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# Saint Peter Julian Eymard: The Apostle of the Eucharist

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 - The Apostle of the Eucharist

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### 1. Opening Prayer

We thank you, Father  
for having raised up in your church  
Saint Peter Julian Eymard.  
You call us, who follow in his footprints,  
to continue his mission  
in the church and for the world.

Grant also to us  
his deep experience of your Love,  
his unconditional abandonment  
to Christ, your Son,  
his docility to the Spirit,  
his lively faith in the Eucharist,  
so that we may be, after his example,  
credible witnesses and tireless messengers  
of the life that springs from this Sacrament.



## 2. Introduction to the Theme

On January 21, 1851, Father Eymard, then a Marist priest, received in the Basilica of Our Lady of Lyons what he called the “grace of Fourvière.” These are his words:

“Kneeling there before the Blessed Mother, I saw the great need that people in my country were experiencing:

- a. The spiritual neglect of secular priests in the midst of their ministry...the complaint that some priests have made to me about feeling isolated from all spiritual help.
- b. The lack of spiritual direction for most devout people, especially with regard to the interior life...
- c. By the small amount of devotion shown toward the Blessed Sacrament...so much indifference and lack of devotion.”

Father Eymard was already beginning to believe that priests and laity alike were missing out on appreciating or experiencing the riches of God’s love that Jesus in the Eucharist made available to them. He approached his superior general, Father Jean-Claude Colin, and asked for permission to write a eucharistic rule for the Third Order of Mary, of which he was then the director. Father Colin asked him not to do that. As we look back, we see how Father Eymard was already seeing a new kind of charism, one that led him to believe that God was calling him to found a new religious community, one devoted to the Eucharist.

In April 1853, Father Eymard received yet another “grace,” the “gift of self.” These are his words:

“During thanksgiving at Mass, I was suddenly seized by a strong feeling of gratitude and love for Jesus, and as a result I said to him: *What great thing could I do for you?*

A sweet and peaceful, but strong and stirring thought made me happy...devoting myself to the service of the Blessed Sacrament...to press for the establishment of the religious Order of the Blessed Sacrament...I

was willing to make any sacrifice for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.”

Father Eymard went to Paris to make a retreat and discern the will of God for him. He wrote on May 13, 1856:

“Finally, after twelve days of waiting, of prayers, of tears and abandonment, the period of trial has ended: I received an answer (from the bishops)...that I dedicate myself to the work of the Blessed Sacrament.

We should summarize the work of the society with these words: A devoted love for the service and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the altar, according to the spirit and laws of the Holy Roman Church.”

At Father Eymard’s meeting with Archbishop Sibour, the prelate at first was not inclined to grant him permission to found a new religious community, thinking that this would be another congregation dedicated to adoration alone. But once Father Eymard explained that *his* congregation would also work for the First Communion of adults and set the fire of the Eucharist ablaze to the four corners of France, beginning with Paris, the face of the archbishop unexpectedly lit up. Now that he understood his project, his opinion was completely changed and he approved Father Eymard’s founding of a new community of religious dedicated to an apostolic eucharistic spirituality.

As we read in Father Bernier’s article in the last booklet, Saint John Paul II, in 1995, said in his decree inserting Saint Peter Julian Eymard’s feast into the calendar of the universal church, “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.”

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

“Be the apostle of the divine Eucharist, like a flame which enlightens and warms, like the angel of his heart who will go to proclaim him to those who don’t know him and will encourage those who love him and are suffering.”

From a letter written to:  
Mme. Antoinette de Grandville  
July 4, 1859

“Live on the divine Eucharist, like the Hebrews did on the manna. Your soul can be entirely dedicated to the divine Eucharist and very holy in the midst of your work and contacts with the world.”

From a letter written to:  
Mme. Isabelle Spazzier  
November 5, 1859

“Belong entirely to God through love, entirely to your neighbor through a gracious charity, entirely to the divine Eucharist by the offering and sacrifice of your whole self. Bear with yourself in the patience of the Lord.”

