

**V - Part 1**

**Saint Peter Julian Eymard  
and the Gift of Self**



## SESSION V - Part 1

### NOTES FOR PARTICIPANTS

#### Introduction to the Theme

The idea of the “gift of self” is central to the teachings of Saint Peter Julian for living one’s life centered on the Eucharist. It was first rooted in the spirituality of self-abnegation found in the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis which Peter Julian was reading during the Great Retreat in Rome. During this time of confrontation with his inner darkness, he became aware of how strong his ego was working toward attaining his goals. His retreat notes are filled with self-castigation. On the evening of February 21, he records the inspiration he received from the Lord in answer to his desire to know what God wanted of him. “*Be to Me in my sacrament what I was to my Father in my incarnation and my mortal life.*”

To love another is to keep nothing for oneself. In the Father’s love for humanity, God empties himself completely of his divinity, “[God] emptied himself, taking the form of a slave coming in human likeness and found human in appearance, he humbled himself...” *Phil 2:7*. Jesus returns the Father’s love for the world through handing over his life to death. He completely empties out his humanity by all appearance and gives himself to humanity as bread and wine, the sacrament of his love.

Eymard’s insight is a radical change from the ideas of “self-abnegation” to the “self-emptying” love found in God. We find this expressed in the words of Saint Paul, “*It is not longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.*” *Gal 2:20*.

(Reflecting on the *Retreat Notes* from the *Second or Great Retreat of Rome*, page 147.  
William Fickel, SSS)

In *Tomorrow Will Be Too Late*, (pages 104-105) Father Pelletier provides the historical context for the “great retreat” in Rome. It was his hope to open a religious house (foundation) in Jerusalem at the place, the Cenacle, where Jesus had broken bread with his disciples. He adds: “This long retreat proved as decisive for his spiritual life as the decision about Jerusalem was definitive for that foundation” (104).

Father Eymard was denied the possibility of a foundation in Jerusalem. However, he left Rome with something more spiritually powerful, the graced insight into “the gift of self.”

The **purpose** of Session V – Part 1 is to explain the historical context of Father Eymard’s insight on the “gift of self” and how he understood this idea which is so central to the charism of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament.

**Note:** The picture on page 47 shows the church and residence of the Redemptorist Fathers at Villa Caserta in Rome where Father Eymard made the “great retreat” from January 25 to March 30, 1865. It was during this retreat when he had the revelation about the “gift of self.”

## Session Five - Part 1

### Saint Peter Julian Eymard and the Gift of Self

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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:* Holy Father, may the love you manifested in Jesus Christ and which we celebrate in the Eucharist, move us to respond to your gift with the gift of ourselves.

Assist us each day to respond to the call of Jesus, your Son, who invites us to leave everything and follow Him along the evangelical path traced out for us.

May the Holy Spirit guide us to search for you and to be inspired by the Gospels at each step. Trusting in the intercession of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, and of Saint Peter Julian Eymard, we ask you, Lord, that we may persevere throughout our life in living the gift of ourselves as we serve Christ and our brothers and sisters. Amen.

#### TEACHING: Key Points

- Father Eymard founded the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament in 1856. Even at this time, the idea of the “gift of self” was germinating within him. He shared with a friend that he wanted to give himself as a gift to Christ. He told him, “My heart has always belonged to Jesus Christ. Now please pray so that I may respond to such a beautiful vocation, that, like the bread of the sacrifice, I may lose my life, my substance, my personality, to be changed into the spirit and life of Jesus . . .”
- In 1861, he further defined this gift: “Now what is the gift of self? It is a contract by which we give ourselves pure and simple, perpetually without any condition, without any self-interest, without any other reward than that of serving Our Lord.”
- On March 21, 1865, at the end of his retreat in Rome, he pronounced his vow of his gift of self.

## **Saint Eymard *In His Own Words***

### **REFLECTION (Saint Peter Julian Eymard)**

#### ***How do we return the love which Jesus Christ has for us?***

Father Eymard's faith in the Eucharist brought him to the idea of the "gift of self." Although this gift cost him a great deal of suffering (he had to give up situations of happiness and success in order to follow God's call), it did not, however, leave him with a negative spirituality. He discovered in his prayer that the Lord wanted to give himself to Peter Julian, and he asks Peter Julian to find room in him, in his innermost being. Certainly, there is the aspect of an "emptying of oneself," but in order to be filled with the Other.

During a retreat in Paris (August 1867), he wrote these notes on "the gift of oneself." This reflects the evolution of his thought that had crystalized during the retreat in Rome in 1865.

