

## IX

# Saint Peter Julian Eymard's Commitment to the Laity and His “Project of Life” for Lay People



## SESSION IX - Part 1

### *NOTES FOR PARTICIPANTS*

#### **A note about the “Aggregation” as envisioned by Father Eymard and how the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament views their lay partners today**

We are reminded by Father André Guitton, SSS, that in 1862, a pamphlet on the Aggregation listed among the main eucharistic works envisioned for lay associates:

1. To teach Christian doctrine to uneducated children and to adults who have not made their first communion.
2. To be dedicated to the work of holy viaticum, which consists in preparing persons for the reception of the last sacraments.

In addition to assisting him in his ministry of preparing workers and the little “rag-pickers” for their First Holy Communion, Father Eymard hoped that each associate would “give a few hours of the day or night in the exercise of adoration,” and “inspired by the eucharistic life of the society, share its goal, according to the limits of his duties of state, and become an active participant in all its merits and in all its spiritual graces.”

At the end of his retreat in Rome in March 1865, Father Eymard expressed his dream for his followers, religious and lay associates:

“But shouldn’t we have both contemplatives and apostles in the society, both adorers and firebrands, since our Lord wants this *Eucharistic fire to set the world ablaze?* Who better than religious of the Blessed Sacrament can and should spread it everywhere and make our Lord known, loved and adored everywhere?”

In the Provincial Superior’s office in Cleveland hangs a picture of Father Eymard entitled “The Unfinished Eymard.” It is a portrait painted by Father Daniel Roach, S.S.S. in his early twenties. He never finished the painting. The busyness of ministerial life took over and late in his life he confided that he struggled to fully capture the essence of this great saint. This picture is the one used as the cover for this Course of Study, “Saint Peter Julian Eymard: When Eucharist Becomes Life.”

Perhaps the painting is a poignant metaphor for the unfinished work of Saint Eymard, the Apostle of the Eucharist. An Associate of the Blessed Sacrament is “inspired by the Eucharistic life of the society, share(s) its goal, according to the limits of his duties of state, and become(s) an active participant . . .” in the mission of the congregation.

So how does congregational leadership view the “Aggregation” today? What do they expect of its associates who make a promise to be disciples of Saint Eymard? In a word, the same that is expected of the professed religious, live a Eucharistic spirituality: *celebrate the mystery of the Eucharist worthily, adore it profoundly, and proclaim it prophetically.*

The **Purpose** of Session IX-Part 1 is to look at the origins of the Lay Association (Aggregation) that Father Eymard first envisioned as early as 1856 and how the Congregation now views the Associates of the Blessed Sacrament.

## Session Nine - Part 1

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#### INVITATION TO PRAYER

*Leader:* Let us put ourselves quietly in the presence of the Lord.

*We take a few minutes to silence our minds and prepare for prayer.*

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

*All:* Lord, you gave us companions on our journey,  
as you gave them to Saint Peter Julian Eymard,  
sharing the same charism and enriching us  
with their enthusiasm and their lives.  
Give us an open heart, ready to serve  
all whom the Spirit leads to the Eucharist.  
May our mutual encouragement  
speak of your kingdom.  
Teach us how to help one another  
with respect, humility and generosity  
as we bring our charism to life.  
Amen.

#### TEACHING: Key Points

- At the very origin of the founding of the Society of the Blessed Sacrament, we see that Father Eymard wanted to associate non-religious members to his Institute, priests as well as lay faithful. According to P. Giuseppe Vassalli, SSS, as early as 1856, Father Eymard “had thought of the idea of the Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament, laypeople included in a unique project, dedicated to promote the knowledge and worship of the Eucharist, as the source of spiritual renewal in the Church and society.”
- “Lay associates” were involved in Father Eymard’s ministry to prepare adults and youngsters (“rag pickers”) for First Communion. This, according to Father Anthony Sweeney, SSS, writing in the forward to the 1992 edition of Father Pelletier’s *Tomorrow Will Be Too Late*, involved going into areas on the outskirts of Paris “where neither police nor clergy would dare to set foot. . .”
- The Aggregation received its canonical status in Marseilles France in 1859.
- Father Vassalli further notes: “The Aggregation, as conceived by Father Eymard, was certainly born as an association of adoration; however, it went well beyond many other associations of the time. Through an intense Eucharistic piety, the Saint of the Eucharist aimed at the formation of *the entire life* of the associate.
- The task today for this iteration of the “Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament” is to discern how lay associates can be “lay partners” in carrying forth the mission of the Congregation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Saint Eymard *In His Own Words*

