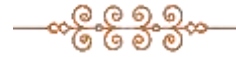




# Glimpses from the General Chapter



November 6-24, 2023  
Thú Duc, Vietnam

1

## Glimpse 6 – Day of Reflection and Interiorization – November 11-14, 2023

Sacramentinos know how to have fun and party after a long week of work. We ended the meal on Saturday night with a light reception of drinks and snacks to enjoy the night together. We had karaoke of popular songs from across the globe – some we all knew, some just for a particular country. The best beats were accompanied by dancing and joy!

After our Morning Eucharist, the Lord's Day was our day off with a bus trip of culture, music, and the landscape of Vietnam. It was a scorching hot and humid day, but we enjoyed fellowship meals with families who love our Congregation and shared their restaurant with us as a gift.

In each Chapter, there is a retreat day with a particular focus. Monday, November 13, began with quiet prayer time in the chapel for an hour, followed by five reflections based on the *Rule of Life*. As many know, especially in light of our retreat next summer, August 5 – 9, at the Provincialate in Highland Heights (Cleveland), Ohio, we are preparing for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this “constitution of Sacramentino life.” We



began in the chapel with exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. This prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament always gives us orientation and reflection and provides a specific purpose for us as capitulars. After the morning Eucharistic-praying, we had five congregation members from different parts of the world reflect on what is most important with this *Rule*. Fr Benzy invited us to enter into the Spirit of the *Rule of Life*, which helps guide our life, but also for the opportunity to lead our Congregation for the following years.

**André Guitton from France** presented our first video reflection. He shared a tad of history on how the *Rule of Life* reevaluated the founder's *Constitution* and made it a more profound statement for the current age. Guitton elaborated on his experience of the *Rule of Life*, as it was in the chapters of renewal of 1969 and 1971. In the chapters of 1975 and 1981, until its approval by the Holy See in 1984, he and a committee of others (*including Ernest Falardeau and Gene LaVerdiere from our province*) worked on the *Rule of Life*. Part of Vatican II instructed religious orders to reevaluate their religious life and align their charisms and constitutions with that of their founders. Many religious orders strayed from their original purpose and even their style of dress. The Second Vatican Council, because of Pope John XXIII's vision, opened up the mystery of religious life in light of expanded Eucharistic theology. This provided a new way of looking at the liturgical and worship life of the Church and our Congregation. Guitton put the process of renewal of our *Constitution* in the context of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century:

1960 marked a profound change in society at every level, with the advent of the consumer society, economic growth, the development of the means of communication, the rise of electronics, the emergence of 'Third World' nations, the political autonomy of formerly colonized peoples, the globalization of trade, etc., against a backdrop of confrontation – and the Cold War – between the liberal Western system and the Marxist Soviet regime. It was also a period of crisis, of demands for individual freedoms and challenges to institutions.

Guitton reminded that the Second Vatican Council:

... was a time of extraordinary grace - and also of trials. It is significant that the same term 'Renewal' is used to describe the changes in society and those in the Church (John XXIII spoke of *aggiornamento* - an updating).



A key social aspect was inserted into the *Rule of Life* as a critical development from previous history for an element of Eucharistic mystery.

Father Eymard had begun his work precisely with the ragpickers of the Paris suburbs... In Father Eymard's conference to the Servants on November 26, 1861, entitled *Les œuvres de zèle* (PS 381; XVI,282), [Eymard said] that the Eucharist was not limited to adoration. By chance, [Eymard] lived in Paris, in an impoverished neighborhood, and he chose to announce the richness of the Eucharist to disadvantaged young people, apprentices or ragpickers who lived on the margins of the Church. ***That's our mission - a beautiful mission***, [Eymard] says. Look at the parable of the guests at the feast, where everyone is invited: the first chosen exclude themselves, and the king sends his servants to invite all those who have lost their way in life; there is still room. *Take the wretched and let them in. That's where the Eucharist began.* And Eymard adds: *On the first day, we had the First Communion of the poor. What happened from the beginning is probably our mission.* It's not a question of copying what Father Eymard did in his time but of asking ourselves what is possible and our attitude towards the poor and the victims of so much distress.

