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# Saint Peter Julian Eymard: His Life and Mission

We are inspired by the teachings and example of Saint Peter Julian Eymard, “Outstanding Apostle of the Eucharist.” He responded to the needs of the people of his time by proclaiming God’s love manifested in a special way in Christ’s gift in the Eucharist; he encouraged the faithful to share, as associated members, in the charism and the mission of the religious congregations he founded.

Convinced that a life cannot be fully eucharistic if it is not consecrated to God and to people, he left us an example of contemplation and apostolic action.

*Rule of Life for Associates (ROLA), 3*

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

## Saint Peter Julian Eymard: His Life and Mission

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### 1. Opening Prayer

*Leader:* O Sacrament Most Holy, O Sacrament Divine.

*All:* All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.

*Leader:* Let us pray.

*All:* O God,  
you filled Saint Peter Julian with wondrous love  
for the mysteries of the body and blood of your Son.  
Grant, we beseech you, that like him,  
we may experience the richness of this holy banquet.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*Leader:* Our scripture reading is taken from the opening chapter of the Letter to the Ephesians. Let us open our hearts to contemplate the mystery of Jesus with faith and love, like Saint Paul and Saint Peter Julian Eymard.

### Scripture Reading: *Ephesians 1:3-23*

*Leader:* In May of 1845, Saint Peter Julian carried the Blessed Sacrament through the streets of the city of Lyons, during the annual Corpus Christi procession. This was a powerful experience of God's grace, leaving an indelible mark on his spirit. In his personal journal he wrote:

*“On May 25, 1845, I had the special privilege of carrying the Blessed Sacrament and I derived great benefit from it. My soul was penetrated by faith and love of Jesus in his divine sacrament. Those two hours seemed but a moment to me. How I wished at that moment to have all hearts and the zeal of Saint Paul! . . . I want to bring all the world to the knowledge and love of our Lord! I have asked our Lord for the spirit of the letters of Saint Paul, that great lover of Jesus Christ.”*

(A moment of silence or song)

*All:* Living Word of God, you entrusted to Saint Peter Julian Eymard the great desire of lighting the four corners of the world with the fire of the Eucharist. You showed him through hardships how to realize in truth this vision of love. Through his intercession, may he who suffered greatly in carrying out his mission, help us to place our talents at the service of others and to live our various commitments with joy and generosity. Set our hearts afire with your love in all we do through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

## 2. Introduction to the Theme

Father Anthony McSweeney, SSS, in his *Forward to Tomorrow Will Be Too Late*, tells us a story about “a man who was about to be thrown into the River Rhone by a band of revolutionaries but was saved by being recognized in time as a priest beloved by the poor, thence carried back to his religious house on their shoulders, draped with the revolutionary flag ...” In fact, here was “a man who was welcomed into the so-called ‘red band’ of slums which encircled mid-nineteenth century Paris, where neither police nor clergy would dare to set foot.” The man, Peter Julian Eymard, was canonized some 110 years later in 1962 by Pope John XXIII, who stressed in his canonization homily Eymard’s singular eucharistic focus:

“... Honor and celebrate with us him who was so perfect an adorer of the Blessed Sacrament. After his example, always place at the center of your thoughts, of your affections, of the undertakings of your zeal, this income-parable source of all grace: the mystery of Faith, which hides under its veils the Author himself of grace, Jesus, the Incarnate Word.”

As a diocesan priest stationed in Monteynard, France, and later as a member of the Society of Mary for 17 years, Father Eymard grew in his love and devotion to the Eucharist. By the time he founded the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament on May 13, 1856, Father Eymard believed that:

- A healthy church life demanded that the Eucharist be in the center.
- Catholic lay women and men should have fuller access to spiritual writings.
- The laity should be involved in Eucharist-centered catechesis.
- Adoration as a prayer of his new congregation and of the church should take its inspiration from the liturgy.
- The love of God experienced in the Eucharist should be the center of a Christian spirituality.

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

“We have known the charity of God’ (1 John 4: 16). To believe in love is everything! It is not enough to believe in truth; one must believe in love. The love, that is, that our Lord Jesus Christ shows in the Blessed Sacrament. It is by living faith in the Eucharist that we return Christ’s love for us. Pray for a simple and pure faith in the Eucharist. People may teach you the subtleties of its dogma, but Jesus alone can give you belief in it. Come and receive not only its consolation, but be strengthened in faith. Yes, here is the Eucharist! What more do you want?”

Saint Peter Julian Eymard in his last sermon

### 4. Bible Text

I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me.

