

# Fr Manuel Barbiero, sss

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Italy



## BRIEF CV

*Father Manuel was born on 16 August 1956 in Sant'Ambrogio di Trebaseleghe, Padua Province, Italy. He made his first profession on 29 September 1976 and was ordained a priest on 3 October 1981 in Sant'Ambrogio di Trebaseleghe.*

*From 1985 to 1990 he studied Spiritual Theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University, and his doctoral thesis gave him the opportunity to approach the study of the works of Saint Peter Julian Eymard. Then in 1994 he coordinated the Italian Province's commission of the Founder's writings. Then in 1999, he became a member of CEFO, the International Commission for Studies on the Founder and his Works, of which he is still a member today.*

*In 2007, he was appointed superior of the international community of La Mure d'Isère (France), where he remained until 2018. He was thus able to study the life of Saint Peter Julian Eymard closely, becoming a specialist of the Founder and his writings. In La Mure, he created the Eymard spirituality centre.*

*At provincial level, he was elected Provincial Superior for two terms from 1999 to 2007. Since 2022, he has been provincial consultor, superior of the Malmantile community and director of its spirituality house.*

"Father Manuel Barbiero comments on number 2 of the Rule of Life with ample reference to our Founder's texts. He tells us about Father Eymard's sensitivity to the signs of his time, the new form of life he outlined for his religious, ending with an overview of the Founder's pastoral and social activities, culminating in his gift of self."



## **"God's Love - Response to Human Needs" RL 2**

I have always been impressed by the ability of those who composed the Rule of Life to trace the figure of the Founder completely, in an extraordinary synthesis.

In Number 2 of the Rule of Life there is all of Father Eymard, although not all aspects of his life experience are touched upon, but there are other numbers to refer to<sup>1</sup>. This number consists of four parts. In the first part we have Father Eymard's personal journey, in the second part the foundation of the Congregation, in the third part his Eucharistic life, and in the final part his apostolate and mission. Through this contribution, in the form of a reflection, I aim to bring out the richness of this number of the Rule of Life.

### **In response to the needs of his time**

The world in which Father Eymard lived was a world on the boil. During the 19th century, France experienced very profound changes in the economic and social spheres<sup>2</sup>. The Revolution and Napoleon had laid the foundations of a secular society that wanted to be free from the influence of the Church (the famous "throne and altar" alliance). The bourgeoisie was anticlerical and believed only in progress, science and its future.

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<sup>1</sup> We must not forget the other numbers in the Rule of Life that refer to Father Eymard: 1.3.14.15.29.33.43.44.

<sup>2</sup> One could speak of three revolutions: the industrial, social and capitalist revolutions.

It is the era of the industrial revolution (the first achievements of the new technology: railway, photography, telegraph, medicine, navigation, steam engine), it is also the era of the abandonment of the countryside which is accompanied by urbanisation with the corollary of the growth of the proletariat (attracted by the great nascent industry) and misery in the large cities such as Paris and Lyon. The workers' living conditions are miserable. They have no rights; they are denied the right to associate to defend themselves; trade unions do not exist at all.

The Rule of Life takes up two expressions found in Father Eymard's writings: "ignorance and religious indifference". Peter Julian Eymard is struck by the spiritual misery of his time. Even with the limitations due to his intellectual and religious formation, which had followed traditional canons, he has the ability to ask himself questions, to let himself be provoked, questioned.

This ability of Father Eymard emerges very clearly on the occasion of the experience he had on 21-January 1851 in Fourvière. In his letter to Father Colin, he shows himself attentive to the spiritual problems of his time. Taking his pastoral experience as a starting point, he emphasises some of the most urgent problems concerning priests, the laity and the place of the Eucharist in the Church<sup>3</sup>.