3

Guillon ended his reflection by reminding us of our current pope's expression of living the Eucharistic mystery:

Pope Francis has outlined lines of action in his documents *Fratelli tutti* and *Laudato si*. Let's consider safeguarding creation, the 'common home,' fraternity [sic], synodality, and other themes. How can they be integrated into a changing and, in some regions, deeply secularized world?

**Anthony McSweeney from Australia** was our second video reflection discussing "the challenges of conversion" in the *Rule of Life*. (*Fr McSweeney looked so well and energized, for he had been sick for some time.*) McSweeney noted that it was twenty years of reflection from Vatican II until the final acceptance of the *Rule*. There were many years of *ad experimentum* of the *Rule* and the council's vision. Our challenge in the 1960s was an "intellectual conversion." Some wondered why there was a need for a change or updating of our religious life. The works of Donald Cave (Australia) and Laureat Saint-Pierre (France), and the creation of these biographies of Eymard, assist in the intellectual conversation of the members of that time to embrace the ***real*** Eymard and the modern insights that their works about Eymard. The books assist in finalizing the *Rule*. McSweeney shared the multiple conversions that



Eymard and we go through with the *Rule*, especially in our living the *Rule*. McSweeney says:

Meditating on the Cenacle texts and Saint Paul in Galatians, [Eymard] began to see with luminous clarity that the central focus of his Congregation must not be gazing adoringly at a host in a monstrance but a faith-filled reception of communion during the Mass. Here, he realized, this was the real center since **“only in communion do we find an intimate knowledge of the Lord.”** ...

We see the fruits of the Holy Spirit in him, especially in the apostolic activities of his final years. Burdened by health issues, financial losses, and, worse perhaps, the loss of esteem on the part of certain bishops, as well as hurtful criticism from his companions, Eymard strove tirelessly, for example, to bring life to the street children of the Paris slums whom he recruited and prepared for First Communion.

Energized by his compassionate love but with few resources, [Eymard] found helpers and money for the task. “These wild natures, so coarse and rough,” he wrote, “gradually become attentive, grateful, good and virtuous ... Their hearts open up, and we find their generous and gentle feelings... They are sure that they are known and loved.”

**Abraham Faye SSS, from Senegal**, gave the subsequent reflection, reflecting mainly on *Rule of Life* 102: the “Profession” we each take. The “Profession” is our SSS Creed. Faye stated that this gives us the basis for living our vocation, faith, and mission. It orients us to always be the “gift of self,” from this phrase’s roots in Eymard to our living this selflessness today. He challenged, based on *Rule 3* and our chapter theme:

[T]he Eucharist, and more precisely its celebration, is the source of our spirituality. This celebration is the way to become a prophetic community because it gives us a lifestyle for our mission and witness. Let’s not forget that the Eucharist is a school where we learn to de-privatize the spiritual life, as Anne Lecu used to say. The Eucharist exists and is celebrated only to unfold in our lives, and it also invites us to live what we have celebrated. Faye said, “So, let’s do it!”



**Arokia Sebastian Peter, SSS from India**, gave his reflection through our chapter theme (*Together, Faithful witnesses of the Eucharist*) and the “3 S’s” – the “SSS,” standing for Spirit, Sacraments, and Service.

In the “Spirit,” *Rule of Life, 4* says that ***“We cannot live the Eucharist unless we are animated by the spirit which led Christ to give his life for the world.”*** Therefore, it is very important for us to allow the Spirit of God to prompt us, in order to listen to the promptings of the spirit you need to spend some quiet time in personal prayer, which I have experienced in the prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. ...

*Rule of Life 3* says for “Sacraments:”

***Formed by the Sacrament of the New Covenant, which frees us from the domination of sin, we commit ourselves to building up the Body of Christ***, says the *Rule*, and ... We make ourselves available to celebrate [and be] the sacraments for the people.

Peter then listed the ways in our *Rule* that we give specific service: **service of parishes** (*Rule 41*), **service of priests** (*Rule 44*), and **service of our sisters and brothers** (*Rule 27*). Ultimately, Peter concluded, **we are in service: “To celebrate the “Supper of the Lord” in truth is to place ourselves at the service of others, as the Lord Jesus showed by washing the feet of his disciples** (*Rule 27*).”

**Camile Gagnon Chamberland, SSS from Peru**, shared additional history paralleling the history from the Constitutions written by Father Eymard to the *Rule of Life*. His reflection stems from his 23 years of ministering in Canada and his 35 years in Peru. Gagnon also participated in the chapters of 1971 and 1981, formative years and times in our world and our Congregation. A significant shift for us in our mission over time, but primarily because of Gagnon’s contribution to form *Rule 3*, is that: [“We live and promote] a social Eucharist, not just a devotional one.”

He ended his presentation by reminding us of a key piece of our history that calls us to live our Eucharistic mission:

Seven hundred fifty young people, accompanied by Father Eymard, made their First Communion. I remain more and more convinced that we are not entirely faithful to Pierre-Julien Eymard, who presented the “First Communion of Young Workers” to the Archbishop of Paris as the Congregation’s main work.



We continue this work, too!

We continued Monday with another hour of prayer in the presence of the exposed Blessed Sacrament. Following a break, we each took time to reflect upon our own experience of the talks and the *Rule* number that transforms our lives still. Following group reflection, we had our Mass and evening group work.

**Tuesday morning, November 14**, began with yours truly celebrating the Eucharist and Morning Prayer at 6 am, our usual time. (If you want a copy of my homily in English or French, please let me know!) Then we heard a report from the International Theological Commission, of which I am a member. We resurrected this historical commission in September 2021, and you have shared in some of these projects: A Basic Eucharistic Catechism, *My Favorite Rule of Life Number*, and a Survey of Prayer in the Presence of the Blessed Sacrament. We are:

- Promoting theological and pastoral reflection in the Congregation to strengthen our identity,
- Encouraging research projects in all aspects of Eucharistic spirituality,
- Publishing regular writings of theological thoughts on the Eucharist,
- Formulating a Eucharistic theology in the post-pandemic era,
- Bringing together a few theologians, liturgists, and pastors into a group for theological discussion and publications and developing a Eucharistic reading of “Laudato Si” to explore the relationship between the Eucharist and Ecology.

Incidentally, this survey results will be made available after the Chapter approves these reports and hopes that the following General Council will support the ITC for continuing work on pedagogy on prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament since most focus only on “adoration.” We also hope to have more work on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Rule of Life* and Pope Francis’ Apostolic Letter *Desiderio Desideravi*.

Two other focus groups prepared and gave reports on the continued work on the writings of Saint Eymard and the update on the holy places of Father Eymard throughout France.

***Please note you still can sign up for the November 2024 Eymard Pilgrimage to visit these holy sites. Email here: [ssscommunications@blessedsacrament.com](mailto:ssscommunications@blessedsacrament.com)***



Now, off to a small group meeting to reflect on the reports, give feedback, and propose for the next general administration's future work!

Various photos...



Sunday day off with boat trip and tour of southern Vietnam rivers



One of our group's boats in traditional protective headwear



Boat ride on our day off



Sunday dinner





Father Joachim Viet Chau who is 90 and moved back to Vietnam on 2018 after serving 40 years in Louisiana in the USA



Saturday night Karaoke and dancing



Father Norman with his bees



Saturday night Karaoke and dancing







Street life and morning breakfast pop ups are everywhere with students enjoying a bite before classes



All around the community is art by one of our Vietnamese SSS artists who was bored during the pandemic and started to paint



Grandma pushes the unique baby carriage





Sunday night dinner provided by parishioners who own a local restaurant near the community headquarters



Ritual of recommitment to the Word of God and the Rule of Life. We proclaimed "Amen" to both in a procession



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Break between sessions with the priests from Africa



Afternoon walk to another cemetery where the people regularly visit the graves of their ancestors



Traffic crawls on Highway 1 which joins the country and is right outside of our property and church



Afternoon walk to another cemetery where the people regularly visit the graves of their ancestors