From a letter written to:  
Mrs. Stephanie Gourd  
October 23, 1859

### 4. Bible Text

But they urged him, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that, their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning (within us) while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?” So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying, “The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!” Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Luke 24:29–35, NAB

## 5. Conversation – tell us your story

- Father Eymard exhorted his followers to be an “apostle of the divine Eucharist.” The word “apostle” comes from the Latin and Greek meaning a “messenger” or the verb form, “to send off.” Our common understanding as Catholic Christians is this: to be an apostle is to be chosen or called to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. How do you experience this sense of “call” or sense of mission to “spread the *good news*” of the “divine Eucharist?”
  
- Saint Francis of Assisi allegedly taught: “Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use words.” As associates in the Eymardian family, we are called to proclaim the good news celebrated at Mass and internalized at prayer in the presence of the Eucharist - or in our “inner room” (*Matthew 5: 6*). What does this mean for you? Is there a story you can share that speaks to some loving action you took as a result of a Mass or prayer experience?

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## 6. Teaching – drawing on the following reading

- *A Zealous Apostle of the Eucharist* by Father Flavio Fumagalli, SSS.

### **Saint Peter Julian Eymard – The Apostle of the Eucharist – Key Points**

- Placing the Eucharist at the center of his life, Saint Peter Julian Eymard left us an example of an interior life that was consumed in apostolic zeal: *“responding to the hungers of the human family with the riches of God’s love manifested in the Eucharist.”*
- Saint Peter Julian Eymard is most associated with adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Yet his life as a religious was very apostolic, serving the poor on the outskirts of Paris, priests in difficulty, and in the work of preparing adults and young people for the reception of First Communion.
- Saint Peter Julian Eymard’s vision of the Eucharist focuses on the presence of the person of the Lord in the Eucharist. While emphasizing this notion, Father Eymard believed that this presence is the source of a dynamism that is related to a mission, an active apostolate in service to others.

## Reading

*A Zealous Apostle of the Eucharist* by Father Flavio Fumagalli, SSS

Peter Julian Eymard, born at La Mure d'Isère, France, on February 4, 1811, was baptized on the following day. After some family and vocational difficulties, he eventually entered the diocesan seminary of Grenoble and in 1834 was ordained a priest. In 1839, after a number of years of zealous pastoral ministry, he began an experience of religious life, entering the newly formed Congregation of the Marist Fathers at Lyons. In a short time, he gained the confidence of the founder, Father Colin, who entrusted him with various important responsibilities.

At the same time, his search for the will of God continued and led him to direct his life more and more toward the Eucharist, for which he wanted to achieve something exceptional. A significant point in this search was reached when he underwent a spiritual experience at the sanctuary of Fourvière in Lyons in January 1851. While praying there he was “profoundly moved” by the thought of the spiritual abandonment in which the secular priests were living, of the lack of formation for the laity, of the little devotion there was toward the Blessed Sacrament, and of the sacrileges committed against the Eucharist. As a result, he decided to form a third order of men dedicated to reparatory adoration. In the years that followed, this would evolve into the definitive idea of establishing a religious congregation entirely dedicated to the worship and apostolate of the Eucharist.

Not being able to carry out this work from within the Marist Fathers, Father Eymard left the institute and came to Paris where, on May 13, 1856, he founded the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament. The newly formed religious institute for men immediately received the approbation of Archbishop Sibour and later the blessing and the definitive approbation of Pope Pius IX (1863).

The work began under somewhat poor conditions in some premises situated on rue d'Enfer where, on the feast of the Epiphany in 1857, the foundation was officially inaugurated with solemn exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Again in Paris, in 1858, Father Eymard, with the help of Marguerite Guillot, founded the Congregation of the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament. In 1859, he opened a second community and placed in charge of it his first companion, Father Raymond de Cuers. A third foundation was established at Angers, then two others in Brussels and a formation house for the novitiate at Saint Maurice in the diocese of Versailles.

