. The pope spoke the following words on that occasion: "Follow his example, place at the center of your thoughts, your affections, your zeal, this incomparable source of all graces, the mystery of

faith which hides under its veils the very author of graces — Jesus the incarnate Word."

SPIRIT

The spirit that Saint Peter Julian spread around him was a spirit of love, a great love for the Holy Eucharist, a love which is transforming and flowers into generous self-giving and service. His goal was to allow Christ to live in him and become the new self within. "I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me."

He focused especially on the love in the heart of Christ at the moment of the institution of the Eucharist, a love that reaches down the centuries to each one of us. Saint Peter Julian felt that the spiritual life is summarized in love which imitates Christ's self-giving.

For him, the Eucharist was the "now" mystery of Jesus, the mystery that sums up all the others. Theology expresses that understanding in the words "covenant" and "memorial." "Having loved his own who were in the world, He loved them to the end." These words from the Gospel of John were a constant inspiration to Saint Peter Julian. This love for the risen Christ giving himself continually as food, as body broken, as blood poured out for the life of others, was the unending subject of his contemplation. He taught a method of prayer that flows from the Eucharist, that is, adoration, thanksgiving, reparation, and petition. His prayer was an extension of the Mass. He was truly a man ahead of his time.

Emphasizing the loving goodness of God, he encouraged frequent Communion as remedy to our spiritual poverty. He prepared the way for the decree of Saint Pius X allowing more frequent Communion. Placing the Eucharist at the center of the Christian life, he paved the way of a spiritual renewal centered on Eucharist which came to flower in Vatican II. Our understanding of the Eucharistic presence of Christ is enriched with a deeper sense of community, as a sacrament of liberation from sin, as a call to personal transformation and communion among believers.

Saint Peter Julian Eymard, the priest of the Eucharist, a man on fire with love for our Lord, stands before us as a contemplative and an apostle of the Eucharist and opens our understanding to a warm, Christ-centered spirituality that is fed at the banquet of the Lord.

THE HISTORICAL SCENE

The following is an excerpt from *Vita Eucaristica e Vita Religiosa* (Eucharistic and Religious Life) by Manuel Barbiero, S.S.S., Verona 1991, an excellent summary of the social and historical events of this period.

"During the lifetime of Saint Peter Julian Eymard (1811-1868), political, social, cultural, and religious events in France intertwined themselves with a steady and pressing rhythm."

"The following events occurred on the political level: from the fall of the Napoleonic Empire (1814) to the Bourbonic Restoration with Louis XVIII and Charles X (1815-1830); from the revolution (1830) with constitutional monarchy or bourgeoisie of Louis Philippe (1830-1848) to the Paris revolution (February 22-24, 1848); from the Second Republic (1848-1851) to the coup d'etat of Louis Bonaparte (December 2, 1851) with the birth of the Second Empire under the same Louis Bonaparte who became Napoleon II (1851-1870)."

"The transformation of France was also taking place on a social level, from a 'rural country' — the farmers represented about 90 percent of the population at the beginning of the nineteenth century — to a country which set out to fulfill, so to speak, the 'industrial revolution.' Under the push of industrial growth, a huge displacement of people took place from the interior of the land, from the countryside to the cities with the consequent birth of a new social reality; the working class, the proletariat, the suburb; the 'social problem' was born tied to the poor conditions of workers; including the sad situation of child labor."

"On the cultural level, a struggle also rose up against illiteracy, creating clear divisions between those outside the cities and among the social classes. The state's responsibility for schools and the various laws underline how slow progress was on this point. In addition to the difficulty in creating public institutions, there was also that of printing and the progress of communications."

"On the religious level, the situation was still more complex. After the unexpected disaster of the revolution, the church made an effort to restructure and recuperate lost land, to reorganize Dioceses, rebuild the clergy, strengthen itself in education and restore religion."

"The signs of the revolution remained, however. They accentuated a process of de-Christianization that was already in course in numerous regions. It left the clergy divided, undermined the Gallican church, and contributed to the new climate."

"These surprising events cost the religious institutes dearly: the religious life was destroyed by the revolution, because it was thought to be in contradiction with its own spirit. It was seen as opposed to Napoleon, who thought it useless; and yet, in an uncertainty due to a lack of legal security, the religious life developed and multiplied with the same spontaneity as in the 1200s and 1500s."

"During the nineteenth century, France was a nation in which the Catholic religion was a religion of the state: it had become a nation in which the greater part of the French were Catholic. At the end of the century, it declared itself to be a nation of separation between church and state."

It is in this social and cultural upheaval that our saint found his way of spirituality. His own faith was unwavering, and he became a firm anchor for many in a stormy sea.

The Letters of Saint Peter Julian Eymard

Translated from the French
by Sr. Catherine Marie Caron, S.S.S.

To translate the thoughts of a saint is an awesome task. The risk of losing a profound intuition in the literal translation of words is ever-present. But the risk is worth effort, nonetheless, in the hope that English readers will be able to benefit to a degree which would otherwise not be possible.

For the first time, the letters of Saint Peter Julian Eymard are being presented in English, and for the first time in any language, they are being presented chronologically. The purpose is an attempt to reconstitute the life and letters of our Founder in as close a combination as possible. This will be as close to an autobiography as we can obtain posthumously. The originals show a remarkable flexibility of relationships. He adjusted to every person. His use of vocabulary, style, and form vary sometimes very sharply from one person to the next. It is hoped that this characteristic has not been lost in the translation.

Here and there between the letters, biographical information is inserted to help place the letters in their context of life and events. Over 2,100 letters have been taken from five published and three unpublished collections, reorganized chronologically, completed with footnotes, and interspersed with a chronology of events and a list of topics taught in retreats and conferences.

To read Saint Peter Julian's letters is to get to know him from within, and to find a friend and spiritual guide. The trivial details of daily life transport us to the lifestyle of the 1800s in a France beset by class struggle and revolution. We find a man who befriended every class of society. I pray that all readers will discover in Peter Julian Eymard the man, a friend. and a saint with whom to study, learn, be guided, struggle and teach.

Saint Peter Julian Eymard's Small Book of Prayers

From the *Life and Letters of Saint Peter Julian Eymard*,
Volume 1: *The Early Years 1828-1852*.
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S.S.S.

EVENTS 1823-1824
**March 16, 1823 – Passion Sunday. First Communion
received from Fr. Allard.**

Before his First Communion at the age of 12, Peter Julian composed a small book of prayers. Although this is not a "letter," it is the earliest handwritten document that we have of his, and is reproduced here as a fitting introduction to the voluminous correspondence which was to flow from his pen in the ensuing years.

Little Book of Acts Before and After Communion

Written by me, Julian Eymard

Renewal of Baptismal Vows

I believe in God the Father almighty,
the creator of heaven and earth,
in Jesus Christ his only Son, both God and man,
who redeemed the world by his cross.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the remission of sins,
the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.
Amen.

I renounce with my whole heart the devil,
his pomps and his works.
I want to live and die as a true Christian,
with the help of God's grace.

Act Before Communion, of Faith, of Adoration

My dear Jesus,
I firmly believe that your body, your blood,
your soul, your divinity
are truly and substantially present in the blessed host
which I am going to receive,
because you told me so.
I adore you with all the respect of which I am capable.

Act of Hope, of Humility

My dear Jesus,
I hope that when I receive you,
you will increase your grace in me in this world,
although I am unworthy of it.

Act of Love and Desire

My dear Jesus,
I love you with all my heart and above all things,
I long to be one with you.

Act of Petition

My dear Jesus,
abide in my heart.
Never leave it.
Remove from it whatever displeases you
and place in it whatever pleases you.

Act of Thanksgiving (Petition) after Communion

My dear Jesus,
I thank you for the grace
which you have given me
that you have come to dwell in my heart.

Act of Offering

My dear Jesus,
I give myself to you
as you have given yourself entirely to me.

End of Acts.

These acts are mine.
My name and last name are Julian Eymard of La Mure.
My God, my all. Julian.

Deus fecit mundum de nihilo.
God made the world out of nothing.

Julian P. Eymard.

June 30, 1828, letter from Saint Robert to his sister asking her to inscribe him in the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin at La Mure.

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**TO MME. NATALIE JORDAN (née BRÉNIER DE MONTMORAND)
(VIII 1/IV 75) DOC. 0601**

Saint Peter Julian often referred to Mrs. Jordan as "my eldest daughter." Born in March 1810, she outlived Fr. Eymard who directed her personally from 1846 and by

correspondence from 1850-1868. He appointed her as Directress of the married women's branch of the Third Order of Mary.

Both were born in the Dauphine Region of France and were proud of their common roots. They were close in age, conviction, feelings and ideals. On a visit to Lyons in 1865, Fr. Eymard told her that they were sister-souls going through the same stages of the spiritual life together. He kept her informed of the principal events in his life and visited her and her family in Lyons and Calet when he could do so. He also corresponded with her daughter Mathilde and her niece Edmée de Montmorand.)

**Rue d'Énfer
Paris**

June 26, 1856

All for the love and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Blessed Eucharist.

Madame and very dear sister in Mary,

I was very grateful that you remembered me. Union in God has no vicissitudes whether in form, time, or circumstances. The soul has no state, no life other than the will of God. You understand me — the name changes nothing. (63)

Here I am then, devoted and consecrated to the realization of a beautiful project (64), that of creating for Jesus Christ in the Blessed Eucharist a guard of honor of faithful adorers, so that the King of Heaven may have, like kings of earth, a court of devoted hearts. Perpetual adoration is to be made by the Religious of the Most Blessed Sacrament, in conjunction with the Associates in the world who will come to give a few hours of the day or the night to the exercise of adoration.

Love does not stop there. It needs zeal. Fire ascends, spreads, and would consume everything. Religious of the Most Blessed Sacrament are consecrated to the Eucharistic ministry, 40 hours preached in parishes, First Communion retreats — and the work of the First Communion of adults, as well as the aggregation for adoration. So you can see that there is only one idea (65); though the scope is vast, the focus is always Eucharistic.

As befits the things of God, the little Society of the Most Blessed Sacrament is beginning in poverty and simplicity. It is (like) the grain of wheat which is first buried in the ground, then germinates, grows and bears fruit. . . . The essential thing for us is to have the blessing of God — and to be faithful to his grace; and so we have great need of prayers — that is the first alms of charity.

Thank you, dearest daughter, for your gift to the new cenacle. May God reward you infinitely. It is beautiful stone for our new little chapel, and from which Jesus will send forth his rays far and wide. As for the beautiful altar cloth that you are so kind to embroider, our altar, in Roman style, will not take lace wider than 10 to

15 centimeters. The length of the table is 2 meters 63 centimeters, the width 88 – the height of the altar from which the cloth is to hang is 90. If only you were in Paris! You could come and see for yourself and pray in this cenacle! We place you at the feet of our Lord – you, your dear husband, and your children.

The Society of the Blessed Sacrament is founded outside the Society of Mary – the two cannot go together – and the members must not be Marists. That much is clear. You realize how much we need God to really choose the pioneers who will begin the work. Several priests, and good priests, must come to join us.

What a new disappointment for you, dear daughter! Certainly the position of councilor would have been the very best. God hasn't willed it for some greater good. We must adore his adorable designs.

When you write to your dear daughter, (66) please remember me to her. One of these days I shall write her.

63 Change of Congregation

64 French: *pensée*.

65 French: *pensée*.

66 Mathilde Giraud-Jordan

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**TO COUNT JEAN RAYMOND DE CUERS (FR. DE CUERS, S.S.S.)
(1 82/181 VI 4) DOC. 1022**

Paris

March 11, 1861

Dear and kind Father,

I received your dear letter and its contents. Everything will be faithfully fulfilled.

Truly! The devil of theft is after us! I think that the daughter has to imitate the mother. (51) There is nothing to gain with thieves. You did well to bring it to a close, but you have to go to Aix! Oh! we should be used to it by now!

I am waiting to be called before the justice of the peace. I wrote to Michael about it. He may pay dearly, as he will have to give an explanation for that note for 500 francs. May God help us!

The status quo of our house under compulsory sale could take two, four, or six years, if the city doesn't meet our hopes. Sometimes that saddens me, because our chapel cannot remain like this. Let's wait for God's time.

Is this a door for Lyons? I believe so. I've just received a letter from a holy priest I know. I like it, I like the work of First Communions. It's the royal work of the Eucharistic wedding. In Lyons, it would be beautiful! We need a work to go together with adoration.

What do you think of that letter? I still haven't told anyone anything.

Our new cook left us, because he didn't know what to say at adoration, and he couldn't get up like the community. When he told me that, I told him that he wasn't in the right place and that we don't keep strangers.

Br. Charles is working in the kitchen, and so am I. They liked my cooking *very much* ; I forgot to put *salt* in the soup.

We have an aspirant who is a good adorer.

Thank good Fr. Leroyer. I will include the "Eucharistic Weeks" in the Manual, it's progressing. I am working like a Trojan.

My intention would be to give a little white cord as an insignia and sign of the Aggregation. What do you think? And what does Fr. Leroyer think of it? The cord is symbolic and is in the spirit of the church.

You tell me nothing about the dimissorial letter. Has the bishop not sent it yet? Write to me right away. If there is a delay, we still have time.

I am wholeheartedly yours, dear Father,

Eymard

P.S. Arras has asked again with the same conditions as on May 1st, and I answered: "*Sint ut sunt, aut non sint.*" (53) No concessions!

51 Marseilles was robbed as Paris had been.
52 Fr. Chévrier of the Prado.
53 "Let them be as they are, or not at all."