



XI



Saint Peter Julian Eymard and Prayer in the Presence of the Eucharist

In a prayer of contemplation and adoration of Christ present in the Eucharist, solemnly exposed or in the tabernacle, we prolong the grace of the mystery celebrated, intensifying our union with Christ so as to become with him and like him bread broken for a new world.

Insofar as we can, we commit ourselves to personal eucharistic adoration, whether monthly, weekly or daily. This prayer is part of our mission and holds an important place in our lives.

The method of prayer taught by Saint Peter Julian Eymard is inspired by the celebration of the Eucharist.

Rule of Life for Associates (ROLA), 8

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

Saint Peter Julian Eymard and Prayer in the Presence of the Eucharist

1. Opening Prayer (alternate stanzas)

Praise, honor and glory be to you Oh God,
For you have created all things and you give life to all that lives.

We adore you and offer you our worship with humble hearts,
Fill us with your blessings and set our hearts on fire with your love.

You are bountiful in your many gifts,
And all that we have comes from your gracious hand.

In all things may we never fail to give you thanks,
And generously share our blessings with others in their need.

You are merciful and forgiving,
And we have sinned through our human weakness.

With humble contrite hearts bestow your mercy on us,
Make us one in mind and heart with you.

We look to you, our God, for you answer all our needs.
When we call upon you, you are there to help us.

Whatever we ask for in your name, you will grant us.
Bestow your Spirit on us, the greatest of all your gifts.

(Note: the Closing Prayer of this session should be done in the Presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Be sure to allot the time for an extended prayer experience before the Eucharist.)

2. Introduction to the Theme

Father Eymard was clearly a very active man: preacher, organizer, catechist and priest to the “rag-picker” children, provincial and founder of the Blessed Sacrament Congregation. And yet it was prayer that gave him a place to discover the will of God for him; prayer that provided a place of rest and retreat, where he heard his Master urging him to “talk to me about yourself, speak your heart out to me, your wishes, your sorrows,” where he discovered the love of Jesus.

Father Paul Bernier reminds us that in the nineteenth century there was a great emphasis on the idea of reparation in the practice of adoration. “He (Eymard) sensed that fully eucharistic prayer required more than this. What he suggested to us is that our prayer should proceed according to what he called ‘the four ends of the sacrifice of the Mass.’” (364) And so, Eymard’s contribution to the theological thinking on prayer before the Blessed Sacrament was to organize the adoration experience around the four great movements or aspects of prayer during the Eucharistic liturgy: Adoration, Reparation, Thanksgiving, Entreaty – or, as Father Bernier suggests, “adoration, gratitude, reparation and intercession or petition.”

Father Eymard was convinced of the power of prayer in the mission of his congregation. He believed that prayer nourishes our faith, orients our commitment and directs our apostolic activity toward the “greater service and reign of the sacramental Jesus Christ.”

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

“But alas! How have I acquitted myself of my service? I have been an agent of our Lord, his doorman, his military orderly rather than his personal servant. I spoke much about him but little to him personally. I was busy about many things like Martha, whereas this good Master wanted me at his feet; and when I was in adoration, I spent my time having him adored by others rather than adoring him myself, talking to him about others, and studying for the benefit of others, and all the while it was *me* this good Master wanted. He kept telling me, ‘Talk to me about yourself, speak your heart out to me, your wishes, your sorrows.’ But like the clouds that are blown away by the wind, like the wind that whistles and is gone, I busied myself excitedly with irrelevant tasks, useless and even harmful since they were depriving me of the grace of my action and were displeasing to our Lord. How stupid can one be to tire oneself uselessly by doing what our Lord does not will at the given moment!”

Meditation, Volume V, 302–303
February 21, 1865

“The adorers shall apply themselves during their adoration to honor the four ends of sacrifice: namely, to offer perpetually to God the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ a homage of praise and honor, of love and thanksgiving, of reparation and petition, for the greater service and reign of the sacramental Jesus Christ; and finally that all may come to love our Lord Jesus Christ and come eagerly to his sacrament of life.”

RR 78: 4 Chapter IV. How our religious should make adoration
Volume VII, 617

“Dear friend, find God in the calm and peace of solitude. It is easier to find him there. Enjoy God in his goodness to you and follow the path of his divine Providence which has so sweetly and powerfully led you to where you are now. Reflect diligently on our Lord in his divine Sacrament and you will be as happy as one can be on this road to heaven.”

