

# Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament



Serving in the United States for more than 100 years

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## IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF EYMARD

by Dr. Patrick J. Riley

Twenty seven of us arrived in Paris on September 27. We were pilgrims *In The Footsteps of Saint Peter Julian Eymard*. Thirteen were members of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament including our pilgrimage leaders, Norman Pelletier and Tom Wiese. Among the SSS pilgrims were priests from Sri Lanka, India, and Vietnam. The lay members of the pilgrimage were a diverse group from as far north as Maine, as far south as Florida, from Maryland in the East to Las Vegas in the West, and New Mexico in the Southwest.

On our first evening in Paris, as a kind of pre-pilgrimage experience, we had dinner at a local restaurant and enjoyed a cruise on the River Seine, during which we were introduced from afar to the Louvre, Notre Dame Cathedral, the Latin Quarter and other treasures of L'Ile de la Cité and the Left and Right Banks.

The next morning Father Norman explained the history and nature of pilgrimages as we set off on the first day of our journey. While our trip allowed us to see and enjoy much of what France has to offer in monuments, shrines, churches, picturesque countryside, cuisine and

art, the constant thread that ran through our pilgrimage was a focus on Saint Peter Julian Eymard, his life, and his faith journey. We began that focus on our first full day as our bus took us to the Rue d'Enfer and Faubourg St. Jacques where Father Eymard established the first foundations of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament. Here he began his ministry focused on helping young children and adults prepare for First Communion. It was here, too, that the Blessed Sacrament was first solemnly exposed for the new community. Later that evening, we drove across town to the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers and Brothers on Avenue Friedland. There we saw the body of Father Eymard enclosed in a glass casket. We celebrated our first Eucharist together as pilgrims in this chapel.

During the next couple of days we toured Paris. We saw the Arc de Triomphe, the Eiffel Tower, and many other interesting sites in the City of Lights. We had tours of the magnificent cathedrals of Notre Dame, Sacre Coeur, and Chartres with their flying buttresses and absolutely breath-taking stained

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glass windows. What was surprising to some of us was the fact that all three of these gems are actually 'living' churches with Masses celebrated daily and confessions heard in many languages every day—that allows these architectural and artful wonders the opportunity of offering an even more intense religious experience. We were privileged to celebrate Mass in the crypt of the Chartres Cathedral.

On day 5 of our pilgrimage we were off to the ancient city of Lyons. On the way, we stopped off at the celebrated ecumenical community of Taizé. We also stopped in Ars sur Formans at the church of Saint John Vianney, the Curé of Ars, who was a friend and confidant of Father Eymard. We visited his house and celebrated Mass in the church at an altar above which the body of John

Vianney was exposed in a glass casket. The next day we visited St. Bonnet-Le-Froid, a country chateau, where Father Eymard stayed in 1864 to write the final draft of the Constitutions of the Congregation. The chateau once belonged to the sister of Father Chanuet, one of Father Eymard's early companions. We celebrated Mass in the chapel in which Father Eymard himself had celebrated Mass. This was followed by a delicious lunch served in the restaurant operated by the current owners of the chateau. They then offered us a tour of the rest of the building and showed us the room in which Father Eymard worked on the constitutions.

We returned to Lyons and walked through the old city where Father Eymard had served as a Marist. We toured the church where he was invited to carry the Blessed Sacrament in an outdoor procession. We

also visited the Prado where a Father Chevrier, a contemporary of Father Eymard, worked among the poor and then founded the Prado Congregation of priests and sisters who continue his work among the poor today throughout the world. Father Eymard visited Father Chevrier at the Prado and had hopes of working more closely with him in the ministry which was so close to the heart of Father Eymard. Before leaving Lyons, we celebrated Mass at the old church of Notre Dame de Fourviere, a place in which Father Eymard became more conscious of the grace to found the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament. Over the doors of this basilica is a relief of the "Saints of Lyon". Father Eymard was one of the figures pictured in this relief.