In the meantime, these years of “eucharistic” life saw Father Eymard involved in serving the poor on the outskirts of Paris and priests in difficulty, in the work of First Communion of adults, and in many and various preaching commitments centered particularly on the Eucharist. Furthermore, certain initiatives which began or developed after his death can be traced back to his eucharistic activity, as for example, the Eucharistic Fraternity for the laity, the Association of Priest Adorers inspired by his concern for priests, and international eucharistic congresses.

Worn out by his responsibilities as first Superior General, and marked by trials of every kind, Peter Julian died at the place where he was born at only 57 years of age on August 1, 1868. Beatified by Pius XI in 1925, he was proclaimed a saint by Pope John XXIII on December 9, 1962, at the conclusion of the first session of the Second Vatican Council. Exactly 33 years later, on December 9, 1995, his feast day was inserted into the general Roman calendar, and he is now presented to the whole church as an apostle of the Eucharist.

The life and activity of Peter Julian Eymard were entirely centered on the mystery of the Eucharist. Initially, he approached it with the theology of his time, stressing particularly the real presence. Nevertheless, he was able gradually to free himself from the devotional and reparatory aspect with which the eucharistic piety of his age was almost exclusively concerned, and he arrived at the point of declaring the Eucharist to be the center of the life of the church and society: “No other center than Jesus eucharistic.”

### **His Vision of the Eucharist**

“The Blessed Sacrament has always been supreme,” he wrote in his last personal retreat, thus characterizing in an incisive way the form of Christian life he proposed. At the center stands the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Faithful to post-Tridentine theology, Eymard strongly emphasized the fact of this presence and its unique character: the Eucharist is the person of the Lord. This gave rise to the concise affirmations with which he expressed his faith: “The Holy Eucharist is Jesus past, present, and future.... It is Jesus sacramentalized. ... Blessed is the soul that knows how to find Jesus in the divine Eucharist, and in Jesus Hostia everything else.”

However, while emphasizing this “personalist” aspect, Father Eymard understood that this presence is the source of a dynamism, that it is related to a mission: “The grace of the apostolate: faith in Jesus. Jesus is there, therefore to him, through him, in him.” This faith in the Eucharist is

nourished by meditation on the word of God. Adoration, which he proposed as the particular type of prayer for his religious and, in a general way, for the faithful, is a means of allowing ourselves to become penetrated by the love of Christ. This prayer takes its inspiration from the Mass. For this reason, he proposed to his religious that they pray according to the method of the “four ends of the eucharistic sacrifice” with the purpose of “actualizing, as it were, all the mysteries of our Lord Jesus Christ in the most eminent worship of the Holy Eucharist,” in attentiveness and docility to the Holy Spirit in order to “advance in recollection and in the virtue of holy love at the feet of the Lord” (cf. Constitutions, nn. 16-17). Therefore, far from being sufficient by itself, adoration tends toward sacramental Communion.

### The Nourishment of Daily Life

Eymard was a tireless promoter of frequent Communion. In a beautiful text of 1863, he clearly expresses the central role of the Eucharist. “Convinced that the sacrifice of the Holy Mass and Communion in the body of the Lord are the living source and the aim of the whole of religion, each one has the duty to direct his piety...virtue...[and] love, so that these may become means that will allow him to reach this goal: the worthy celebration and the faithful reception of these divine mysteries.”

Eymard broke with the practice of his time in which, under the pretext of respect for the sacrament, many pastors prevented the faithful from approaching the eucharistic table. This is how he expressed himself in one of his letters: “Whoever wants to persevere, let him receive our Lord. He is the bread that will nourish your failing strength, that will sustain you. The church wants it this way. [It] encourages daily Communion: as a witness to this we have the Council of Trent. Someone will say that we need to be very prudent. ...But our reply to that would be: this nourishment, if taken at very long intervals, would have to be considered as an extraordinary food. Therefore, where is the ordinary nourishment that is meant to sustain me each and every day?”