Letter to Father Paul Marie Marechal, SSS
November 29, 1867

4. Bible Text

“When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.”

“In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

Matthew 6:5-8, NAB



5. Conversation – tell us your story

- Call to mind experiences of prayer you have had in your life – moments of solitude, meditation or prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Can you give a witness to the power of prayer in your life?
- The *Rule of Life* states that “this prayer (before the Eucharist) forms part of the mission of the congregation” (29). What does this mean to you, and how do you realize it in your own spiritual journey?

6. Teaching – drawing on the following reading

- The Vineyard, Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament, Australia, September, 2010. Father Anthony McSweeney’s Commentary on number 30 of the *Rule of Life*.
www.stpeterjulianhaymarket.org.au

Saint Peter Julian Eymard and Prayer in the Presence of the Eucharist – Key Points

- Father Eymard centered his prayer on the person of Jesus Christ present in and through the Eucharist, emptying himself entirely out of love and for the glorification of God the Father (Philippians 2: 5-11). This paschal mystery signifies the love of the Trinity to impart the Holy Spirit into our lives for our sanctification and the transformation of the world.
- The Eucharist is the body of Christ at prayer. It is always ecclesial and must never be reduced to a private devotion for oneself. It is a gift given by God to the church for the transformation of the world into the kingdom of God. The Eucharist draws us into the prayer of Christ who intercedes for the needs of all humanity.
- The Eucharist is a “*dynamic*” prayer that works on multiple levels: external ritual with movement, gestures, participation using all the bodily senses; internal acts lifting the mind and heart to God in acts of worship and praise, gratitude and contrition, self-offering and quiet intimacy; spiritual level of the divine action of the Holy Spirit who prays in us bringing about the work of salvation being accomplished by Christ in the church.
- There are various methods of prayer available when praying in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Father Eymard gave priority to the “*four ends of the sacrifice of the Mass*,” namely, a prayer of adoration, of praise and thanksgiving, of reconciliation and intercession. These elements comprise the Mass prayers and are used to extend the fruits of the Mass during periods of eucharistic prayer.

Reading

FATHER ANTHONY MCSWEENEY'S COMMENTARY ON NO. 30 OF THE RULE OF LIFE

“Our response to this presence of Christ is to enter into the dynamism of the Eucharist with a prayer of adoration, of praise and thanksgiving, of reconciliation and intercession as church and for the world.”

Rule of Life, 30

To Pray “As Church”

Father Eymard had an acute awareness of this ecclesial dimension of the sacrament. He wanted “adorers” to be deeply conscious that, choosing to pray in the presence of the sanctified bread, they no longer acted simply in their own name. That which concerns the Eucharist can never be appropriated by us as something private, to use as we wish; it cannot be made the object of our purely subjective “devotions” based on personal tastes or whims.

The Eucharist is God’s gift *to the church* and always retains its essentially ecclesial character. In consequence, Eymard called his religious to transcend purely personal interests and to take on the concerns of the whole church as it makes its laborious way through time. He knew very well that when the church celebrates the Eucharist its interest is not just for itself, but “for the world,” according to the intention of Jesus who described himself as “the bread of life... for the life of the world” (Jn 6:33,51).

For this reason, the criteria that guide our mode of praying must transcend purely personal and subjective goals or even narrowly confessional concerns. It was this awareness that led our founder to propose the Good Friday intentions as a guide. In a word, our prayer must be shaped by the nature of the sacrament as the church understands it.

This same awareness, furthermore, led him to see that prayer made in the presence of the sacrament had to be determined in its form and content by the directives of the church intended to protect the character of the sacrament and order behavior towards it accordingly. He wanted our every approach to the sacrament to be respectful of the church’s directives and laws, in regard, for example, to behavior, dress, and attitudes. He opposed exaggerated

forms of pomp (such as the multiplication of candles) and singularities of personal behavior, because they denoted the intrusion of personal emotion and tastes; he wished to abide by the simplicity and dignity of the liturgical directives.

Our Rule picks up this same concern of our founder when it describes our “response to this presence” as one of entering into what it calls “the dynamism of the Eucharist.”

