



# SSS Grapevine

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## A note from our new Parochial Vicar, Father Louis Demba Ndione SSS

I am glad to share these few lines as a short bio of my life journey. I am Louis Demba Ndione, born on December 3, 1988, in a village called Fandène in Thies in Sénégal.

I wanted to become a priest from a young age, but I was only a small boy passionate about football (*American soccer*) and music. I started playing football while doing my studies. I joined a football academy, playing and participating in some football tournaments. As I grew up, my ideas and desires were shaped, and I joined a music band as a singer known as “Talibé Krista,” which means “Disciple of Christ.”

After all of these, I did well in my studies. After I got my bachelor's and was about to go to the university, I met with a very complex decision.



Father Louis with USA Provincial Superior, Father John Thomas Lane SSS. Father Louis moved to the USA on October 20.

I wanted to join the seminary, which got rejected by my dad, who wanted me to join the army. I had to convince him of my desire to become a priest because it came up again and took over me. I could not stand it anymore because I felt the call of God ringing in my heart. It is only after convincing my dad that I started this journey of priesthood in answer to my vocation. Note that I often went to vocational camps, and these camps helped me discern my vocation. And I had to leave all behind football, songs, and the army to take the new journey.

I was then accepted to start my experience in the SSS family in Sénégal. Little by little, through formation, I was helped to mature my call in and through prayer, religious life, and work. I did my philosophical studies (2011-2014), I went for my novitiate (2014-2016), and after my first vows on September 8, 2016, I was sent to Sri Lanka for my theological studies (2017-2021).

On July 29, 2022, I pronounced my final vows; the following day, July 30, 2022, I was ordained as deacon. I served in the parish of Saint Peter Julian Eymard as a deacon, and on December 3, 2022, I was ordained priest and assigned to the same parish as assistant parish priest or parochial vicar.

This is a summary of my life. I look forward to meeting you. Thank you all. God bless us!

Father Louis

## Highlights from the 2024 Eymard Pilgrimage

By John Thomas Lane, SSS, *Provincial – Province of Saint Ann (USA)*

Twenty-one pilgrims gathered from Northeast Ohio, the New York region, Houston, and the Diocese of Saint Petersburg to meet at JFK International Airport and begin a holy journey from November 5 – 17. Together with the Center for Eucharistic Evangelizing's (CEE) Co-director Mona Grigsby-Suarez, we gathered in the footsteps of Saint Peter Julian Eymard. Associates of the Blessed Sacrament on the hinge of the 160<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the institute, members from our Blessed Sacrament Community (SSS) parishes, and four folks just seeing our adventure on our province website came together to be pilgrims who would deepen their faith and learn more about the life of our holy founder and his association with other holy women and men across France.



The pilgrims gather for a photo op at the still-unfinished Cathedral of Notre Dame

We gathered at JFK as a group and then flew to Nice, France (*via Frankfurt, Germany*). After a day to regroup from losing sleep, we traveled by bus to the Diocese of Grenoble to camp at a hotel, the city/diocese where Father Eymard would be ordained a priest on July 20, 1834, at the cathedral. We would visit this sacred spot, celebrate a Mass there, and see the statues of Eymard and Saint John Mary Vianney, who bookend the sanctuary of the cathedral. The two saint-priests served this diocese well. From our base hotel for four days, we could be in the places where Eymard was born in La Mure on February 4, 1811, baptized on February 5, 1811, Confirmation (May 22, 1822), First Communion (March 16, 1928), and died (August 1, 1868). We celebrated Mass in the chapel, where the sacraments celebrated Eymard's life in Christ and nurtured a vocation in the Eucharist. In Le Mure, amid the outstanding locale of the French Alps, we met most of the international SSS community led by Father Thaddée Mapupa SSS. It was a joy at Le Mure to have local

parishioners host us and the local SSS community and to climb to the top of Calvary, a nearby steep hill that was Father Eymard's favorite place of refuge and prayer.

