

# **CHAPTER I**

## **The Early Years.**

**Latin Student at St. Robert's Hospice**

**Novice with Oblates of Mary Immaculate**

**Departure from Pastorship at Monteynard**

TO MLLLES. MARIANNE EYMARD AND NANETTE BERNARD  
(III 1/145 VI 10)<sup>1</sup>

*Saint Robert<sup>2</sup>, June 30, 1828*

My dear sister,

I'm writing you a few words to let you know that my health is quite satisfactory, thank God. I hope this letter will find you in good health, as well.

Let me say that I was very upset over the fact that I did not see you before I left. You surely could have waited a little longer for me. Unfortunately, it was otherwise. However, I do hope to see you this summer. It's starting to get very hot here and it would be a lie if I didn't say that I'm bored. It's worse than ever. If, at least, I had someone to keep me company, I wouldn't be so bored. But I have no one, so to speak. I pray that the Lord will have mercy on me and remove me from the abyss of disorder and crime which reign here in Bicetre.

May the Lord keep me from spending the rest of my life here!

Would you have my name inscribed among the members of the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin? Since the feast of the Visitation is coming soon, I would like to become one of your associates. Feel free to choose the hour that I am to dedicate to the Virgin Mary. Please send me the holy picture which is in the book I had brought to Notre Dame du Laus.

If I am able to go to La Mure this summer, I promise to give you a very lovely sermon. Until then, accept this token of my esteem and love.<sup>3</sup>

See, I am praying to the Good Lord for all our relatives and also for Nanette, whom I look upon as my sister. Notice the expression of joy shining on my face!

Remember me to the Lord in prayer as I need it in order to remain virtuous while living among so many scoundrels.

Give my regards to the Pastor. Since I was so disappointed that I could not see him before I left I didn't even ask his sister to give him my warmest regards. I was so hurt!

I wish I could continue writing now. If it were possible, I would go on forever, but right now the paper is full. So I am closing by embracing you both in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

Julian Eymard

I forgot to mention that no one scolded me; neither Fr. Dumoulins nor the Director. On the contrary, they welcomed me very joyfully. The Blessed Virgin has been very kind to me.

To Miss Marianne Eymard, at her father's  
at La Mure (Isere). Urgent  
(Father Eymard was then 17 years old.)

The following letter is written from the novitiate of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate where Peter Julian entered in June 1829. In November 1829, he was sent home seriously ill on the advice of the doctor.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the first of 145 letters addressed to his sister Marianne Eymard and to Nanette Bernard, their adeptes

<sup>2</sup> Hospital 6 kilometers from Grenoble

<sup>3</sup> Here he drew a picture of himself kneeling in prayer with a cross in his hand.

**TO MILES. MARIANNE EYMARD AND NANETTE BERNARD**  
(III 2/145 VI 10)

*L.C.M.*<sup>4</sup>

*Marseilles, October 13, 1829*

My dear sisters,

I was very happy to receive your letter. I can only admit that I am guilty of what you say. No, it wasn't laziness that prevented me from writing to you. Far from it. Time just flew by without my being aware of it, because I was spending such beautiful days with dear friends. The fact that you are in good health, as you said in your letter, made me very happy. Let me assure you that I am also enjoying good health. I haven't been sick since I arrived here. I was very surprised that you didn't take advantage of Brunel [to send me a letter]. I thought I might receive some letters from you. When I learned that you didn't even see him, I was really surprised. Knowing the circumstances, I can understand why. We lose sight of things and it is easy to forget. Your letter surprised me and it was only after a second reading that I recognized your handwriting. At first I thought it was Nanette's. I'm so very happy that you are continuing to learn. Continue, continue. I know you will succeed.

For the moment, let's talk about something else: the Sodality. Is it successful? That is what I would like you to tell me. Above all, recommend me to the prayers of the devout members of the Sodality. Continue your own prayers for me and have Nanette do the same. Pray that I may persevere to the end in the holy vocation to which God has called me. Avoid the ways of the Pharisees. That is to say, avoid the companionship of men: flee from it, flee! Do look after our Henrietta, if she stays at the house. On one occasion I saw a worker from Vanard speaking with her and it really troubled me...

If I continued to write as I would like, I would never finish. New things constantly come to my mind, but it surely is time to stop. Please remember me in your prayers. I do not and will never forget you in mine. Extend my regards to Babos, whom I forgot to visit. I keep thinking of Baret; that dear friend was kind enough to write to me through Brunel and I haven't answered his letter yet.

To close, my sister, I offer my deepest respects to you, and to Nanette, as well. And I have the honor to be

Your brother,  
Julian Eymard

P.S. I am happy that you will have the good fortune to hear our Fathers.

To Miss Marianne Eymard  
at her father's at La Mure.

There is a 10 year lapse in the available correspondence and Fr. Troussier questions the accuracy of the date of the following letter to his sisters. It is difficult to determine under what circumstances it would have been written.

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<sup>4</sup> Abbreviation for "Praised be the Heart of Mary," in Latin.