The “Dynamism” of Prayer and its Fundamental Attitudes

In speaking of the “dynamism” of the sacrament, the Rule situates our prayer in relation to the “action” that is constituted by this sacrament. It is worth noting that one of the early terms for the Eucharistic Prayer was precisely this: the “*actio eucharistiae*.” Such action takes place on different levels:

- On the *ritual* or *liturgical* level, it is constituted by the movements, postures, gestures, and the words of the assembly, representative of the church gathered in this place and time under the leadership of its liturgical minister, to celebrate its hope in obedience to the Lord’s command to “do this in memory of me.”
- A second level of the action is constituted by the succession of *internal acts* expressive of spiritual attitudes corresponding to the words of the prayers and the bodily postures and movements – specifically, of thanksgiving with praise, of confession and adoration, of invocation and offering, of intercession and doxology.
- On a more profound level, that is strictly inaccessible to our scrutiny yet no less real for all that, there is the *divine action* of Christ realizing the memorial in the power of the Spirit and in union with his church, and directing it all to the Father as worship and to us as sanctification.

These three levels are obviously interconnected; yet the movement of the *actio eucharistiae* is a single unitary and coherent one, even though the first two levels are obviously going to be subject to the variations and inadequacies to which the human actors are necessarily prone.

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Our concern is with the second level, namely with the set of spiritual attitudes and acts and their succession embodied in the liturgical prayers. These are described in terms which the founder drew from the Council of Trent, known as “the four ends of sacrifice,” namely, “a prayer of adoration, of praise and thanksgiving, of reconciliation and intercession.” In this, the Rule is simply repeating the teaching of the Founder:

“Since the form of our prayer becomes a rule of life, our religious shall pray in this manner. They shall studiously apply the Four Ends of Sacrifice in their adorations, in preparing for and in thanksgiving after Holy Communion, in confession, in the hearing of Mass and in mental prayer, each according to his own personality, the ministry in which he is engaged and the inspiration of grace... They shall recommend this form of the church’s prayer to all, explaining its meaning and its efficacy, such that its integrating power and its ability to bring about holiness is uncovered.” (Notes personnelles, Saint Bonnet, A.P.S.S. O.6, pp. 49-50. Translation from Donald Cave, *An Eymardian Spirituality*. Rome: Blessed Sacrament Fathers, 1995, 38.)

In reminding us of this part of our heritage, the Rule is affirming the continuing validity of Eymard’s insights. This may surprise some religious, who may perhaps have concluded that, in the light of the conciliar vision and reform, the idea of “the four ends” had by now lost its actuality. This point perhaps needs to be nuanced. What matters most here is not so much the formula as such as what it represented. It was the best – because guaranteed by church teaching – means by which the Founder in his time could focus the attention of his congregation on the *integral vision* of the Eucharist. He did not want a partial approach to the mystery such as that adopted in the reparation movement, and he was perfectly explicit about the matter.

“The purpose which we are setting for our little Society, is to honor our Lord Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament by the four ends of the Sacrifice: adoration, thanksgiving, reparation and petition — or a perpetual mission of prayer. We take the whole Eucharist. That is why I cannot accept the idea of mere reparation .. nor an exclusively contemplative life.” (Letter to Mme. d’Andigne, August 24, 1857, 85. In his refusal “I cannot accept...” he alludes to the suggestions of Mother Dubouché and of Father Hermann Cohen (emphasis mine).)

For Eymard, then, the value of the formula was as a means of guaranteeing a comprehensive approach to the sacrament within the parameters of the theology of his time. The recalling of it in the Rule is a reminder to us but it does not bind us to the formula as such.

To understand correctly what the Rule is proposing we must also establish a clear distinction between the *insight* of the Founder into the principles that guarantee an integral view of the Eucharist on which to found adoration, on the other hand, and the various *methods* by which that insight might be translated in practice, on the other. For it is precisely this distinction that stands behind the phrase that follows: “Though our prayer finds its inspiration in the celebration, it is not limited to any one form” (the word *form* is being used here in the sense of *method*); his insight, in other words, can find expression in a variety of methods of prayer.

A Variety of Possible Methods

In regard to the way we seek to structure our prayer, a person may well, indeed, choose to divide the hour of prayer into four fifteen minute segments, dedicating each segment in turn to the corresponding attitude. Though some may find this approach congenial and helpful, to others it may seem altogether too artificial and mechanical.

