

BLESSED SACRAMENT FATHERS

The Blessed Sacrament Fathers, a congregation of religious priests and Brothers, was founded in Paris in 1856 by St. Peter Julian Eymard. The Congregation arose to oppose the rising tide of disbelief in the divinity of Christ which brought with it the denial of the reality of the personal presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

The Blessed Sacrament Fathers as founded by St. Peter Julian intended to witness in many ways this personal presence of Jesus Christ, true God and true man in the Blessed Sacrament, but the chief and characteristic way chosen was by perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament solemnly exposed.

The solemn perpetual exposition of the Blessed Sacrament called into existence a pattern of prayer called in the Congregation "adoration." This format of prayer gives the distinctive ordering of the whole pattern of community life. Adoration is the prominent element but thanksgiving, propitiation and petition form an integral part both in the individual life of prayer as well as the life of the community.

This life of prayer St. Peter Julian based upon the four ends of the Sacrifice of the Mass. This clearly oriented the life of prayer, and

¹ In its extraordinary issue dedicated to the 4th Centennial of Christianization of the Philippines, 1965, the BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO outlined the missionary activity of the religious Congregations that contributed to the evangelization of this country up to the year 1900, and of some others that are still engaged in mission work in areas of the Philippines. Considering the scope and limits of that issue, it was not possible to pay due attention to the other religious institutions that have contributed their important share in the various fields of Christian apostolate in this country. Letters from some members of these congregations were received in this office expressing keen interest in seeing similar acknowledgment of their apostolic work in

the apostolate to the central mystery toward which the activity of the Church is directed and from which all her power flows.

The life of prayer, of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament solemnly exposed, brought into being an orderly and public tribute of due worship and reverence to the supreme majesty of God by a community of men designated by the Church for this purpose. The Congregation as a body underlined the chief bounty and benefit the Church has in the abiding presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar. By this public action they could hope to draw men to understand this and all the other bounties and benefits God has lavished on men.

Such an understanding leads to thanksgiving. The Congregation offered to men the pattern of thanksgiving through the example of the complete gift of themselves to the life of adoration.

Perhaps it was more clearly evident in the days of the foundation that there was a need for public amends for the open disregard for this wonderful Gift of God, the Eucharistic presence of Jesus. This disregard remains in our day even though it may be more subtle in form.

In the end the most rewarding duty would be prayer for what would be helpful and beneficial to the salvation of souls. The Congregation could hope to lead all men to understand and practice this unselfish petition.

The Congregation sought the aid of the Blessed Virgin to assist in this work of perpetual adoration since no one knows better than she, nor can know, how best to prove one's love for Jesus.

the BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO. Now our Ecclesiastical Review is most ready to satisfy them all in its succeeding issues.

We invite all Congregations which came to the country after 1900 to send us an informative and compendious sketch on the most salient aspects of their Congregation, its foundation, characteristics and establishment in the Philippines, works of apostolate here in all its forms, charitable, educational, social, etc., giving outstanding facts and figures which might be of particular interest to our selected readers.

The article must be typewritten, double-spaced and between six to ten pages long. No time can be fixed for its publication, but effort will be made to accommodate it as early as possible.—*Ed.*

But apostolic activity "like the flame to the fire" as St. Peter Julian put it, should result from and accompany this life of prayer. While any available channel can be used to spread devotion to the personal presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, the first place is given to helping diocesan priests develop and deepen their appreciation of the Eucharistic mystery so that they will be led to foster the spread of true worship in their flocks.

Special mention should be made of the offering of instruction to children and adults when necessary in preparation for their First Holy Communion. Together with this the Fathers strive to stir up enthusiasm among the faithful for the frequent and full participation in the Liturgy of the Word and the Eucharist. This is done among religious in their convents, the laity in their parishes or in public and private churches.

The spirit characterizing the Congregation is one of the Eucharistic love and humility practiced in total self-denial. The virtues of truth and simplicity fitting for such a vocation while permeating the whole daily life of the Congregation is mostly clearly shown in its obedience not only to the Holy See but also to the bishops of the Church as well as to its own superiors.

At the time of the death of St. Peter Julian the Congregation had only four houses in France and Holland. These houses, though below the number of religious needed for the full pattern of the life of adoration, assured that the pattern would be preserved. It was on those four houses that St. Peter Julian depended to obtain from the Holy See a Decree of Approbation. This decree was issued in 1863, only seven years after the first foundation. This approbation places the original thrust of the Congregation in the protective hands of the Church thus keeping it free from the personal or communal whims of men.

The Constitutions approved in perpetuity in 1895 were substantially those St. Peter Julian had submitted to the Holy See in 1863. The years between had been filled with trials in which the meaning and purpose of the foundation had been challenged both from within and without. All these were resolved by the definitive affirmation of the Founder's grace by the approbation of the Constitutions in 1895.