Communion ought to become the pivot of the Christian life: “Holy Communion should be, above all, the aim of Christian life. ...Every pious exercise that does not have some relationship with Holy Communion is not directed toward its main goal.” To receive the Eucharist in Communion fruitfully is an action that changes one’s life. “Our Lord comes to us sacramentally in order to live there spiritually.” That is what he wrote in notes he made during the Great Retreat of Rome (1865). And a few months before

his death, he wrote: “[The one] who does not receive Holy Communion has only a speculative knowledge. He knows only the terms, the words, the theories, [but] is ignorant of what they signify...But [the one] who receives Holy Communion, while previously he had just an idea of God, now...sees... and recognizes [God] at Holy Mass.”

### **The Source of a New World**

“A purely contemplative life cannot be fully eucharistic: the fire has a flame.” Thus wrote Eymard in 1861. An adorer, he was also an impassioned apostle of the Eucharist and he sketched out ways of glorifying this mystery. The basic lines of his activity and teaching can be summarized in the following way.

Above all, a renewal of Christian life. It is not just a question of combating ignorance or indifference, but rather, and above all, of regenerating the Christian life which becomes lost in the middle of a thousand practices and devotions that forget the essentials. In the preliminary draft of the Directory of the lay Fraternity of the Blessed Sacrament, he lays down his principle: “Man is love like his divine prototype. Just as [God] is love, so [God] is life.” And he explains that “every love has a beginning, a center, a goal.” From this principle, Eymard draws a whole pedagogy for the spiritual life: “In order that the devout soul become stronger and grow in the life of Jesus Christ, it is necessary first of all to nourish it with his divine truth and the goodness of his love, so that it may proceed from light to love, and from love to virtue.”

The religious institutes founded by him are called to live that spirit of love of which the Eucharist is the sacrament. “This eucharistic love of Jesus should therefore be for all our religious the supreme law of their virtue, the object of their zeal, and the distinctive mark of their holiness,” he wrote in the Constitutions. In a word, a community shaped by love. In the same way, he conceived the fraternity as a group of lay people who unite adoration and apostolic commitment. For this reason, he created centers not only close to his religious communities but also in numerous parishes. At times, he seems to have had thoughts of having some members who, for the purpose of leading a more eucharistic life, would form a family community in the world, like a small religious cenacle.

The ideal that he confided to his spiritual children was “to set the four corners of the world on fire with eucharistic love.” And he exhorted his religious, in the Constitutions, “that our Lord Jesus Christ be always adored

in the Blessed Sacrament and glorified socially throughout the world.”

This is the meaning of the expression “the reign of the Eucharist” which appears frequently in the writings of Eymard. Thus, in an article entitled “The Century of the Eucharist,” written in 1864 for the review *Le Tres Saint-Sacrement*, Peter Julian wrote:

The great evil of our time is that people do not go to Jesus Christ as to their very Savior and God. They abandon the only foundation, the only law, the only grace of salvation....What is to be done then? We must return to the fountain of life, and not just to the historical Jesus nor to the Jesus glorified in heaven, but rather to Jesus in the Eucharist. It is necessary to bring him out from the shadows so that he can once again take his place at the head of Christian society....May the reign of the Eucharist increase.... *Adveniat regnum tuum.*

In concluding, here is a text from Father Eymard, which the liturgy of the office of readings offers us:

The Eucharist is the life of the people. The Eucharist gives them a center of life. All can come together without the barriers of race or language in order to celebrate the feast days of the church. It gives them a law of life, that of charity, of which it is the source; thus it forges between them a common bond, a Christian kinship. All eat the same bread, all are table companions of Jesus Christ who supernaturally creates among them a feeling of togetherness. Read the Acts of the Apostles. It states that the whole community of the first Christians, converted Jews and baptized pagans, belonging to different regions, “had but one heart and one soul” (Acts 4:32). Why? Because they were attentive to the teaching of the apostles and faithful in sharing in the breaking of the bread (Acts 2:42).