### REFLECTION (Saint Peter Julian Eymard)

The following quotes of Father Eymard are taken from:  
*Work for the First Communion of Workers* (1864 – 1865)

In order for Father Eymard to start a new religious community, he needed the permission of the archbishop of Paris. In a chance encounter with Archbishop Marie-Dominique Sibour on May 13, 1856, Eymard set forth his hopes for the new congregation. What delighted the archbishop was the fact that Father Eymard was not proposing just a contemplative community of adorers (there were many adoration movements in France at the time), but rather a new congregation that linked the eucharistic celebration with catechesis and missionary action, principally the preparation of poor young workers for their First Holy Communion.

Father Eymard knew that he could not do this arduous work alone. He reached out to a friend of his from Lyons, a Louis Perret. This was in 1858. He invited him to share in this work, describing it in this way:

“Looking for the young workers, catching them at night as they leave the factories – because it is impossible during the day, since they have no time;... teaching them the basic foundations of religion and thus filling in for the parish catechetics which they cannot attend; this is the special work of the religious of the Blessed Sacrament.” (62)

“Tomorrow begins the retreat for the little rag-pickers. God gave us the gift of the ultimate work of charity ... What a ministry! I would not trade it for worthier causes. They are the little princes of the Eucharist whom we have sought out of the gutter.” (62)

The help of Mr. Perret was indispensable, as was the assistance of a group of volunteers from the Saint Vincent de Paul Society.

Here is how Father Eymard described the young non-catechized workers for whom he and his associates would spend so much time:

“Barely able to work, the poor children of Paris are placed in factories to earn a few pennies ...; this helps to buy a little bread for the poor family, and to pay the rent of forty cents a week. If there is no room in the factories . . . the child takes a small sack and goes rag-picking in the city. How many hundreds of children are like that in Paris” (60).

Mr. Perret continued to assist Father Eymard with financial assistance for the poor children who had no other support. In a letter to Mr. Perret, dated August 20, 1860, Father Eymard wrote:

“You are using your wealth wisely, since it is the wealth of the poor of a wonderful God. Thieves will never come to steal it.

“I was moved to tears upon seeing these poor abandoned children of the street, almost all of whose parents had no religion, and unfortunately, even worse than that. They were praying with such fervor, and approaching the holy table with striking reverence. Nothing is impossible to the grace of God and the charity of Jesus Christ!”

From the beginning, Father Eymard desired to associate non-religious members to his community. (As a Marist, he had founded a Third Order group of laity.) In a letter to Cardinal Morlot, archbishop of Paris, in October 1857, he listed among the members of his newly founded group, two types of aggregation:

1. “The aggregation of priests ...
2. The lay aggregation composed of faithful living in the world and who wish to be united with the society in a fraternal bond and share its goal.”

A few months earlier, Father Eymard had written to Mme. Jordan, a lay woman associated with the newly formed religious community:

“Perpetual adoration must be done by the religious of the Blessed Sacrament in coordination with the associates who are in the world who will come to give a few hours of the day or night in the exercise of adoration.

“Love does not stop there; it must be zealous ... there is only one idea, but the scope is vast. The focus, however, is always eucharistic.”

June 26, 1856

At the end of his retreat in Rome in March 1865, Saint Peter Julian expressed his dream for his followers: religious and lay associates:

“But shouldn’t we have both contemplatives and apostles in the society, both adorers and firebrands, since our Lord wants this *eucharistic fire to set the world ablaze*? Who better than religious of the Blessed Sacrament can and should spread it everywhere and make our Lord known, loved and adored everywhere?”

## **THE WORD OF THE LORD**

*The Leader asks one of the participants to proclaim the following Scripture passage: Luke 14:12-14.*

*The group spends a moment of silence before beginning the small group sharing.*