The small foundation of four houses in two countries in 1863 had spread to the four corners of the world by the centenary year 1956. Over a hundred houses were in existence then with over 1500 professed priests and brothers. The years since 1956 have seen a further spread. In December 9, 1962, at the end of the first session of the Second Vatican Council, St. Peter Julian was canonized in the presence of a large number of the Council.

To the Philippines falls the honor of the most evidently flourishing example of the power of Eucharistic adoration and apostolate. Negotiations for opening a Eucharistic shrine of the Blessed Sacrament by the Fathers in Manila began late in 1955 with arrival of Rev. Fr. Rosaire J. Merin, S.S.S. In the year 1956 saw a sometimes bitter controversy of a very public nature arise over the giving of Sta. Cruz Church in the heart of downtown Manila to the Blessed Sacrament Fathers for the Eucharistic Shrine. The controversy, now happily forgotten, only served to underline the intervention of Divine Providence which identifies itself with the mark of suffering.

Sta. Cruz Church is in the heart of Manila which is the center of the Philippines. The central location has done much to make Sta. Cruz Church the center of the Eucharistic revival evident in the land. In and out of this Church as from the heart a constant stream of Filipinos come to be restored in the Eucharistic spirit only to go out to spread this life giving spirit throughout not only in Manila but the whole of the Philippines.

The first place in this restorative power must be given to the schedule of eleven Masses each day and sixteen Masses each Sunday. Nine of those daily Masses and 14 of the Sunday Masses feature the laymen led participation of the faithful in the Mass. These laymen are drawn from the Eucharistic Fraternity, the equivalent of the Third Order of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers.

As frequent full participation in the Mass demands that the Sacrament of Penance be easily available to the faithful, a generous daily and Sunday schedule of Confessions is a feature in Sta. Cruz Church. On the eves of Holy Days of Obligation, First Fridays, and special days the

number of confessions increase. In addition to the Sacramental and the Confessional, the Fathers give counsel in the Convento for those who desire it.

The most evident fruit of this sacrament ministry has been the ordination of two Filipinos to the priesthood in the Blessed Sacrament Fathers. Applications for entry into the Congregation caused the opening of a novitiate in Sta. Cruz Church in September, 1957. One perpetually professed Filipino Brother has been in service at Sta. Cruz since 1964. At present three lay brothers are in the novitiate. Three young men are in the major seminary on their way to the priesthood. In 1961 the novitiate was moved to the newly constructed Seminary-novitiate of the Fathers in San Jose del Monte, Bulacan.

The recently ordained Fathers came to Sta. Cruz in 1958. As students they travelled back and forth to Christ the King Seminary in Quezon City each day. One made his seminary studies in Australia, the other in the United States. Both are now actually involved in the Eucharistic life in Sta. Cruz.

Since Sta. Cruz Church is a territorial parish, all the parochial activities are carried out even though as far as numbers is concerned, it is one of the smallest parishes in the Philippines.

Undoubtedly the greatest lay arm of the Eucharistic Apostolate in Sta. Cruz Church is made up of the Eucharistic lay associations: the Men Guards, Women's Guard of Honor, and the Eucharistic Fraternity. These three organizations are vigorous examples of lay activity in the prayer life of the Church.

The members of the Women's Guard of Honor pledge themselves to one hour of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament each month. In addition to this, the Women's Guard of Honor have been tireless workers for the benefit of the Eucharistic project. The notable hand they gave toward the fund drive for the building and support of the Seminary-Novitiate of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers in San Jose del Monte, Bulacan, is a matter of history. The Women's branch number 7,000 active members.

The glory of the Men's Branch of the Guards of the Blessed Sacrament has been their maintenance of nocturnal adoration between hours of 7:00 p.m. and 1:00 a.m. each night. Bands of at least six volunteers have been coming according to an hourly schedule each night for over 10 years. While this assures the perpetuity of exposition at Sta. Cruz — the Fathers take the hours from 1:00 a.m. through 6:00 a.m. and through the day — the spiritual benefits to the members cannot possibly be assessed. Nor can one project accurately how much these men influence the spiritual climate of their communities. Members who have been active during their stay in Manila tend to spread the Eucharistic spirit when they return to their province. There are over 4000 active members in the Men Guards.

The Eucharistic Fraternity is composed of men and women desirous of uniting their life of piety more closely to the Fathers of the Blessed Sacrament. The members of the Fraternity have a regular and balanced life of personal and public prayer together with selected activities in the Eucharistic apostolate. The men's part in the leading of participation in the daily Mass has already been underlined. The Fraternity has 340 members.

Even though the Blessed Sacrament Fathers have been limited to Sta. Cruz Church as a missionary area, they have gone out to the ends of the Philippines through those whom they have assisted in becoming more deeply conscious of their duty to be devoted to Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament. These men and women, by gladly assuming that duty in its full, have Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament. These men and women, by gladly assuming that duty in its full, have begun living more clearly Christian lives in the light of the Eucharist and have been carrying that light to others throughout the length and breadth of the land.

What a splendid realization of St. Peter Julian's watchword "Jesus is there! Let it be that everyone come to Him!!!"