Galatians 2:20, NAB

## 5. Conversation – tell us your story

- The story of Saint Peter Julian Eymard – in the words of Father Pelletier – reveals a “life, if not filled with contradictions, is at times enigmatic and reveals an elusive personality ‘scarred’ by failures and disappointments but also full of courageous new beginnings.” (13) Can you relate to this statement in any way? Please share how *your* life’s journey has been in any way similar.
- In your own spiritual biography, please share with us what experience or happening moved you to want to be an Associate of the Blessed Sacrament Congregation.

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## 6. Teaching – drawing on the following readings

- *An Auspicious Anniversary* by Father Paul Bernier, SSS. An editorial in *Emmanuel*, May/June 2006.
- February 4, 2001 Homily by then Superior General, Father Fiorenza Salvi, SSS.
- *The Mission of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament and Saint Peter Julian Eymard: When Eucharist Becomes Life*. Two pamphlets published by the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament.

### Saint Peter Julian Eymard: His Life and Mission – Key Points

- As we pray in the closing prayer, God led Peter Julian Eymard on a *journey* of faith. This was a journey that included five years as a diocesan priest and seventeen years as a religious of the Society of Mary before he founded the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament in 1856. Each of us is on a journey of faith.
- Father Bernier reminds us that Father Eymard “had been struggling with a deepening devotion to the Eucharist for many years.” And through the “Eymardian family” he founded, Saint Peter Julian Eymard left a rich legacy to the church by placing the Eucharist at the center of its life.
- The Eucharist made the love of God tangible to Father Eymard and awakened within him a passionate desire to spend his life spreading the fire of this love in building the kingdom of God in the world.
- Deeply troubled by the societal evils of his time, Saint Peter Julian Eymard sought in prayer a solution to the religious ignorance, exploitation of workers, poverty and injustice causing social upheaval. He was convinced that God was providing a solution to these problems if people could be drawn to experience the love of God manifested in the Eucharist, through Mass, Communion, and adoration.



## Readings

### *An Auspicious Anniversary*

by Father Paul Bernier, SSS, Editor Emeritus of *Emmanuel Magazine*

On May 13, 1856, Saint Peter Julian Eymard founded the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament. A Marist priest at the time, he had been struggling with a deepening devotion to the Eucharist for many years. The thought that struck him was that the Eucharist lacked a religious congregation to honor it. “Isn’t it amazing,” he wrote, “that, since the foundation of the church, the Holy Eucharist has not had its own religious body, its honor guard, its court, its family, as the other mysteries of our Lord have all had a religious body to honor and to preach about them?”

He had been a Marist priest for 17 years, during which time he had been spiritual director and later superior of a Marist college; provincial superior and assistant to the founder and superior general, Father Claude Colin; and director of the Third Order of Mary, for which he wrote the Rule and secured canonical approbation from Rome. If his leaving the Society of Mary seemed like a betrayal by many Marists, it was equally painful for Fr. Eymard. He bore the society a deep love and affection; and he had tried, at first, to realize his aim within the society. It was not to be, and he had to strike out on his own.

At first, he had but one companion who shared his dream, and they had to struggle to erect the first foundation in Paris. Three years later, however, a second foundation was opened in Marseilles. Yet another three, and Angers became the site of the third house of the new society. The eucharistic work was underway. Before he died, at the relatively young age of 57, shrines had been started in Belgium, and the congregation numbered some 40 religious.

The biggest threat to the vision of Father Eymard in the 50 years following his death was the lessening, if not the loss of the apostolic dimension that Eymard had insisted on from the very beginning, and of which he himself gave such eloquent example. His immediate successor as superior general saw the congregation essentially as a contemplative one, thus giving the apostolic dimension a back seat. Likewise, an assistant general two decades later proposed an actual affiliation with the Benedictine Order, whereby the congregation would become the Cistercians of Adoration. This also was an

explicit option for a purely contemplative life. It was a lovely ideal; but it was not the vision of Father Eymard.

Unfortunately, Father Eymard's spirituality is nowhere set down clearly in any one place. He was revising the Constitutions of his congregation until the day he died. He authored no complete treatise on the Eucharist. His reading and reflection, to say nothing of the hours spent in prayer, however, resulted in a deepening understanding of the Eucharist, a fact made evident in the many letters of spiritual direction he wrote (of which we have six volumes!). He began to stress less the exterior cult in favor of the interior dedication and commitment that should be the result of a eucharistic life.