From this observation, he tries to find the most suitable response. Two letters bear witness to this: "I have often reflected", he wrote to one of his correspondents, "upon the remedies for the universal indifference which is taking hold of so many Catholics in a frightening way. I can find only one: the Eucharist, love for Jesus Eucharistic. Loss of faith comes in the first place from loss of love; darkness, from the loss of

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<sup>3</sup> In particular, four problems were highlighted: 1st the spiritual abandonment of diocesan priests in the midst of their ministry and of the devout laity; 2nd the lack of spiritual direction for the majority of the devout, especially with regard to the interior life; 3rd the lack of devotion to the Blessed Sacrament; 4th the many sacrileges committed against the adorable sacrament. Cf. letter to Father Colin, 3 February 1851 - CO 243 (letter not sent).

light; the freezing cold of death from the absence of fire. Oh! Jesus didn't say: I've come to bring a revelation of the most sublime mysteries: but rather, 'I have come to bring fire on the earth, and all I desire is to see it enkindle the whole world.' (cf. Lk 12:49)"<sup>4</sup>.

In 1852 he wrote: "Now we must quickly get to work to save souls by the divine Eucharist, to awaken France and Europe numbed in dormant apathy because they don't know the gift of God, Jesus, the Eucharistic Emmanuel. This is the spark of love which we must ignite into tepid souls who think they are devout, and are not, because they haven't made Jesus in the holy Tabernacle their center and their life... I see that people are wandering too far from the holy Eucharist, that this mystery of love par excellence is not sufficiently proclaimed"<sup>5</sup>.

As the Rule of Life clearly states, Father Eymard found the answer "in the love of God manifested in a special way in the gift of Christ in his Eucharist". Of great importance in his life was the discovery of God's love, which became a strong point of his proclamation; and as a consequence, the discovery of the centrality of the Eucharist, the sacrament of God's love, which is manifested in a special way in the gift that Christ makes of himself.

The grace of the rock of Saint-Romans<sup>6</sup>, if we consider the spiritual context of his era, worked in him like a Copernican revolution. This experience remains fundamental even today. In contact with creation, travelling paths that only the Spirit knows, Father Eymard is led to a life inspired solely by love; penetrating the very heart of God, he discovers there a burning furnace of love. He proposes to everyone this path of discovery of God's love, which he called: the path of royal love, the shortest and noblest path, which gives everyone the "wings of the royal eagle" to reach God (cf. RA 16,2; 18,2).

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<sup>4</sup> Letter to Tholin-Bost, 22 October 1851, CO 286.

<sup>5</sup> Letter to Tholin-Bost, 11 February 1852, CO 325.

<sup>6</sup> In Father Eymard's correspondence we find several references to this experience, spanning from 1851 to 1867 (CO 263; CO 832; CO 845; CO 971; CO 1380; CO 1463; CO 2011).

Fascinated, conquered by this love<sup>7</sup>, he found an ever present and true source of this love in the mystery of the Eucharist. “Where does this divine fire reside, where is its fireplace?” - he asks himself. And taking up St John Chrysostom he replies: “This fireplace of love is the Eucharist (...), that’s where the love of Jesus Christ inflames us, penetrates and inflames us” (PG 283,1).

Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, is love made sensible, love incarnate. Everything he said, he said out of love, everything he did, was the fruit of love. And after showing love to his disciples, Jesus gave love: the Eucharist (cf. PS 321).

Father Eymard is convinced, by the power of the Spirit, that the Eucharist is the great grace chosen by God to restore faith and love to the modern world. “It is necessary to make him loved. It is through divine love that we need to bring people back to virtue, to religion, and to the faith. There is no other more efficient means; it is maybe the only one left to combat the indifference that reigns in the world and to win the hearts of the faithful” (PR 149,11).

He suggests to the Church today, faced with secularisation and diversity of cultures, committed to the new evangelisation, the “way of love” as the “most effective means” to make our contemporaries encounter Christ. The first part of n. 2 of the Rule of Life ends by saying: “Captivated by this love (cf. Phil 3:12), he made it known to his contemporaries”.

### **A new form of life in the Church**

Three months before his death - 6 May 1868 - in a sermon Father Eymard, commenting on the first letter of St John: “*And we have recognized the love that God has for us, and we have believed in it*”

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<sup>7</sup> “*Love!* such is my law, my way, my virtue, my strength, my joy, my happiness, my life, my death, my heaven! Amen!” (NR 44,111).

(1Jn 4:16), says: “We believe in love... What is this love that we must believe in? Our Lord Jesus Christ who is the substantial love of the Father and the Son. Happy are those who believe in love, who believe in the Eucharist” (PO 37,1).

