
A TRIBUTE TO THE BLESSED SACRAMENT SISTERS



On the occasion of the centennial of the coming to Canada in 1903 of the Sisters Servants of the Most Blessed Sacrament, it is my pleasure to share with you what I wrote about them, in the Pentecost 2003 pastoral letter.

SEIZED BY THE LOVE OF CHRIST

The Congregation of the Servantes du Très-Saint-Sacrement was founded in Paris in 1858 by Pierre-Julien Eymard (1811-1868), a French priest, with the collaboration of Marguerite Guillot (1815-1885), a worker. Two years previously, Saint Pierre-Julien had founded the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament, for men. On 26 May 1864, feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, the seventeen first sisters and their five postulants settled in Angers; a few months later, they already numbered well over thirty. On 1 August 1868, Father Pierre-Julien Eymard, the Founder, died at the age of 57. He was beatified by Pope Pius XI on 12 July 1925 and canonised by Blessed John XXIII on 9 December 1962, during the first session of the Second Vatican Council. This man of fire had been seized with the love of Christ revealed in the Eucharist, and his aim was to witness to this to the people of his time. His life, nourished by the Eucharist celebrated and contemplated was rich in all kinds of ministries. Through the Holy Spirit he perceived the Eucharist's power for renewal of Church and society: "We take all of the Blessed Sacrament! We want not only to worship and adore, serve and help the Eucharistic Jesus, but we especially want to make him known, worshipped and loved in every heart. Until now the sun of the Eucharist had not risen, but all the great Eucharistic riches now open before us. This is amazing! What will it be like, later?" The Foundress, Mère Marguerite, died 7 July, 1885, after having been for over twenty years blind and suffering. During her lifetime she had received the final approval of the Holy See for her Congregation and its constitutions. She also worked on a book of rules, a directory, and a manual for the sisters, and founded two convents, in Paris and Lyon.

IN OUR DIOCESE

The Servants of the Blessed Sacrament arrived in Canada, in Chicoutimi, 21 July 1903 – one hundred years ago, this year. From there they gradually prepared the founding of the Edmundston Cenacle, as their convents are called. In July, 1945, at the time Father Marie-Antoine Roy, O.F.M. is appointed the first bishop of the newly-erected diocese of Edmundston, he was replacing chaplain at the Chicoutimi Cenacle. The very day of his episcopal ordination – 15 August 1945 – the sisters let it be known that they would like to open a cenacle in Edmundston. One of Bishop Roy's first reactions reminds one of the reaction of Pope Pius IX, when he approved the project for the new Society of the Blessed Sacrament; when the project was presented to him by its founder, Father Pierre-Julien Eymard, in 1856, the Pope had exclaimed, "The Church needs this Work!" For Bishop Roy, also, "his diocese needed this Work." So, after consultation with clergy and laity of his diocese, on 27 March 1948 the bishop signified his agreement to the sisters' coming: "The Blessed Sacrament Sisters have requested to come to our episcopal city. We and our clergy have granted their request with happiness and joy, though we ourselves should have approached them on bended knee, and crying tears of blood, begging them to come to us!" On 10 April, 1948, he wrote to his people: "Contemplatives, perpetual adorers of the Most Blessed Sacrament, [the sisters] desire to open a centre for the spreading of Eucharistic devotion, where the faithful will have easy access and where they shall be able to nourish and renew their devotion. There is no need to demonstrate that by their prayer and sacrifice they shall bring much to the diocese. They shall draw to us the graces which enlighten the mind, purify the heart, and sanctify souls. Their

uninterrupted prayer will bring us further blessings from God.” On a photo of himself he autographed a few weeks before his death in 1948, he wrote: “To the Reverend Sisters Servants of the Most Blessed Sacrament, living links connecting the Eucharistic Christ to the Diocese of Edmundston;” this confirmed once again the mission he had given them for all the years to come. Their mission is to make known the indescribable gift of the Eucharist, through constant praise, adoration, atonement, and perpetual intercession for the needs of the world. Their mission is also one of reminding us that all the baptised are called to this, according to one’s state in life. The faithful who desire to participate in a more committed manner to this mission can join the “Agrégation du Saint-Sacrement” which now has a membership of over 700, in the diocese. They can also practice meditating on the Word of God through the *lectio divina* method. “Everything must flow from the divine Eucharist and return to it: our spirit must be one and return to it,” wrote Saint Pierre-Julien.

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« From A Bishop’s Journal » (503) (27 August 2003)