One example only: in the theology of the day, the purpose of the religious life and vows was for the perfection of the individuals and to better assure their eternal salvation. This was the norm to be included in the constitutions of the various religious congregations. Not so for Eymard. He insisted that the purpose of the religious life in his congregation was to facilitate a loving gift of self to our Lord in return for Christ's own self-gift in the incarnation and in the Eucharist - which he saw as a prolongation of the incarnation. Through this sacrament, Christ continued the work of salvation he carried out in his own lifetime.

Even as early as 1851, while still a Marist, he became more and more convinced that a healthy church life demanded that the Eucharist be in the center. He wrote: "I have often asked myself what remedies could there be for the almost total indifference that is evident in a frightening degree on the part of so many Catholics, and I must say I find only one: the Eucharist; love of Jesus in the Eucharist."

It is Eymard's singular eucharistic focus that Pope John XXIII chose to stress in the homily at his canonization:

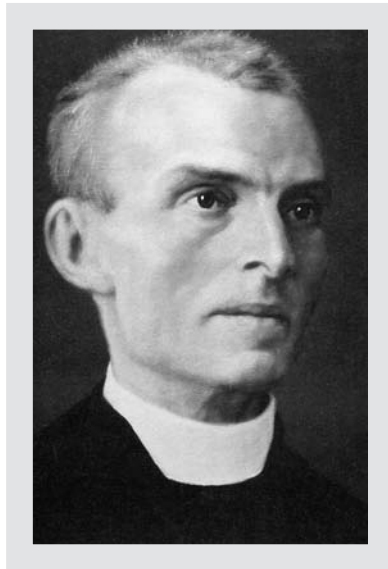
"... Honor and celebrate with us him who was so perfect an adorer of the Blessed Sacrament. After his example, always place at the center of your thoughts, of your affections, of the undertakings of your zeal, this incomparable source of all grace: the mystery of faith, which hides under its veils the Author himself of grace, Jesus, the incarnate Word."

It is also the reason why Saint John Paul II, in 1995, inserted his feast in the calendar of the universal church for August 2. In the words of the decree:

“Font and fullness of all evangelization and striking expression of the infinite love of our divine Redeemer for humankind, the Holy Eucharist clearly marked the life and pastoral activity of Peter Julian Eymard. He truly deserves to be called an outstanding apostle of the Eucharist. In fact, his mission in the church consisted in promoting the centrality of the Eucharistic mystery in the whole life of the Christian community.”

He is truly a saint for all seasons.

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## **Celebration of the 200th Anniversary of the Birth of Saint Peter Julian Eymard**

Homily of Father Fiorenzo Salvi, SSS, Former Superior General  
February 4, 2011

*Two hundred years after February 4th, 1811, the day of Peter Julian's birth, a Mass was celebrated in the chapel in which he was baptized on the next day and which now bears his name. The celebration began with a word of welcome from the parish to express its joy in these words: "Today, February 4th, 2011, the parish of Saint Peter Julian Eymard is glad and proud to welcome the members of the Eymardian family who have come from all over the world." Father Fiorenzo Salvi, the Superior General of the congregation, who presided at this Mass, recalled in his homily the main features of the life and thought of Father Eymard.*

Each time that we celebrate the feast of a saint, we can touch what God is doing in those who trust in him unreservedly. What God does in the life of the saints isn't simply what we want and think that he should do for our wellbeing. It is something that brings a fullness and zest to living. This is why a saint is for us: an example, a model, a guide, a teacher. He becomes for us like a father, mother, confidant, friend, refuge. Saint Peter Julian is all that for us. He is the patron of this parish, he is our Founder, he is an example for the whole church.

The father of Peter Julian wasn't very enthusiastic about the dream, desires, or idea of him becoming a priest. And we can understand him well. Widower after the death of his first wife, he also lost the second, and then all his children one after another. Only one daughter remained, Marianne, from his first marriage, and this son of his second marriage. Peter Julian was born here, at La Mure on February 4th, 1811, about 11 o'clock in the morning, at 69 rue du Breuil. It was a Monday, market-day. The following day he was brought here to this church to be baptized.

His father had left Oisans to go to La Mure, where he became well integrated into the community. He had set up a little business as a cutler and also had an oil press. The future of his son was assured; it was enough to follow in his father's steps. But Peter Julian had a dream that drew him beyond that.

What was Peter Julian's dream, his vocation, this irresistible attraction that will impel him to leave his home, his parents, his sister Marianne, his native village, his mountains...? His vocation was revealed on the day of his First

Communion, here in this church. An extraordinary meeting with Christ at the age of 12! In this encounter, he felt fascinated by the love of Jesus, who gives himself in the eucharistic bread and draws us to himself.