**TO MISS MARIANNE EYMARD**  
(III 3/145 VI 10)

*J.M.J.*<sup>5</sup>

1837<sup>6</sup>

My very dear sister,

It is in the Lord that I am writing to speak with you about spiritual things. Since our affection is rooted in God with Heaven as its goal, it's only right that we assist one another on the long and difficult journey to eternity. My dear sister, how many times I thanked our good Master for having consecrated you to serve him as a virgin! How often I applauded the plans of Divine Providence upon you in all the circumstances of your life! All the vexations, conflicts, pain and suffering which filled your life were an indication that God wished you to love him more perfectly and gave you those opportunities to show your love for him. So you will continue to suffer. You will always suffer, because divine love always places its throne on Jesus' Calvary. Your crown of Justice must be made up of thorny red flowers, gathered at the foot of the Cross. If you really want to love Jesus, you must embrace suffering, for you must love it as the bond and nourishment of that love.

You asked me two questions: the first, what you should think about this fear of yours, the second, how you should pray. First, to reply to your fear of not having acted according to God's will, I answer: you surely could have legitimately sought a relationship with the future in mind, even without our parents' permission, because that is a natural right. With greater reason, you might have pursued a deeper relationship and yet maintained a friendship that was both reasonable and Christian. Our parents' opposition stemmed more from not finding you at work than from a condemnation for seeing you go to your girl-friend's home.

If your choice had been conducive to personal gratification and vanity, if you had been seeking pleasure and honor according to worldly standards, I would say: it's a punishment; her reward is in this world. But the cross leads me to say - God willed this state in life, he willed it in his love and certainly wills it now. If he didn't he would not have given you this inclination, this continuing attraction, this facility for union [with him]. Satan would have done all he could to prevent it. He dislikes a sacrificial path. So from now on, bless and thank God for your choice and your state in life. It's the most beautiful in the eyes of faith and love.

For the second question about prayer: In order to succeed in it, it should be done when we first awaken, when our whole being is calm and recollected. We need to make our meditation before anything else. There are some who do it even before vocal prayer, in order to profit better from the soul's recollection.

As far as possible, we should pray in a quiet and silent place. That is why contemplatives seek out places of solitude, e.g. caves in the rocks, the more solitary unnoticed places of their home or Church. Then, one is closer to God.

Try to have a favorite topic for prayer which will give life to the others [prayers]. No doubt, that would be divine love, together with a strong inner attraction, such as devotion to the Passion of Jesus, the Blessed Sacrament, holy Poverty, or awareness of the divine Presence. This then must lead us to love his divine Will.

My dear sister, be faithful to meditation, follow the attraction of recollection and union with our Lord by self-denial. Go directly to Jesus without too much fuss or preparation. Love goes directly to the heart. The child goes directly to its mother without delay. When we love someone, we no longer need someone else to introduce us - that's only for strangers.

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<sup>5</sup> Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

<sup>6</sup> Fr. Troussier questions the year, probably Apr. 1847.

*The Early Years*

Decide on a determined [amount of] time: a half hour, an hour, according to the time you have available. But before prayer [begins], leave aside any duties which would distract you.

These are some sure rules, my dear sister. I share them with you with a brother'-s love. As a priest and religious, I beg Our Lord to give you the gift of prayer together with all it entails.

All yours in our Lord,  
Your brother,  
Eymard

Fr. Eymard wrote to Fr. Dumolard regarding his plans to join the Marist Congregation (Doc. 4) and to his sisters from Grenoble after the fact (Doc. 5).

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**TO FR. DUMOLARD<sup>7</sup>**  
(V 1/2)

*October 4, [1838]*

I have just received your magnanimous letter, my dear friend; your sentiments and mine are the same. Only God can will the state of crucifixion in which I had been since our separation. I wanted things to happen right away, but a thousand delays! The greatest [was] the Bishop. Yes, my dear, I know the famous words of St. John Chrysostom: "*Super calcato, Petre, perge.*"<sup>8</sup>

It seems to me that once I am convinced of my vocation, nothing will stop me. I made this sacrifice twice and never fulfilled it. I hope the third time will be eternal, because even if I knew that I would die on the way I would be happy! If only I had the advantage your brother had, to die in a religious house!

As for my temporal affairs, I have a few personal debts. I would like to pay them off before leaving, and I propose nothing less than to sell some of my books, and bring the rest with me.

Keep this matter so secret that they will not know our decision until after we leave!

I am working a little at writing a few fundamental instructions, in order not to be naked; but I think that we will have to make up for this winter's delay.

The Bishop will oppose you as much as he can. But I hope to have a peremptory reason. You, you have the Foreign Missions. Besides, I know as you do all the difficulties that will be involved in creating his new house,<sup>9</sup> and I don't want to bear them. Besides, I want to leave the diocese, in order to be free and unknown.

Win over the Bishop, and everything is done.

Don't come to see me this week. I'm leaving for Voreppe. I am going to get the altar which Mr. de Perus made for me.

Ever and always,<sup>10</sup>  
Eymard, Pastor

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<sup>7</sup> Pastor at Villard – St. Christophe

<sup>8</sup> Peter, proceed without scorn.

<sup>9</sup> The Bishop was establishing a new community.

<sup>10</sup> French "conglutine".