"Jesus loves you, you in particular. Doesn't he come daily to you, completely and only for you? In return, what shall we do? What Saint Paul did: he renounced his will, and offered himself for his glory; what our Lord himself did during his life ... We have said that it was necessary to consecrate to God our personality by giving him the ego which is our being, the ego which is the center of human relations, which receives praise and affection, that ego which is our natural end ... But you will say, it is very difficult to always love Jesus Christ for himself, to never seek anything for oneself. It is true it is difficult to arrive at such perfect love, and it is impossible to act always out of *actual* love. However, what I propose to you is that you give yourself to God by an act of love which embraces your whole being and your entire life and then that you act, as much as possible, in the spirit of the gift of that love ... No doubt the perfection of this gift of oneself, which would be the life and the perfect reign of Jesus in us, is never attained in this world. But why not pledge ourselves to incessantly tend toward it? 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord!' This is the formula of the gift of self... How can we correspond to that personal, individual love, which is such that Jesus Christ gives himself in his entirety to each one of us? A gift calls for a return gift: as our Lord gives himself with his graces, give him not only your works but all of yourselves ... The gift of perfect love is to love God for himself and because he merits it, even if there were no other reason for loving him... The conclusion to all this is easy to draw: the best state in which to glorify God is our actual state; the best grace is that of the moment; the law of duty is that which is inspired by love and fulfilled out of love."

August 1867, Retreat of Paris

### **THE WORD OF THE LORD**

*The Leader asks one of the participants to proclaim the Scripture passage from John 13: 1 – 17.*

**Sharing Faith**

1. Share a story or experience of when someone ministered the heart of Jesus and his love for you by making a “gift of her/himself” (or as John quotes Jesus in 13: 14) “washed your feet.”
2. Any reflections on responding to Pope Francis’ invitation: “increasing our hearts for *Mercy*?”

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## INVITATION TO MISSION

*Choose one or two practical ways you can give yourself to God; and keep a journal of your success. An example: Surrendering to the Lord in prayer by asking Him to direct my thoughts and actions this day or surrendering to the Lord by giving up “my plans” to be open to those who call upon me.*

## SENDING FORTH

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

Holy Father.

May the love you manifested in Jesus Christ  
and which we celebrate in the Eucharist  
move us to respond to your gift with the gift of ourselves.

Enable us to live the Paschal Mystery,  
to interiorize it in prayer  
and share with others the Life that springs from it.

Assist us each day to respond to the call of Jesus, your Son,  
who invites us to leave everything and follow him  
along the evangelical path traced out in our Rule of Life.

May the Holy Spirit guide us  
together with the community of sisters and brothers, to search for you  
and be inspired by the Gospels, at each step.

In your ever faithful love  
and of Saint Peter Julian Eymard,  
we ask you, Lord, that we may 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 revealed in the world.

*Conclude with the Sign of Peace*

**Note:** In preparation for the next gathering, please read pages 103 – 105 in *Tomorrow Will Be Too Late*.

**V - Part 2**

**Saint Peter Julian Eymard  
and the Gift of Self**



## SESSION V - Part 2

### *NOTES FOR PARTICIPANTS*

#### **Introduction to the Theme**

*“The greatest grace is my life has been a lively faith in the Most Blessed Sacrament (Cf. Retreat of Saint-Maurice NR 45, 3). This lively faith in the Eucharist brings him to the gift of self, our of love for Christ and the world. Although this gift cost Father Eymard a lot of suffering (he had to give up situations of happiness and success, order to follow God’s call), it did not, however, leave him with a negative spirituality. Rather, he sees this as an existential identification with the Lord (as we would say today), who wants to give himself to Father Eymard, and who asks him to find room in him, in his innermost being. Certainly, there is the aspect of an “emptying of oneself,” but in order to be filled with the Other. In mystical terms, but the gift of self, he enters into a participation in the life of the Trinity in order to radiate this shared love. All his future commitments finds their explanation here.*

We ended Session V – Part 1 with a prayer based on *Rule of Life* #102 titled, “Formula of religious profession.” This is the text:

Summoned by the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ and celebrated in the Eucharist, I intend to respond to God’s gift with the gift of myself.

I wish to live the Paschal Mystery, to internalize it in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament and to share with others the life that springs from it.

For this reason, in order to follow Christ in the way he is calling me, before you, Reverend Father Provincial and in the presence of my brothers, I, \_\_\_\_\_, make to God the annual (perpetual) vows of chastity in the celibate state, evangelical poverty and obedience, according to the *Rule of Life* of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament.

By the grace of the Holy Spirit, I commit myself to seek God with a community of brothers. I intend to take the Gospel as my source of inspiration in all that I do, and to enter into the life of the Congregation, which welcomes me as one of its members.

Trusting in the intercession of the Virgin Mary and Saint Peter Julian Eymard I ask you, Lord, in your ever faithful love, to grant that I may commit my whole life in the service of Christ and my fellow human beings.

Grant that I may work at building a world founded on justice and love, so that the Reign of Christ may come and your glory be revealed to the world. For the Kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and for ever.

The **Purpose** of Session V – Part 2 is to hear and appreciate the story of Father Roger Bourgeois, S.S.S., a Blessed Sacrament religious who has made a “gift of himself” to the Church for over 60 years.



