

The Spirit of the Foundation¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Paris, Tuesday, December 27, 1859

My Sisters, we were gone for a while, but we left you with the Good Lord, the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, and the whole of paradise. I am always hoping that you can live without me, because, after all, man is only an instrument. And it can happen that you will be obliged to give up these little instructions, as happened in Marseilles. If you place your peace in these little instructions, you will no longer be running. You must keep running, like a clock.

My goal, in all that I do, is always to make you go alone to the Blessed Sacrament. You have a lot of need for direction, for priestly guidance, but as far as I am concerned, to be wise, I must imitate St. John the Baptist. He had disciples: and you, you are my disciples. The Good Lord gave me the grace to gather you. He instructed them and kept them for a long time. When the time came, he sent them all to² our Lord (cf. Jn 3:26), and he disappeared (cf. Jn 3:30), like the stars do when the sun has risen. **All our instructions should make you become a burning bush in the presence of our Lord. We throw them into your heart so that you can burst into flame.** Otherwise you will be like a beggar who asks for a piece of bread and sometimes gets something stale. This is what happens when, in front of the tabernacle of mercy and grace, you are not sufficiently given to our Lord.

You should suffer less when you miss your other exercises: they give you life, but adoration replaces everything. The Divine Office less so: you pray, but you pray with the words of the Church. The words are those of the Holy Spirit and the Church has you utter them, (...) if you did only that, you would only be praying persons. But adoration is different: there, you are being formed in the true spirit of your vocation. Holy Communion is the holiest, most divine action; it would not bear fruit without adoration, but it works during adoration. When you have received Communion, you produce acts of virtue; but in adoration, our Lord works in you: you are then forming in yourself the life of our Lord. He is feeding it; you are not beggars.

Understand clearly the spirit of your vocation – the spirit in which you must honor our Lord. I will not always be [there] talking to you. If ever someone tells you something else, if someone wants you to focus on things contrary to this, I sincerely hope – whether I am still alive or not – that you will never deviate from the spirit of your rule. You understand that if another came, you would not have the same food. The Spirit of God does things only once; he makes only one foundation – not two. When he gives a grace, he doesn't experiment – he gives it completely. It's up to us to make it bear fruit. My Sisters, there is much commotion about you: people know you exist, that something is happening. Many well-to-do persons in Marseilles are asking when we will begin there. I said: Not before one or two years. They consider you very lucky to be near us. In general the two branches are not together; they are not in the same chapel, as in the Cenacle. This is a great opportunity, but it certainly requires much greater prudence.

[...]

¹ Number 190. L'esprit de fondation.

² Guillot and (S7bis), variant: *vers* (towards)

We form only one³ family: one day, will this be a consolation and a glory? I don't know, but when the Blessed Sacrament was not yet exposed, we were like our Lord on the eve of his death. When our Lord died, St. Peter became the head of the apostles and of the Church, prayer was in common, but everyone lived at home. When adoration began, the faithful experienced a new grace. Our Lord wanted it that way. You must try to live according to this first spirit and grace, and not deviate from it. Later it will be a grace of perfection, and not of foundation. Usually, the initial grace is prophetic; as time goes on, you will live like a tree does from its roots. Draw your life from it: God wanted to use us – Receive attentively what we have tried to tell you.

Personally, I admit that, when I review the notes taken at the beginning, I am surprised. God gave much light, and, as we move on, he seems to give even more. At first God makes us do his will; later, when we want to do something else, we encounter many difficulties. Do not be concerned about what you will become in the world: I'm talking about your external situation, your habit, your legal status in the Church – how many religious groups have worn themselves out trying to move too quickly! **Your hidden life is like the life of the Blessed Virgin.** Even after the Resurrection and Pentecost, she always honored our Lord by a hidden life. She spent her life at the foot of the tabernacle.⁴ That is also your duty; external works will never be your concern – they will be works of zeal, but not of vocation.

Die then, so that our Lord may live in you. Then God will shape the external [dimension]. You are not sufficiently Eucharistic. We must live in Jesus, and Jesus must live in us – we must be his human form. You must be severely tempted and crucified; thieves attack those who are rich and powerful. The devil will do the same, and so will the world, your vocation is so great. If you were here for your own satisfaction, that would be very sad. Jesus does not seek satisfaction; the Eucharist is his perpetual sacrifice.

I have seen many religious women in my travels, and I said to myself: They are not equal to ours. Externally, you have nothing at all; naturally speaking, nothing at all⁵. Yet grace – what Jesus is doing around you – makes you worth a hundred times more. I was telling myself: Our sisters are much richer, closer to the Good Lord. They don't even have an attractive habit. What does Jesus value? His life in us. And the Father? He loves Jesus in us. The rest are mere trinkets. You might have a beautiful habit, but what value is that, if there is no spirit⁶?

How beautiful is a soul that is poor and detached from created things! It is certainly very beautiful and weighs heavily in the scale of justice and mercy. The poor little person – the nobody – who annihilates himself – how great will he be before God! How great was the Blessed Virgin – she weighed more heavily in the scales for the salvation of the world than the entire universe, yet she was unknown. The Good Lord surrounded her with such poverty and humility that no one noticed her. Do you believe that she was venerated as the saints were venerated? During her public life, she passed unknown among the people; but she was great before God!

³ Guillot and *S7bis*, variant: même (same).

⁴ Symbolic or figurative meaning.

⁵ Omitted in Guillot and (*S7bis*): *pour ce qui est naturel, rien du tout* (naturally speaking, nothing at all).

⁶ Omitted in Guillot and (*S7bis*): *ce sont des colifichets. Cela a beau être un habit religieux, si vous voulez* (The rest are mere trinkets. You might have a beautiful habit)

If you had famous women among you, famous young ladies, and big names – God preserve you from that – you would have difficulty remaining humble before the Blessed Sacrament. We have only average virtues: we cannot boast that we would have the strength to resist temptations, as though our virtues were stronger. For us, we have more than you do, but it is only a hindrance. That’s all. Here, it is very little; but if you could see Marseilles – how beautiful it is! And here we have titles – see what difficulties it causes: we are the superior, the Founder – as though we were the one who had founded. Alas, alas! The Good Lord allows it, but I would be very foolish if I did not see this as a temptation – a natural temptation. They say: Here is a man who is always before the Blessed Sacrament; he must love the Lord very much; he must be a zealous firebrand. They say these things when they see us on our kneeling benches. Besides, we have our priestly dignity, a quality that makes us known. We must make be very small in our own eyes, to keep our weaknesses in mind.

Let me tease you, perhaps you would not be as strong as we are. After twenty-five years as a priest, I am getting used to the compliments and the humiliations. When I preach, there are always people with flattering words about a beautiful sermon. Anyway, you have just come out of the woods. I thank the Good Lord that we began in Paris. If we had begun in Lyons or Marseilles [there would be more popularity], but here, no one [we are unknown].

In general, when people see our habit, it’s not bad: we have no cape, but just a small collar. They greet us: Good morning, Brother. They take me for one of the teaching brothers. And I answer: Good morning, Sir. At least they did not call me superior or Founder. That was not so bad.

The Good Lord helps us much by keeping us out of the public eye. The devil hurts us much by honoring us. St. John the Baptist said so beautifully: he *must increase, and I must decrease* (Jn 3:30).



Points for reflection:

Father Eymard presents his daughters with the true values that they must esteem: dependence on God and not on his own person; life in Jesus more than in external works; the hidden life more than external signs; humility more than human honors. How do you find yourself in this teaching?