This flame that was kindled in his heart on that day of his First Communion grew in the course of time and little by little moved him to discover his vocation and his mission: to make the Eucharist known, loved, and received because in this sacrament Christ gives himself and communicates his divine life.

Struck by this, he was led first of all to become a priest in the diocese of Grenoble – as curate at Chatte and parish priest later at Monteynard. Then he entered the Marists in order to be a missionary in the entire world. And finally, he became the founder of two religious congregations (of men and women) which continue until our day his mission in the Church and in the world. He also considered setting up an association of laypeople, who also have a eucharistic vocation. This is the Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament, whose members together with the male and female religious form a great Eymardian family throughout the world.

How can the eucharistic mission of Peter Julian Eymard be described? *“To respond to the hungers of people, starting from the riches of God’s love manifested in the Eucharist”* (ROL, 3). This is the mission of Father Eymard: to proclaim to all that the Eucharist is the fire able to transform the hearts of persons and the energy able to transform the world; because the Eucharist is Christ among us continuing his mission. Around the table of the Eucharist, the Lord brings to birth a new community that is able to live in reciprocal love, solidarity, justice, peace.

Father Eymard’s existence was consumed in carrying out this mission by his living example, tireless preaching, predilection for the poor and abandoned, who are God’s special concern and the guests of honor at the table of the Eucharist. When he left home, his family, his friends, this land that he loved, no one could imagine what God would bring about through this son of the Matheysine:

- He became a saint, like his friend and confidant, the Curé of Ars;
- He gave birth to a family comprising male and female religious, consecrated persons and associate laity, who are in the five continents and twenty-nine countries of the world;
- He became “the outstanding apostle of the Eucharist.”

Today we are gathered here in this church where he was baptized, where his mother brought him to pray, where he celebrated the Eucharist and preached when he returned to La Mure, where he used to pray, where his requiem and funeral were conducted. This church is now a place of prayer and pilgrimage. After he was beatified, this church became consecrated to him as the “Chapel of Saint Peter Julian Eymard.”

After Father Eymard’s death, the postulator of the cause of his canonization, Father Edmond Tenaillon, came here, to this region, to La Mure and the other parishes, where many people knew him, to collect their testimonies. His life is a patrimony belonging to you. Here are some sentences that can give an idea of the testimonies gathered: *“His memory is living at La Mure more still than elsewhere; he loved his native land, and was loved here.”* *“No sooner than it was known that he arrived, than the home of his sister was invaded. All wanted to see him, to speak with him, to ask his advice.”*

At his death on August 1st, 1868, the townsfolk of La Mure placed the keys of their houses near him to be blessed by touching him. *“This was to choose him to guard and protect every hearth, as well as his native town, to which God brought him back at the last hour as if to make him its protector.”*

Dear sisters and brothers, may this anniversary of his birth be for all of us the occasion of thanking the Lord who has given him to us, and to make him a model for imitation, a guide to follow, a saint to intercede for us.

The message that he leaves us and that he entrusts to us as a mission is neatly summed up in this little phrase that can still be read on the monument here at the side of the church where he was buried:

**“LET US LOVE JESUS WHO LOVES US SO MUCH IN HIS  
DIVINE SACRAMENT.”**



## 7. Closing Prayer

*All:* The God of our ancestors led you, Peter Julian  
like he did his servant Jacob in times past,  
on a journey of faith.

All your life long you searched for a deeper union with God  
and for an answer to the hungers of humanity.

You discovered in the Eucharist the answer to your quest.  
God's love was there available to you and to all mankind.  
In response to this unearned love,  
you made a "gift of self" to God  
and tirelessly spent yourself to serve his people.

Your life, modeled on the Cenacle where Mary and the  
disciples gathered in prayer and celebration,  
inspired your own disciples, as it does again today,  
to a life of profound prayer of contemplation  
and of apostolic zeal for building Christian communities  
where the Eucharist is source and center of life.

Saint Peter Julian, assist us in our own journey of faith  
to pray more fervently and to serve one another more  
generously so that our lives may witness to a more just  
and peaceful world.

May our celebrations of the Eucharist proclaim God's  
liberating love for the renewal of the church and for the  
coming of the kingdom. Amen.

## 8. Additional Reading Material

- Camiré, Bernard, SSS. *The Eucharist and Saint Peter Julian Eymard*. Emmanuel Publishing, 2011.
- Fernandez, Erasto, SSS. *A Year with Father Eymard*. R.R. Graphics, For the Asian Conference, 2009.
- Pelletier, Norman, SSS. *Tomorrow Will Be Too Late*. Emmanuel Publishing, 1992, 2002 (2nd ed.).





*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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Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament

