

Concerning the Foundation¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament,
Paris, Sunday, July 31, 1859

You are now associates², consequently you participate in all the merits, prayers, and indulgences [of the Society]. We could receive you only personally, verbally, without any rite, becoming your superior by right. **Finally, this Society of the Servants of the Most Blessed Sacrament – so much in demand and awaited for – is now founded: it begins today³, feast of St. Ignatius**, that great saint whose motto was: *All for the greater glory of God*. He began in Paris, in the grotto of Montmartre, with seven companions. There they made a retreat, pronounced their first vows, and from this temple, these catacombs, these tombs of the martyrs, came the apostolic army that has done and continues to do much good in the Church. Their success came from the fact that St. Ignatius was a man of God, and that he had communicated to his followers his love and his virtues. Now they cover the world.

You begin in this same city of Paris, where so many good works began, and where Satan acts in many diabolical ways. There are seven of you: may it please God that you be like the seven lamps spoken of in the book of Revelation, the seven lampstands that represent the seven angels of God. May it please God that you be the lampstand with seven branches that stood before the Holy Ark (of the Covenant), symbol of the Holy Eucharist. May it please God that each of you receive perfectly one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. There are seven lampstands, seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, seven sacraments in the Church; seven is a mystical number. May each of you hold carefully her lampstand and burn brightly before God.

The health of a tree is assessed, not by its blossoms or its fruits, but by its roots. I don't know what you will become, whether you are worthy to become virgins and martyrs. I don't know what the community will become: perhaps some day it will become great. In a sense, it is already great, for you belong to our Lord, who is the source of all greatness and holiness. The nobility of the community cannot increase because your goal is divine. Jesus Christ is perfection itself, from the start, and cannot grow in excellence. Because Jesus Christ is your rule, it is already perfect. There will not be infancy and adolescence, only the perfection of Jesus Christ. The grandeur of the community, insofar as it depends on you, must be like a tree, beginning in its roots. The first germination takes place underground as long as the Good Lord wants. Our Lord remained in the tomb. You must remain there a long time⁴, not asleep, but keeping vigil with Jesus Christ.

¹ Number 156. *Sur la fondation*.

² From Ravanat: “Vous voilà *agrégées*” instead of Pineau: “Vous voilà *professes*” (You are now *professed*).

³ From Ravanat: *Elle est enfin fondée cette Société des Servantes du Très Saint Sacrement tant demandée, tant attendue, elle commence aujourd'hui*. Instead of Pineau and an anonymous copy: *Il est enfin fondé ce tiers-ordre des Servantes du Très Saint Sacrement tant demandé, tant attendu, il commence aujourd'hui*. (This third-order of the Servants... is finally founded.) In the anonymous copy, we read: *Ordre (Order)* rather than *Tiers-Ordre (Third-Order)*. The terms, Order or Third-Order, do not describe the reality. Father usually used the term Society to designate the women's branch of the Society of the Blessed Sacrament. In all the instructions referring to this idea, this is the only place that the term third-order is used in reference to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament. It is the copy of Ravanat that we must follow. It is the earliest and the most reliable, with rare exceptions. Why then did the later copies, after Ravanat, alter the text? Here we are touching the delicate and complex question of the date of foundation.

⁴ From Ravanat and anonymous copy: *longtemps* (a long time).

Today the retreat continues. Let this be a day of gratitude; it's important to thank our Lord. Now, my Sisters, what will you do next? Treasure the graces that you received. To protect a small fire from the force of the wind it must be enclosed and sheltered. How is good fruit produced? First the seed must go into the ground. Jesus Christ planted this seed deeply into your hearts. What comes next? Shelter yourselves from the foul wind of the world. Once the seed is in the ground, it must not be touched, for a mere touch might lead to its death. To ensure this quiet growth, God provides the winter season, so that no one will disturb the grain's germination.

Protect in your heart the covenant that has been made, conceived in Communion and renewed by your vows. When conception takes place, there is need for rest⁵; otherwise there will be a miscarriage. If you are distracted and easily allow yourselves to be involved in external things, becoming agitated like the sea, the love of God will not take root in you, will not grow naturally in you. Do not be concerned with what stirs the world. In heaven there are no anxieties, preoccupations, sufferings, and movements, merely recollection, deep recollection, in order to preserve grace.

Jesus Christ does not want you involved in external things. When you leave the church, leave yourself, to burn continuously at his feet. When you are not in church adoring our Lord, your heart becomes his tabernacle and his temple. Learn how to be recollected; offer him your little sacrifices. Where there is an altar, there is a sacrifice. Offer to Jesus your spontaneous prayers.

When a small tree has been planted, how will it grow and become a large tree? It needs water. While germinating, it begins to nourish its sap from the soil. If the soil does not have the needed elements, the tree will dry up. So it is with you. **What must you do to maintain grace within you?** Do your exercises well, your chores; carry out the will of God. This is how you cultivate the soil. The richer the soil, the more will the tree bear fruit.

What else must be done? To protect this little tree, a stake is needed to protect it from the wind that could break it, and from wild beasts that could devour it. We must encircle this stake carefully and surround it with a fence. Because you are very weak, you also need a support. This support is obedience. **You need to be led by the rule**, like a child that is led by the hand and so is afraid of nothing. Protect yourselves from your own ideas, from the devil, and from wild beasts. What will assist you? Distrust of yourself, modesty over your senses, strong virtue. Externally nothing has changed; modesty will be your crown of thorns, your cloak of thorns, constantly preserving you, surrounding you, and strengthening you. Because you are weak, the devil will attack you and the world will be jealous.

When the tree is large and bearing fruit and no longer needs support, what else must be done? So that it may bear more fruit, it must be trimmed, removing useless branches that would weaken it; that is why trees are pruned in the spring. Always keep the pruning-hook in hand, ready to restrain thoughts and desires that are not in line with your virtues; what is too external will drain you. When a tree produces too many flowers, it will not bear fruit. Learn to control internally your desires: let go of the good to do the best. Keep full interior freedom: you can embrace the world, be apostles, mediators and victims, embrace more than the world if you want. However, for what is external, prune what is unnecessary; keep only what will bear blessed fruit (cf. Jn 15:2).

Preserve your grace, so that you may produce fruits that are mature. The birds of the sky will come and dwell in your branches (cf. Mt 13:32). These birds of the sky are the angels. God will bless you. Your tree will be blessed by God the Father, and it will bear fruits for eternal life. Multiply acts of gratitude. Thanksgiving gives perfection, and perfection is perfect love. If you have no other virtue, have that of the

⁵ Omitted in the Anonymous copy: *autrement il y aurait avortement; (otherwise there will be an abortion).*

poor person who knows very well how to say thank you. He knows how to obtain gifts and in being grateful, becomes perfect.

Points for reflection:

Using the example of a tree, St. Peter Julian helps the sisters to understand the meaning of spiritual growth that leads them to gratitude. How do you see the “tree” of the Congregation today?