

Saint Peter Julian Eymard – 1811-1868

By Faith Inspired – December 9, 1962

His Holiness, Pope John XXIII, on Sunday, December 9, 1962, solemnly canonized the Founder of the Congregations and Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament, Saint Peter Julian Eymard.

In the Decree for Canonization, the Holy Father said: *“Among the illustrious servants of this divine Host, who founded institutes and societies with the purpose of developing the splendor of Eucharistic rites, of adoring perpetually, night and day, this Most August Sacrament, or of making reparation for the outrages and injuries to which He is subject, one must put in the very 1st place, without any doubt, Blessed (Saint) Peter Julian Eymard.”* (Pope John XXIII)

By Faith Inspired

If ever there was a span of human life that was by faith inspired, we have to include Saint Peter Julian. To quote the words of the Pope who beatified him on July 12, 1925: *“If a selection were to be made among the virtues which this Servant of God, Peter Julian Eymard, practiced heroically, his faith would stand out foremost. He was a man of faith.”* (Pope Pius XI)

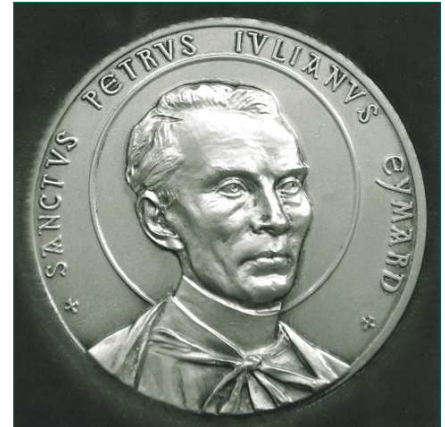
Faith in the Holy Eucharist... *“How happy we should all be if we had more faith in the Holy Eucharist,”* was a fond saying of Saint Peter Julian. His whole life was centered on this theme. And with him this faith in the Holy Eucharist implied a personal love for Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, with selfless and dedicated service.

This great saint whose life motto was: *“For me, to live is Christ, and Christ made-Sacrament,”* stood in the vanguard of the valiant champions who toppled over the vanguards of Jansenism and hastened the Decree for Frequent, and even daily, Holy Communion.

Childhood

Pierre-Julien Eymard (*in English we render his name as Peter Julian Eymard*) was born on February 4, 1811, in La Mure d’Isère, a picturesque little village tucked away in a nook of the French Alps. His mother was a very saintly woman who would find time to skip out of her home every day to visit with Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. She would bundle up the baby and carry him to church: *“For Our Lord’s blessing,”* she said.

His father approved of this most heartily. Monsieur (*in English this is rendered as Mister*) Eymard was not only a God-fearing man, but also a very devout Catholic. On account of these daily visits to the House where God dwells, the village church soon became like a second home to little Pierre-Julien. But imagine the surprise of his big sister when one day she found him behind the main Altar; he was perched on a step ladder and had his little head pressed against the Tabernacle. *“What on earth are you doing there?”* she asked. The reply came with childlike



Commemorative medal struck on the occasion of the Canonization

candor: *“Oh, I can hear Him much better from here.”*

Most saints have normal childhoods. Pierre-Julien was a very normal boy, yet one who did peculiar things, at times: such as slipping a hard board in his bed, going without lunch during Lent, making the Stations of the Cross every day. This boy was preparing himself for his First Holy Communion, and he really meant “business”.

First Holy Communion

Shortly before his death in 1868, Saint Peter Julian confided to a close friend that he was still chastising his body for his big sin, because as a child he had attempted to shop-lift an officer’s plume, a colored feather to wear in his hat. The feather must have been worth about a dime!

No wonder that the God of the Holy Eucharist, who loves innocence and purity, flooded the boy’s soul on the day of his First Holy Communion with such happiness that young Pierre-Julien thought himself already

Continued on next page...

Saint Peter Julian Eymard...Continued from previous page

in heaven. That day also marked the beginning of a conflict that was to last for many dismal years. Again we quote the Saint himself: *"When I pressed Jesus on my heart for the first time in Holy Communion, I promised Him: Yes, dear Lord, some day I will be a priest."*

Struggles for his Priestly Vocation

Monsieur Eymard was a loving father, but he was also a Frenchman. In his French mind, an only son – his other boys had been killed in the wars of Napoleon – the legitimate heir according to French law, had the sacred duty to marry and pass on to posterity the family name. The clergy of LaMure sided with the French father.

Since the priests at LaMure would not give him absolution, the boy walked miles to the neighboring village to go to confession. With his allowance and savings he bought Latin textbooks. Furtively, as though he was committing a crime, he studied Latin by himself. It hurt him to cause untold sorrow to his father, but God was calling him to be a priest. He had no choice but to obey God.

Diocesan Priest

Saint Peter Julian was ordained a priest on July 22, 1834. The bishop of Grenoble sent him to a village parish as assistant to an old pastor who managed quite well without the help of any assistant. So, there was little work for the newly ordained priest. Young Father Eymard took refuge in his second home, the church. Before the Tabernacle he prayed, meditated, prepared his sermons, and reviewed his whole theology. This suited the young assistant very well, for he could give full vent to the irresistible attraction he felt for the Real Presence. As his conversations, instructions,

and sermons were always pointed to the Holy Eucharist, the good parishioners dubbed their young assistant: **"the Blessed Sacrament Father."**

After three years of this intense Eucharistic Life, young Père (*Father, in English*) Eymard found himself suddenly wrenched from the Tabernacle, as he expressed it with longing regret. The bishop appointed him pastor of the Monteynard parish, a god-forsaken place, if ever there was one. There had been no priest in Monteynard for fifty years. There was very little faith left in the place. Besides, these country folks were very poor. That meant no cooperation and no funds.

The village church was a wreck of an old shell, leaking like a sieve; no altar, no sacred vessels, no sacred vestments, not even a statue. The French Revolution had done its work only too well. The young pastor was not dismayed. He proved that he could work just as well as he could pray. After one short year, well, even the bishop could not believe it. Repairs had been made to the church, sacristy, and rectory. But most of all, repairs had been made to the souls of the parishioners. Monteynard was one of the finest parishes in the diocese.

"How in the world did that young Father Eymard do it?" asked the bishop with utter amazement. He had been told that the young pastor spent parts of his nights in long vigils of adoration before the Tabernacle. He knew that this zealous young priest skimped on his food, so as to feed the poor. So, the bishop had part of his answer: zeal, prayer, mortification. The bishop had a creeping suspicion, that he had sent a young saint to Monteynard. The young priest himself took no credit for all this. He sincerely believed that it was Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament who had worked the miracle of transformation: *"What is really wrong with us,"* he said, *"is that we do not make the Blessed Sacrament work enough. After all, is He not the God of heaven and earth?"*

A Marist Father

From 1834 to 1839, the young pastor was extremely busy, but he was far from being happy. In his heart of hearts he wanted to be a religious. As he had always said that it was to Mary that he owed everything, his way of trying to repay her was by becoming a Marist. *"The Society of Mary will know in what high esteem I hold its members, when I part with a priest like you."* Such was the answer of his bishop.

From 1839 to 1856 Saint Peter Julian tried to prove himself a good Marist. His superiors noticed that he succeeded very well in living up to the spirit and rule of the Society of Mary. They assigned to him the arduous task of reorganizing and revitalizing the Third Order of Mary. Against his personal wish and inclination, Père Eymard was appointed local superior, then provincial superior, and eventually visitor general.

But from the very beginning, it became most apparent that this saintly Marist had a way about him of injecting the spiritual miracle-drug of the Eucharist in all his undertakings. Frequent Communion Leagues, Holy Hour Sodalitys, Daily Mass Promotion Groups were started and flourished wherever he went.

Continued on next page...

Saint Peter Julian Eymard...Continued from previous page

Because he was not only a very good preacher, but also a very saintly one, Père Eymard was very much in demand. As he had taken the personal resolution that in all his sermons and talks, in all his conversations and directions, he would glorify the Blessed Sacrament, and as he unconsciously yet powerfully diffused the Eucharistic fervor that was in him, this good Marist was known far and wide as “**the Priest with the Eucharistic Inspiration.**”

Blessed Sacrament Foundation

For seventeen years, then, Père Eymard was a Marist, and he would have died a Marist had not Our Lady herself at the Shrine of Fourvière on February 2, 1851, made known to him by a special grace of illumination that something very special was wanted of him, namely: the foundation of a Religious Society exclusively and totally dedicated to the honoring of her Divine Son in the Blessed Sacrament. “*There just had to be such a Society,*” urged the illuminating grace. And Saint Peter Julian pledged to Mary that he would busy himself with this Eucharistic Foundation.

His Eucharistic Project was presented to the Holy Father in Rome for approval. Pope Pius IX in a clear-cut answer, and with his customary sense of humor, brought things to a head: “*I am convinced that the idea of the Eucharistic Foundation comes from God. The Church needs it. I am happy that you, Père Eymard, are making this Eucharistic Foundation. If I were not Pope, I would found it myself.*”

Humble Beginnings

And so it was that in 1856 Saint Peter Julian severed his spiritual ties with the Society of Mary to found the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament.

The new Foundation of the Blessed Sacrament was housed in a dilapidated building on the outskirts of Paris. The blight of sterility descended upon it, never to lift again at least it seemed like that to the Founder and to his one and only companion, Father De Cuers, a former sea captain. The vow of poverty was no trouble at all; they were penniless. By pawning piece by piece the collection of sea shells of the old sea captain, they were managing to keep candles on the altar and a bit of food on the table.

The two, and the only two, Blessed Sacrament Fathers held on by the very skin of their teeth, as it were. Taking turns every two hours for a two-hour period of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, these two heroic priests stormed heaven with prayer. The Pope had said that the idea of this Eucharistic Foundation was from God. That was enough for them.