He sought the means to make known, to communicate to others his discovery: the love of God revealed/manifested in the Eucharist. “We have only one thought, one goal, one center: the Eucharist! How happy we would be if we could become those special men, and bring back the indifferent and selfish men of our poor society to faith and love of the Eucharist” (CO 609).

Led by the hand of the Spirit, he first thought of a Third Order of men, still linked to the Marists (cf. the “grace of vocation”, Fourvière 21 January 1851); then he joined a Eucharistic movement in the company of de Cuers, Cohen and others, dreaming of participating in the birth of a religious order dedicated to the Blessed Sacrament (cf. the “grace of donation”, La Seyne-sur-Mer 18 April 1853); finally, he founded the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament on 1 May 1856.

Faced with Mgr Sibour, Archbishop of Paris, who is not prepared to welcome a purely contemplative congregation, Father Eymard replies forcefully: “But Your Excellency is mistaken about our purpose. It is not a purely contemplative society. Yes, we adore certainly, but we also want to lead others to adore. We must take care of the First Communion of adults. We want to set fire to the four corners of France, beginning with the four corners of Paris which need it so much!”<sup>8</sup>.

The Eucharistic life that Father Eymard proposes is not limited to the contemplative dimension; he wants to take the Eucharist with all its demands; he wants to unite the active and contemplative dimensions, to adore and make adore, to take care of the first communion of young workers; he wants to light the fire in the four corners of France. This

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<sup>8</sup> G. TROUSSIER, t. 1, pp. 552-553.

is a summary of the “new form of life in the Church” that Father Eymard proposes.

As fire has its flame, so the love of God is completed in the love of neighbour. This fire must first fill and burn all hearts. In this way, his religious, having gathered and burned at the feet of the God of love, can go forth to spread his glory and extend his kingdom. Eymard speaks of courageous men, of “the ones who ignite this Eucharistic fire” (cf. PR 149.11).

Number 2 of the Rule of Life, at the end of the second paragraph refers back to a text of the Constitutions: “to provide for Christ the Lord, present in the Eucharist, true and perpetual adorers and zealous promoters of his love”<sup>9</sup>. If we know the historical setting of this text, which belongs to the years 1864-1868 of Father Eymard's life, we understand that it was not easy for him to outline and codify this “new form of life in the Church”. Until the end of his life, he worked to perfect the Constitutions.

The basic idea is that the Eucharist must be the form of life of a religious of the Blessed Sacrament. The Eucharist must represent the centre and the point of arrival. “An adorer, who is also an apostle, should always adore and preach Jesus Hostia”, he writes towards the end of the Great Retreat in Rome (NR 44,136). The idea is clear: everything must flow from the Eucharist and everything must return to it. The Eucharist, says Father Eymard, “is the center of our life, our power of action and apostolate” (PR 107,3).

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Constitutions No. 2: “The supreme reason for the Institute consists entirely in this, that is, that under the guidance and auspices of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, to God and Our Lord Jesus Christ, dwelling day and night in the Eucharist for the love of mankind, it should consecrate true and perpetual adorers and form courageous zealots of His glory and propagators of His love, that the Lord Jesus always be adored in His sacrament and glorified socially in the whole world”.

## **A fully Eucharistic life**

To understand the “new form of life in the Church” that Father Eymard desired, we must always refer to him. The Rule of Life tells us of one of his convictions: “a life cannot be fully Eucharistic unless it is consecrated to both God and our fellow human beings”. This formulation refers to a letter that Father Eymard wrote to Father de Cuers, his first companion: “A purely contemplative life cannot be fully Eucharistic: the hearth has a flame” (CO 1030).

The Bishop of Grenoble, Mgr Fougerat, in his panegyric on the occasion of the thanksgiving for the canonisation of Saint Peter Julian Eymard (9 December 1962), said: “The originality of Peter Julian Eymard, apostle of the Eucharist, bread of life, consisted first of all in not diminishing anything of the adoring homage, of the transcendent sense of mystery, of the depths of Love. (...) One wished to oblige him to choose between the Eucharist of contemplatives and adorers, and the Eucharist of apostles and missionaries. (...) And the whole spirituality of his Congregation, its entire mission is built on this indissoluble marriage of contemplation and the apostolate. One used to say that he did not know what he wanted, because he was a man of fullness and wanted everything together”.<sup>10</sup>

Father Eymard is the man of fullness, he has lived a fully Eucharistic life and proposes that we “live the mystery of the Eucharist fully” (Rule of Life No. 1).