## Session Five - Part 2

### Saint Peter Julian Eymard and the Gift of Self

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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:* Holy Father, may the love you manifested in Jesus Christ and which we celebrate in the Eucharist, move us to respond to your gift with the gift of ourselves.

Assist us each day to respond to the call of Jesus, your Son, who invites us to leave everything and follow Him along the evangelical path traced out for us.

May the Holy Spirit guide us to search for you and to be inspired by the Gospels at each step. Trusting in the intercession of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, and of Saint Peter Julian Eymard, we ask you, Lord, that we may persevere throughout our life in living the gift of ourselves as we serve Christ and our brothers and sisters. Amen.

#### TEACHING: Key Points

- The Eucharist, where Jesus Christ makes a gift of himself to us, is the essential heart of the charism of the congregation Saint Eymard founded.
- Father Eymard taught his disciples to pray and reflect on this beautiful mystery in prayer before the Eucharist, Adoration.
- Father Eymard lived an active ministerial life serving poor workers by preparing them, children and adults alike, for the reception of their Holy Communion. He often saw to it that they were provided food and clothing.
- As each Blessed Sacrament religious is called to embrace the gift of self in their own lives, we who choose to associate with the charism of this religious community, strive to discern the unique gifts that God has given us, that we might make a “gift of self” to Christ and the world.

## REFLECTION

Father Pelletier gives us a good sense of the experience Father Eymard had in coming to the spiritual revelation of the “gift of self.” He writes in *Tomorrow Will Be Too Late*, pages 108 – 109:

“Toward the end of the retreat, Father Eymard made what he described the ‘vow of his personality’ to God. This gift of his very being was the ultimate act of abandonment. All of his life he had offered God bits and pieces of himself: his good works, his heart, his will, even his failures. With the ‘gift of self’ he was now declaring his willingness that God be completely and totally in charge of his entire life and of his whole person. This gift required that he allow the Holy Spirit to transform him. From this moment he placed himself into God’s molding hands. He realized that progress in holiness depended much less on the efforts one made, as heroic as these may be at times, but rather on the intensity and the completeness with which God takes hold of the person and directs his/her life.

“For years he had lived as if progress in the spiritual life depended, if not solely at least to a major extent, on the strength of his will. Personal discipline, he had thought, was proof of a strong will and consequently of God’s strength. Now he knew that he merely had to let God take over. To place his salvation on the strength of his own will left salvation in his hands, not in God’s. With the ‘gift of self’ he would allow God to take charge of him.

“This retreat proved to be pivotal in his life as it provided him with a profound insight into the dynamics of his own soul. He had succeeded to free himself from an excessive preoccupation with individual acts of the will as a gauge of spiritual progress.”

We read in the *Rule of Life* for the congregation in Number 15 the following:

“Nourished by Christ,  
who gives himself to us totally in the Eucharist,  
we express, in our form of life, the gift of ourselves  
as it was lived and taught by our Holy Founder.”

And in Number 4 we read:

“We cannot live the Eucharist  
unless we are animated by the spirit  
which led Christ to give his life for the world.

When he proclaimed the new covenant  
by the gift of his body and blood to his disciples,  
it was out of love that the Lord gave himself up.

Sharing in this gift of himself to us,  
we place ourselves at the service of the kingdom,  
fulfilling the words of the Apostle: “It is no longer  
I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”

## **THE WORD OF THE LORD**

*The Leader asks one of the participants to proclaim the Scripture passage from Philippians 2: 5 – 11.*

### **Sharing Faith**

1. Reflecting on your life, can you remember a time or event when you felt yourself “surrender to Christ” (“emptied” yourself) [Philippians 2:7a] as a “gift of self.”
2. Share an experience over the past weeks putting into action what you chose to do after the last session.

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## SENDING FORTH

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

Holy Father.

May the love you manifested in Jesus Christ  
and which we celebrate in the Eucharist  
move us to respond to your gift with the gift of ourselves.

Enable us to live the Paschal Mystery,  
to interiorize it in prayer  
and share with others the Life that springs from it.

Assist us each day to respond to the call of Jesus, your Son,  
who invites us to leave everything and follow him  
along the evangelical path traced out in our Rule of Life.

May the Holy Spirit guide us  
together with the community of sisters and brothers, to search for you  
and be inspired by the Gospels, at each step.

In your ever faithful love  
and of Saint Peter Julian Eymard,  
we ask you, Lord, that we may 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 revealed in the world.

*Conclude with the Sign of Peace*

**Note:** In preparation for the next gathering, please read from “*May God Be Praised!*” pages 18 – 26 and Chapter IV, “A Zealous Apostle of the Eucharist” by Flavio Fumagalli, S.S.S. We also refer you to pages 131-134 in *Tomorrow Will Be Too Late*.