We then left for Grenoble. On our way we visited the museum and the book shop of the Carthusian



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Monastery of the Grande Chartreuse. This monastery, founded in the 11th century by St. Bruno, has endured the destruction of six fires, one avalanche, and several expulsions by anti-religious anarchists, but it still thrives and maintains its contemplative tradition, a flavor of which is conveyed in their very modern, state-of-the-art museum.

Just south of Grenoble we visited St. Romans, a small hill in a cemetery where Father Eymard would go to pray. There is a small chapel there now which is a shrine to Father Eymard. We visited Chatte, where Father Eymard served as a curate in his first assignment after ordination. At the time of our visit, the parish was preparing to celebrate the 170th anniversary of Father Eymard's arrival at the parish by placing a plaque on the rectory where he lived. Our plans to visit other spots in Grenoble significant to Father Eymard were not realized that day as our bus went off a small country road and could not continue. Rather miraculously, we were welcomed by the Soeurs du Christ Roi (Sisters of Christ the King) who operated a small boarding school near there. They could not have been more hospitable. After six hours, two cranes arrived to get the bus back on the road and we were off again to Grenoble with everyone safely on board.

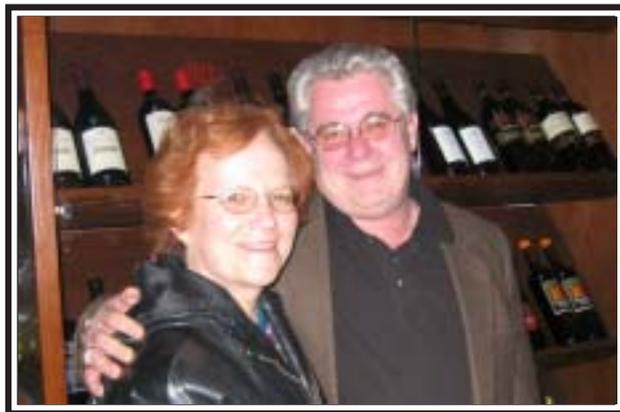
On our way to LaMure, where Father Eymard was born and died, we visited the parish church at Monteyard where Father Eymard served as pastor before he entered

the Marists. In La Mure, we visited Father Eymard's house which hosts a modest museum to the Saint and his Congregation. We visited the "old" church where Father Eymard was baptized and received his First Communion. Even though Father Eymard's body was removed from his home town and taken to Paris, his grave stone remains in La Mure next to those of his sister and step sister. In our tour of La Mure, we saw the school Father Eymard attended which has changed little on the exterior since those days. About ten of us 'braver souls' tackled the rather steep climb to the Calvary area where Father Eymard often went to pray. We celebrated Mass in the old church in La Mure and toured the new one which contains a shrine to Father Eymard.

Before returning to Paris, our bus climbed high into the lower Alps where we visited the Shrine to Our Lady of LaSalette which commemorates the appearance of the Blessed Mother to two young children in 1846. It was amazing to some of us how the LaSalette Fathers and Brothers were able to get all the construction materials up the narrow mountain road, above the tree line, to

build their large church, conference center, and monastery. We came down from the mountain and continued on to the shrine of Notre Dame du Laus. We celebrated Mass in this same church ( which celebrates another apparition of Our Lady) where Peter Julian Eymard came at 11 years old to have his confession heard in preparation for his First Communion. Here he told the Blessed Mother that he desired to become a priest. At the close of the Mass, Father Norman gave each of a small cross as a memorial of our pilgrimage.

The next morning, we drove back to Paris from where we departed the next day for home. While our pilgrimage has ended and we are back to our day-to-day lives, images remain of those privileged 10 days. During this pilgrimage, Father Eymard was really brought to life for us as we walked where he walked and prayed where he prayed. We visited those sites most significant in his life. Each day we prayed to him, invoked his protection, and asked him to grant us a deeper appreciation and love for the Eucharist. Hopefully, that will be the lasting grace of this pilgrimage for each of us. ✚



Dr. Patrick Riley, author of this article, with his wife, Sue Ann, at a recent celebration of their anniversary.