For him, the Eucharist is the sacrament of Christ's presence, the mystery that contains the total Christ, the synthesis of his mortal and glorious life. “The Holy Eucharist is Jesus past, present and future” (PG 356.1). He states: “We wish to embrace the Eucharistic idea in all its aspects” (CO 553), “We take the whole Blessed Sacrament” (CO 690).

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<sup>10</sup> Hommage à Saint Pierre-Julien Eymard canonisé le 9 décembre 1962. Rome, Maison Générale, 1963, p. 29.



The Congregation unites the active life with the contemplative life: a truly Eucharistic life is actively involved for the salvation of mankind. The Eucharist and the needs of human society cannot be separate realities. He often used the metaphor of fire and its flame. This metaphor expresses his passion for the Eucharist very well. Just as fire has its flame, so the love of God is completed in the love of neighbour<sup>11</sup>. There is a fruitful tension and not separation between these two poles, just as fire and its flame cannot be separated.

Father Eymard proposed a spirituality that was nourished by the celebration and contemplation of the Eucharist, and committed to the service of the Gospel, giving priority to the most disadvantaged people in life. Considering his intense activity, what he accomplished, the many initiatives he launched to incarnate his charism and Eucharistic grace, despite his frail health, we can understand the passion that animated him. This constitutes for us “an example of contemplation and apostolic action” for a creative Eucharistic mission in our world today.

### **He gave his whole self to Christ**

The last paragraph summarises Father Eymard's apostolic action. First of all, his own life of prayer is recalled. His life of adoration nourished his apostolate and his apostolate nourished his life of adoration. Thus he writes in the notes of his last retreat (1868): “Make adoration the very center of my life. Prepare my adoration as one prepares a meal, an important address. The soul of my adorations: the gift of self” (NR 45,16).

In the last years of his life, mass and communion will become increasingly important.

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<sup>11</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (DCE), wrote: “«Worship» itself, Eucharistic communion, includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented.”, no. 14.

Father Eymard is convinced that the sacrifice of the Mass and sacramental Communion are the vital source and summit of all Christian religious experience. He writes: “the Eucharistic marvel that summarizes all the others, and that, in itself, is worth all the love, all the sacrifices, all the glory that the Lord has rendered to his Father during his lifetime: it is the Holy Mass, that is celebrated at every moment of the day and night, in all inhabited places, and even in the heart of deserts” (PG 244,4).

A Christian life that wants to bear fruit must start from Jesus Christ and arrive at him, nourish itself and make the Eucharist its centre of life (cf. PG 241,5). A frequent theme in Father Eymard's preaching is: communion as the power of transformation and holiness; he highlights the role of the Holy Spirit who renews man, freeing him from the chains of sin to open him up to the true freedom of love.

The Eucharist is the bond of Christians, it builds fraternity. Jesus came to make all men one family, "the Eucharist is the bread, the common food, the union of all the children" (PP 36,1); it destroys all kinds of jealousy and separation, because we share the same table and drink from the same cup; we have the same Father who is in heaven. The same spirit of charity unites all those who eat the same Eucharistic bread. “Jesus Christ then is all in all” (PG 242,3), and the Eucharist is “the happy feast of the true fraternity, that we can extend forever” (PG 244,7).

If he strives “to lead people to the adoration of the Lord in the setting of the solemn exposition”, it is because he is well aware of the pastoral challenges of his time, in particular the lack of faith, rationalism and materialism. Through adoration, Father Eymard wishes to lead the faithful back to the person of Jesus as their source of life, to make them encounter his love present in the mystery of the Eucharist, because “they are no longer aware that he is their neighbor, their friend, and their God” (PG 241,4).