Within a few years the Blessed Sacrament Fathers were doing their work of perpetual adoration in several cities of France and Belgium. The feminine branch, called the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament, was also thriving.

Eucharistic Foundation Prospers

It was with no exaggeration that the Saintly Founder called “**Chapel of Miracles**” the tiny oratory where on January 6, 1857, he had solemnly exposed Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Within a few years the Blessed Sacrament Fathers were doing their work of perpetual adoration in several cities of France and Belgium. The feminine branch, called the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament, was also thriving.

Still there was no rest for the great **Apostle of the Eucharist**. Saint Peter Julian wanted the whole world on its knees before the Blessed Sacrament, “I wish I could set the Eucharistic fire to the four corners of the world,” as he put it so figuratively in French. The next great Eucharistic Project was the Peoples’ Eucharistic League. The faithful the world-over were invited to join the great Eucharistic Family in a worldwide endeavor to pay homage to the Blessed Sacrament by the triple means of frequent Holy Hours, frequent Holy Communion, frequent week-day Mass. Saint Peter Julian’s rallying cry was: “*Jesus is there; everybody must go to Him.*”

Then it was that Saint Peter Julian engineered the boldest stroke of Eucharistic Strategy. He would found the Priests’ Eucharistic League. On the 26th of February 1868, a few months before his death he said: “*I must get the priests and form them into a Eucharistic League. We must get them together before the Blessed Sacrament; preach Eucharistic retreats to them. Oh, how I long for that day!*”

Just as God chose two women as his instruments for the Institution of the Feast of Corpus Christi (Saint Juliana and Blessed Eva), likewise did he make use of two women – both were spiritual daughters of Saint Peter Julian – for two of

Continued on next page...

Saint Peter Julian Eymard...Continued from previous page

our greatest Eucharistic Movements: Mlle. Marie Hebert de la Rousselière for the Priests' Eucharistic League and Mlle. Martha Marie Tamisier for the National and International Eucharistic Congresses.

Under the Guidance and Patronage of Mary

One of the happiest days of St. Peter Julian's life was when, with the approval of Rome, he exclaimed: *"From this day forward we can invoke the Blessed Virgin Mary, as Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament The cult of Mary follows that of Jesus. Devotion to Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament will grow with the cult of the Eucharist... Mary will make use of her power as Mediatrix to form adorers in spirit and in truth. Adorers must put themselves in the school of Mary, stay very close to her, and be accompanied by her if they want to love and serve the Holy Eucharist."*

A New Approbation

The Papal pronouncement came. Saint Pius X promulgated the Decrees for Frequent Holy Communion and for the First Holy Communion of Children, as soon as they reached the use of reason.

It was then that Saint Pius X said of the Founder of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers: *"The Holy Founder Père Eymard was inspired by God. I bless with all my heart the cause for his solemn glorification by the Universal Church, because this will mean that Jesus Christ Himself is giving a new Approbation."* This new Approbation has come. Père Eymard is now Saint Peter Julian Eymard! □

This article was found in the archives of the Province and most probably written by one of our Blessed Sacrament religious at the time of the Canonization of Saint Peter Julian Eymard.

A Snapshot of the 50th International Eucharistic Congress in Dublin, Ireland

by John Thomas Lane SSS

It was quite a joy and a privilege to attend the 50th International Eucharistic Congress in Dublin, Ireland along with my brother SSS and associate SSS from across the globe. The



[L-R] John Thomas Lane SSS; Eugenio Barbosa Martins SSS, Superior General; and Rene Esoy SSS

Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament (SSS) and lay associates from our parishes were well represented from the countries of Ireland, Scotland, England, Spain, India, Italy, Vietnam, Brazil, Congo, Sri Lanka, Philippines and the USA.

An International Eucharistic Congress (IEC) is central to the mission of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament and was inspired by our founder Saint Peter Julian Eymard. For centuries now, members of our Congregation have helped lead the event to promote an awareness of the central place of the Eucharist in the life and mission of the Catholic Church. An International Eucharistic Congress also improves our understanding and celebration of the liturgy and draws attention to the social dimension of the Eucharist and the responsibility which we have to live in the spirit of communion and self-giving that we celebrate. The Congress normally takes place every four years and rotates from continent to continent. The daily celebration of the Eucharist is at the heart of the Congress each day, and it is always spectacular to have the many choirs and presiders from different countries leading the celebrations.

The wider program of the International Eucharistic Congress includes cultural and catechetical events, with workshops held each day. Workshops were full and difficult to get into during this congress – there was so much interest. One workshop that I found particularly inspiring was that of assuring that each parish inspires the youth to be actively engaged in the life of the parish. There is a concern among church leaders that we do not have the youth properly engaged in our parish's life and we need to do all we can to make them feel at home and welcome so they continue to share their gifts in the life of the Church. For this

Continued on next page...