Another person might prefer a quite different approach altogether, for example, to follow the pattern that we find in the church’s Eucharistic Prayers. These prayers do indeed enshrine these self-same four attitudes, but they do so in conformity with their own dynamics and unfolding. The advantage of such an approach would be that of substituting, for the more abstract and static schema just mentioned, a pattern nearer to life and one that corresponds more closely to the flow of the Eucharist itself.

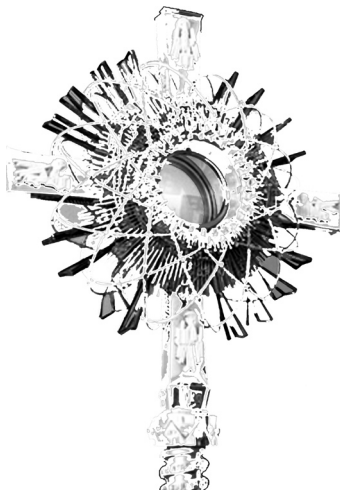
Still another approach might be to pray in a more spontaneous fashion, starting perhaps from a scripture passage or an event of life, and seeking to draw out one’s responses in a freer way that, in some manner, leads the person to incorporate the four fundamental attitudes mentioned, but according as the Spirit guides the person.

Numerous other methods could be used or adapted, provided they are at the service of the needs of the praying person and of the goal of adoration,

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namely to draw the one praying more deeply into the eucharistic mystery. For example, the classical method of the *lectio divina*, with its four stages: *lectio* (reading or study), *meditatio* (reflection), *oratio* (prayerful dialogue with the Lord) and *contemplatio* (silent presence of love), is easily adapted to the setting of eucharistic adoration.

In the end, methods are relative; they are no more than guides or props to help us enter into relation with the Lord. Many of us may find that, over the years, we use a method that helps us for a time but then look for another more adapted to our changing needs. Some methods are well suited to the needs of beginners while others are better adapted to persons who have gained a certain proficiency in praying. In any case, as one grows spiritually, prayer usually becomes more contemplative and hence simpler.



7. Closing Prayer

Closing Prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament

(Pass out blue Adoration Prayer cards)

Opening Song:

Let us Pray:

I pray to you, O Lord, I call to you,
and at times I do not even find the right words
to speak to you about myself, about you,
about everything and everyone.

My words fail me, but I still feel attracted to you,
to reflect on my life in your presence.
May this always continue, Lord!

And may the example of Saint Peter Julian Eymard
encourage me to make my life of prayer
a breath of my soul, breathing you,
a constant inhaling of your Spirit,
a source of life and love.
Amen.

Psalm 63

O God, you are my God – for you I long!
For you my body yearns; for you my soul thirsts.

I look to you in the sanctuary to see your power and glory.
For your love is better than life; my lips offer you worship!

I bless you all my life long;
I lift up my hands calling on your name.

My soul delights in the rich banquet of praise,
with joyful lips my mouth glorifies you!

My soul clings fast to you;
your right hand holds me fast.

Period of Silence

Gospel Reading: *John 15: 9 17*

As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love.
If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love.

I have told you this so that my joy might be in you and your joy might be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. This I command you: love one another.

*The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you O Lord.*

Incensing of the Blessed Sacrament and the assembled group

Prayer

Good and gracious Lord, your Spirit changes our hearts
and calls us to a deeper sense of the paschal mystery.

May this eucharistic prayer hold an active part in our lives.
May we go forth renewed in the hope of your promise.
Your Son suffered, died and rose from the dead to bring us new life.

Grant us a portion in the fullness of life in your kingdom
Where you live and reign with the Holy Spirit,
One God, forever and ever. Amen.

8. Additional Reading Material

- Fickel, William, SSS. “In a Profound Atmosphere of Prayer.” *Manna I*. Published by the Center for Eucharistic Evangelizing, Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament.
- Falardeau, Ernest, SSS. “Eucharistic Contemplation 15 - The Eymardian Way.” *Emmanuel*, June 2002.
- Falardeau, Ernest SSS.” Lectio Divina.” *Emmanuel*, July/August 2001.
- Bernier, Paul. SSS. “Prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.” *Emmanuel*, September/October 2003.
- Wiseman, James A., OSB. “The Eucharist: the Greatest of All Prayers.” *Emmanuel*, July/August 2010

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