Yes, the Eucharist is the life of souls and of societies, just as the sun is the life of the body and of the earth. Without the sun, the earth would be sterile; it is the sun which makes it fertile, renders it beautiful and rich; it is the sun which provides agility, strength, and beauty to the body. In the face of these amazing effects, it is not astonishing that the pagans should have adored it as the God of the world. In actual fact, the sun obeys a supreme Sun, the divine Word, Jesus Christ, who illumines everyone coming into this world and who, through the Eucharist, sacrament of life, acts in person in the very depths of souls in order to

form Christian families and peoples. Oh how happy, a thousand times happy, is the faithful soul who has found this treasure, who goes to drink at this fountain of living water, who often eats this bread of eternal life!

Christian society is also a family. The link between its members is Jesus Christ. He is the head of the household who has prepared the family table. He is the head, Jesus Christ, who celebrated Christian togetherness at the supper; he called his apostles *filioli*, my little children, and he commanded them to love one another as he had loved them.

At the holy table, we are all children who receive the same nourishment, and Paul draws out the consequence of this, that is, that we form but one family, one same body, because we all share in the same bread, which is Jesus Christ (1 Cor 10: 16-17). Lastly, the Eucharist gives Christian society the strength to observe the law of honor, and to practice charity toward one's neighbor. Jesus Christ wants everyone to honor and love his brothers and sisters. For this reason, he identifies himself with them: "What you do to the least of mine, you do to me" (Mt 25:40); and he gives himself to each one of them in Communion.

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## 7. Closing Prayer - Litany of Saint Peter Julian Eymard

**Note:** The group is invited to move to the chapel for the closing prayer and benediction.

*Reader:* A reading from Luke 24: 29 – 35. [Pause for reflection.]

*Leader:*

Lord, have mercy.  
Christ, have mercy.  
Lord, have mercy.  
Christ, hear us.

*All:*

Lord, have mercy.  
Christ, have mercy.  
Lord, have mercy.  
Christ, graciously hear us.

God, the Father of heaven. Have mercy on us.

God, the Son, redeemer  
of the world. Have mercy on us.

God, the Holy Spirit. Have mercy on us.

Holy Trinity, one God. Have mercy on us.

Holy Mary, mother of God. Pray for us.

[*The response to each of the following invocations is Teach and inspire us.*]

<i>Leader:</i>	St. Peter Julian, apostle of the Eucharist.	R.
	St. Peter Julian, priest of the Eucharist.	R.
	St. Peter Julian, adorer of the Eucharist.	R.
	St. Peter Julian, adorer in spirit and in truth.	R.
	St. Peter Julian, lover of the Eucharist.	R.
	St. Peter Julian, servant of the Eucharist.	R.
	St. Peter Julian, teacher of the Eucharist.	R.
	St. Peter Julian, disciple of Christ.	R.
	St. Peter Julian, follower of Christ.	R.
	St. Peter Julian, man of hope.	R.
	St. Peter Julian, man of integrity.	R.
	St. Peter Julian, man of the interior life.	R.
	St. Peter Julian, man of contemplation.	R.
	St. Peter Julian, model of adoration.	R.
	St. Peter Julian, model of thanksgiving.	R.



St. Peter Julian, model of reparation.	R.
St. Peter Julian, model of intercession.	R.
St. Peter Julian, giver of self.	R.
St. Peter Julian, trusting in providence.	R.
St. Peter Julian, caring for priests.	R.
St. Peter Julian, caring for people.	R.
St. Peter Julian, caring for the poor.	R.
St. Peter Julian, caring for the church.	R.
St. Peter Julian, minister of the word.	R.
St. Peter Julian, minister of the sacrament.	R.
St. Peter Julian founder of the three branches of the Eymardian family.	R.
St. Peter Julian, servant of Mary.	R.

Pray for us, St. Peter Julian . . .

R. *That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.*

[Pause for reflection.]

*Leader:* Let us pray:

*All:* Lord, our God, Christ entrusted  
your most wonderful gift of the Eucharist to the church  
as a memorial for all time.  
May we follow the example  
of Saint Peter Julian Eymard  
in the worship of so great a mystery,  
and spend our lives  
in the fullest sharing of your love.  
We ask this through  
our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you  
and the Holy Spirit, one God,  
forever and ever. Amen.

Saint Peter Julian Eymard, pray for us

## 8. Additional Reading Material

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

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