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The Vocational Call of the Laity in Service to the Church

Our ideal is to live the mystery of the Eucharist fully and to make known its meaning, so that Christ's reign may come and the glory of God may be revealed to the world.

In response to our baptismal vocation we seek to witness to Christ's presence at the Crossroads of society and, starting from the Eucharist, we strive to influence our world in the light of this mystery, source and summit of all evangelizing.

Rule of Life for Associates (ROLA), 2

**Associates of the
Blessed Sacrament
Initial Formation Program**

The Vocational Call of the Laity in Service to the Church

1. Opening Prayer

Leader: We stand before you, Holy Spirit,
aware that we gather in your name.

All: Come to us, remain with us, and enlighten our hearts.

Leader: Give us light and strength to know your will,
to make it our own, and to live it in our lives. *Refrain - All*

Leader: Guide us by your wisdom, support us by your power,
for you are God, sharing the glory of Father and Son.
Refrain - All

Leader: You desire justice for all; enable us to uphold the rights
of others; do not allow us to be misled by ignorance or
corrupted by fear or favor. *Refrain - All*

Leader: Unite us to yourself in the bond of love
and keep us faithful to all that is true. *Refrain - All*

All: As we gather in your name, may we temper justice with love,
so that all our discussions and reflections may be pleasing
to you, and earn the reward promised to good and faithful
servants. We ask this of you who lives and reigns with the
Father and the Son, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

[Adapted from the prayer used before every session of the Second
Vatican Council.]

Scripture Reading: *John 1:35-39*

Prayer for the Gift of Self (Adapted from *Rule of Life*, 102)

All: You number us among those who hear the voice of your call, loving Father, to live the paschal mystery, to interiorize it in prayer, and to share with others the life that springs from it.

May the love manifested in Jesus Christ and celebrated in the Eucharist inspire us to respond to your gift of love with the gift of ourselves.

Accompany us on our journey and may our hearts burn within us in the proclamation of the word and the breaking of the bread.

In your ever faithful love and trusting in the intercession of Mary, the Mother of the Word made flesh, and of Saint Peter Julian Eymard, apostle of the Eucharist, we ask you for the grace to persevere throughout our life in living the gift of ourselves as we serve Christ and our sisters and brothers.

Grant that we may build up a world founded on justice and love so that the reign of Christ may come and your glory be revealed to the world. Amen.

2. Introduction to the Theme

Reflecting a long history that dates back to the founder, Saint Peter Julian Eymard, the laity share the vocational call to take an active role in the mission of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament: *“We invite all people to that communion with God, which we celebrate in the Eucharist. We collaborate with men and women of good will toward the building of a world of justice and solidarity. We are ready to assume lay ministries in liturgy, in sharing of faith, and in the pastoral structures of the church.”*

Rule of Life for Associates (ROLA), 12

3. Eymard . . . *In His Own Words*

“The divine flame needs a little activity...there are no limits or degrees for the love of God, the gift of self, personal self-denial. We must die daily and be like the sun, which always rises as if it were the first time that it is obeying God, and follows its course until its setting. Live especially in the divine Eucharist. I will grant you the first blessings. I have just had the form printed for the aggregation. I am sending you the first copy; you will be my eldest from Paris.”

To Mme. Marechal
March 1, 1866

“Continue to grow in the knowledge and love of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the purpose of time and eternity; it is life; it is happiness in exile. To succeed in it, become a disciple of prayer; prayer is the golden chain which binds us to God, it is the hearth of the divine flame, the nourishment of the inner life.”

To Mme. Natalie Jordan
January 1, 1853

4. Bible Text

“I urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love. Striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Living the truth in love, we should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body’s growth and builds itself up in love.”

Ephesians 4:1-6, 15-16, NAB

6. Teaching – drawing on the following reading

- Excerpt from *Emmanuel* article by Peter J. Riga.

The Vocational Call of the Laity in Service to the Church – Key Points

- The Bible is a collection of vocation stories. It narrates the many ways in which God has spoken to people throughout time, and has promised to be with them to carry out the work of salvation in making God’s message known to others. God speaks in deeply personal ways to individuals, yet the gift of each vocation is for the good of all the people. Vocation entails a response to God in serving others with the gifts that God bestows.
- God penetrated the heart of Saint Eymard with a profound insight into the transforming force the Eucharist could be within the church and society. He formed two religious congregations and an aggregation of laity to unite by means of eucharistic prayer and apostolic service to address the religious ignorance and indifference people had toward the Eucharist. Consider the situations that challenge society and the church in our time and allow the charism of Peter Julian Eymard to stir your heart into flames.
- The renewal taking place within the church’s identity as the “*People of God*” situates our primary vocation in the sacraments of initiation (baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist), out of which flows the mission of the Church to teach, worship and evangelize. There is found a richness in the living of our Christian life when it is rooted in “*eucharistic attention*” to the world around us. As lay associates of the Blessed Sacrament we feel the call to center our lives on the Eucharist and lead others to appreciate the fullness of God’s love in the Eucharist.

Reading

Eucharistic Lives by Peter J. Riga

We know that the Eucharist is at the heart of Christian life. To celebrate the Eucharist is to remember the gift that Christ made of his life. It is also to celebrate the victory of love over death on the paschal evening. Finally it is to receive Christ as nourishment, thereby letting him live, grow, and act in us. By all of these manifestations, we are incorporated into the work of the resurrection.

What happens in the Eucharist, what it signifies and renders present, cannot be confined to a particular moment. The celebration in itself manifests at a precise moment the whole Christian vocation, all that must be deployed in our life. It is our whole being that is called to become the body of Christ; it is our whole life which is called to be Eucharist. But what does this mean concretely?

Our Whole Existence

There are two risks today. *The first risk* is one of closure. On the one hand, our life is filled with work, commitments, serious demands, negotiations, even moral ambiguities with which we must deal regularly; and, on the other hand, there is God, faith, convictions, religious practice that we often confine to a moment or two in the week. There is no communication or connection between the two – as if the domain of religious convictions had nothing to do with real life. As if God had nothing to say about our everyday cares and concerns!

The second risk is a variant of the first. The world can be a fearful place and not a good spot for us; the risk then exists of a flight to a spirituality which becomes dis-incarnational—where all that is important is our intimate relationship with God. Clearly to give priority to God, and the desire to experience his love and his comforting presence, are desirable and legitimate goals provided we not flee our human condition and responsibilities. We must not forget that Christian existence is total human existence. Our whole existence in its totality must be orientated by choices in conformity with the imitation of Christ.

We should recall that where the synoptic gospels recount the institution of the Eucharist, John's Gospel proposes the incident of the washing of the feet, by which Jesus is revealed as master of a community of service (Jn 13:1-20). Christ at the heart of the Eucharist demands that we follow him in a similar life fashion. It is in the service of men and women that the eucharistic mystery is accomplished: "Do this in memory of me" are commands that accompany both the Eucharist and the washing of the feet.

On his part, Paul declares unworthy of the Christian community any participation in the Supper of the Lord in the context of division and indifference to the poor (1 Cor 11:17-22 and 27-34). This dimension of service and our presence to the other can take on various forms in our lives. Our union with Christ is true only because we are united to all men and women. Christ directs us without ceasing to be present to our sisters and brothers.

To Orientate Our Days

To help us to have "eucharistic attention" in the totality of our lives, we can begin by stopping periodically to remember what God does and has done in our lives. God is present there; he acts. Do we see this? Just as the disciples on the way to Emmaus on that first Easter night, we are invited to reread our daily lives to discover how we were really never alone on the route of life. We just don't realize God's continuous presence.

Such a view naturally leads us to give thanks—which is the very translation of "Eucharist," a term that replaced "the breaking of the bread" by the second century. It is a question of the movement of our entire being which recognizes the one who brings us life; and we thank him for it. This life given is manifested through multiple gifts, happy events, protection, and sustaining, every blink of our eyes, which are so many manifestations of the love of God for us. Every movement, every moment, is a gift of grace.

Each day God brings about in us, as well as in the world, his work of life. At every moment, God desires to associate us with that work. That relates us to the meaning of our existence: do we desire to follow Christ, to imitate him, to also enter into that movement of true life of which we and the world have such great need? The offering of our existence is our response to the offering of Christ to us. We bring ourselves to the Eucharist in order to make our lives eucharistic.

We are not all called to give our life in the same way Christ did, but we must really give our lives to others. And the way each person lives this following of Christ, the commitment and fidelity by which we choose to love and serve, remains for each of us within our own intimate and personal choices. They do not always appear brilliantly and sometimes remain unsuspected even by those closest to us. To give ourselves to others each day in the most ordinary tasks—which are often repetitive, boring, and humble—is not always glorious and visible, but something which permits the mystery of love to irrigate the whole world. We are “hidden in Christ.”

It is in really going all the way in this gift of ourselves that our lives will become more and more eucharistic, more and more the body of Christ, more and more self-giving, more and more love.

Thinking About The Eucharist

- *Our attitude toward life shapes the world around us and colors our relationships. God calls us to celebrate our lives each day, to be mindful of the sacred presence within the ordinary, and to see that our lives are lived in gratitude for all that we receive.*
- *The celebration of life and the celebration of Eucharist are one in the same. When life is challenged with hardships and disappointments we know that we bear the sacrifice, as did Jesus, with love and joy for the glory of God and the good of others. Then our lives are offered on the altar.*
- *Eucharist is lived in love and seeks to let others share in the blessings we receive from God. The bond of unity is realized as others can connect with the values the Eucharist brings into our lives.*

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7. Closing Prayer

All: Yes, Lord, I come.
Thank you for your invitation.
I bring you my *self* – my gifts, my foibles,
my joys, my sorrows,
all the things I do well; and, all my sins.

(Pause for a moment of reflection)

I bring you my work, my vocation, my avocations.
I bring you my family life, my friendships – all my
commitments.

(Pause for a moment of reflection)

I bring you my successes and accomplishments, my love,
my life. I sing your praise.

(Pause for a moment of reflection)

I come to hear your word
and learn what it means to live like Jesus,
love like Jesus, serve and give like Jesus.

(Pause for a moment of reflection)

I come to receive your body and blood.
I take you into my humanity
so that you may lift me up into your divinity.
I learn to adore you
with the angels and saints.
I cry Glory and call you holy.
May all nations and peoples adore you,
especially me . . .

(Pause for a moment of reflection)

I come before your tabernacle
 and feast in your presence.
 In prayer I learn how
 my heart hungers and thirsts for you.
 “O God you are my God, for you my soul thirsts.”
 “He feeds us with finest wheat.”
 In your eucharistic presence I discover
 that you have set a banquet for me.
 My heart overflows. Amen.

8. Additional Reading Material

- Bevens, Steve, SVD “The Church’s Mission in the Third Millennium: Religious and Lay Partnership for the Future.” *Emmanuel*, January/February 2004.
- *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*. Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 2005. Online: <http://www.usccb.org/upload/co-workers-vineyard-lay-ecclesial-ministry-2005.pdf>.
- John Paul II. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *The Vocation of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World (Christifideles Laici)*. (30 December 1988. Online: http://vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_30121988_christifideles-laici_en.html).
- Second Vatican Council. Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (18 November 1965). Online: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html.
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, especially numbers 898-902, 905

Prayer in Honor of Saint Peter
Julian Eymard

Gracious God of our ancestors, you led Peter Julian Eymard, like Jacob in times past, on a journey of faith. Under the guidance of your gentle Spirit, Peter Julian discovered the gift of love in the Eucharist which your son Jesus offered for the hungers of humanity. Grant that we may celebrate this mystery worthily, adore it profoundly, and proclaim it prophetically for your greater glory. Amen.

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