Faced with the situation of the society of his time: the absence of reference points, the result of the French Revolution, and the growth of individualism, Father Eymard proposed the cult of the Eucharist to rebuild human society. “But society will revive full of life when all of its members come and gather around our Emmanuel. The relationship of minds will very naturally be reformed under a common truth; the bonds of true and strong friendship will revive under the action of the same love; the beautiful days of the Cenacle will return, the Corpus Christi Feast of the family, the festival of the great King” (PG 241,4).

The Rule of Life then goes on to recall his action in the service of all. Father Eymard is aware that God has entrusted him with a mission for the whole world (cf. NR 44,79); he tells his religious: “You are called to set fire to the four corners of the world” (PR 107,3). “His love loves all his children equally. He wants to give himself equally to all, and therefore, we must continue the Eucharistic cenacle, leaving the festive hall of the King always open to all” (PG 294,6).

Two categories of people in particular are mentioned: “the priests and the poor”. This reference refers to the Decree of Approval of the Congregation of the Religious of the Blessed Sacrament, 8 May 1863. In this decree, Pope Pius IX mentions two specific works of zeal: the reception of secular priests who wish to do their spiritual exercises, and the instruction and preparation of poor children so that they can worthily make their first communion to the Body of Christ.

Father Eymard is aware of the loneliness from which so many priests suffer, of their spiritual abandonment and their lack of devotion to the Eucharist (cf. CO 1099), he proposes to commit himself to their sanctification. He writes: “I understand more than ever that to rekindle, nourish and perfect the spirit of Eucharistic devotion among priests is the work par excellence, the most excellent of all” (CO 698).

In his project to return Christian life to its centre, which is the Eucharist, he sees priests as the “multipliers”, that is, those who work for the spread of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. Indeed, “To do good to

one priest”, he says, “is to do good to thousands of souls”. He dreams of creating priestly fraternities to help them grow in Eucharistic spirituality. In a word, he wants to “sanctify priests through the Eucharist”.

In addition, Father Eymard had discovered the profound link between Christ present in the Eucharist and Christ present in his brothers and sisters, particularly the poor and marginalised by society. His commitment to the workers on the outskirts of Paris, what he called the: “beautiful and lovely mission, the royal mission of the Eucharistic wedding feast” (CO 1099), “the royal work of the Eucharistic wedding” (CO 1020) found its inspiration in the Eucharist and in the Word of God.

At the end of his life, echoing the final doxology of the Eucharistic prayer, Father Eymard notes: “Grace of the apostolate: faith in Jesus. Jesus is there, therefore everything to Him, for Him, in Him” (NR 45,3). He understood that this presence of Christ in the Eucharist is the source of a dynamism and a mission that is never concluded.

The Rule of Life concludes this issue by saying: “his whole life witnesses to the gift of himself to Christ”. This is a reference to what was the apex of his spiritual experience: the vow of personality, the total gift of self. Like the vase in the hands of the potter (cf. Jer 18:1-6), Father Eymard allowed himself to be moulded by the Spirit so that Christ might live in him (cf. Gal 2:20) and thus become a Eucharist, “tasty bread” for the life of his brothers and sisters.

Here is what he writes: “I must give myself unconditionally, and abandon myself to his good pleasure, giving myself up to his grace, like the clay in the hands of the potter [cf. Si 33,13], so that it might form me and make me a good and true adorer. I must hand over to that grace my mind, my heart, my body, and my entire life, so that it might inspire them, form and perfect them into the holiness of the Holy Eucharist. *O Lord Jesus! Live in me, reign in me, govern me, so that*

*you, in all things, may live in me, reign in me and govern me”* (PR 150,22).

We can say that Father Eymard realised what Pope Francis said in a catechesis on the Eucharist, he became a “Eucharistic man”. “We must not forget that we celebrate the Eucharist in order to become *Eucharistic men and women*. What does this mean? It means allowing Christ to act within our deeds: that his thoughts may be our thoughts, his feelings our own, his choices our choices too. And this is holiness: doing as Christ did is Christian holiness. Saint Paul expresses it clearly, in speaking of his own assimilation to Jesus, and he says this: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). (...) Christians are men and women who, after receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, allow their soul to expand with the power of the Holy Spirit”<sup>12</sup>.

1<sup>st</sup> of July 2024

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<sup>12</sup> Pope Francis, *General Audience*, 4 April 2018.