The other three days, we ventured to the famous Marian Shrines, which were of crucial importance in the life journey of Saint Peter Julian in LaSalette, Laus, and L'Osier. Also, we spent time on the early presbyteral assignments of Father Eymard in Chatte (*where he was a parochial vicar*) and Monteyard (*pastor*). At Monteyard, we had the blessing of meeting



with our SSS International General Team on retreat. We joined them to celebrate Mass with our General Superior, Father Philip Benzy Romician, in the intimate chapel on a hill of another picturesque valley of the Drac River. From these places, we went to the cemetery of Saint Romans near Chatte and L'Osier to climb the mountain that Eymard found to be his "rock" and sacred space of refuge. We visited his unique chapel and hilltop to see a magnificent sunrise and why Saint Eymard found it such a holy space. We witnessed the glorious sun and its setting from this spot with the unique stained-glass window



At the hill of Saint Romans

memorializing his work of First Communion for the street children of Paris in the chapel. Of course, his spiritual care for the youth and his intense need to interiorize this sacred mystery with prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, especially in exposition, made him well-known to the people he served.

After our four days nestled in the beautiful French Alps, we traveled to Lyon (*France's second-largest city*) for a few days to see the roots of his journey as a Marist Priest, his pastoral work as Provincial (*leader*) of this order, and his important work with the Prado

and the holy founder Blessed Father Antoine Chevrier of this religious institute. Father Chevrier is in the process of becoming a saint. While we knew of the special relationship between these two holy founders of institutes, Fathers Amrando Pasqualotto, General Superior of the Prado Institute, Luc Lalire, local superior, and Ms. Frederique Ayme-Tabka, Assistant to the Superior General, gave us new relevant information about how our two institutes, some documents never before explored and details on how the two men hoped to merge into one dynamic religious institute around the Eucharist. The merger did not occur, and we remained separate institutes (*they were diocesan priests living in community*) because the local cardinal denied their request to combine ministries at the time.

From the Prado neighborhood of Lyon, we had the experience of visiting Chartreuse, Ars, and Saint-Bonnet-le-Froid. Father Eymard went for an autumn at this remarkable site, where we wrote drafts of the *Constitutions* of the Congregation and found time to relax and regather his strengths. We met Jean-François (*father*) and Alban (*son*) Grange-Chavanis, previous property owners. We had a very special Mass in the chateau chapel with the family and heard the great memories of a place that was Eymard's retreat center of sacred writing. The property has been out of the family hands for eight years and is currently for sale for four million dollars and in need of many repairs; the beautiful scenery reminds us why Eymard sought refuge here for his health and inspiration to write our *Constitutions of the Congregation* and the 1864 *Handbook for the Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament* that evolved after Vatican II into our SSS *Rule of Life* and *Project of Life* for the Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament.

Having had a special tour of the old city of Lyon, we visited the basilica shrine of Fourviere and the parish of Saint Paul where Eymard had the inspiration, during a procession of the Blessed Sacrament, to begin our institutes dedicated totally the entire mystery of the Blessed Sacrament – the Eucharist. We also had part of a day to go to Ars, the place where we celebrated Mass at the tomb of Saint John Mary Vianney, the special priest-friend and internationally known model of diocesan priesthood. It was a joy to celebrate Mass and pray for our diocesan clergy friends at the altar/tomb of Saint Vianney. Also, we had a side trip to modern-day Taizé, the central pilgrimage site for youth to develop their spiritual journeys, the unique music style, and a retreat center that buzzes with many catechetical opportunities.

After a bus-long journey to Paris, we enjoy the culmination of our trip to the Corpus Christi Church in Paris, where Father Eymard is entombed. With the heritage shared by SSS Eymard scholar Father André Guiton (97 years young!), we heard our history and the vital work of this chapel dating back to the 1870s. This place is still a Eucharistic center and headquarters for our northern Europe SSS. With Father Eugene van Heijst SSS, Provincial of the northern European province, we enjoyed our special Mass. We heard of a part of the

property sold to bankroll the essential needs of the Congregation across the globe, including rebuilding our old Chicago house. It was here we prayed and allowed the intentions we brought with us from our website and parishes at the tomb of Saint Eymard. We had held up the intercessions in prayers to Christ and the intercession of Eymard during our journey.



Our pilgrims at the Cathedral of Chartres

Later, we toured the ancient city of Paris and its historical sites today and had a unique moment in front of the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris, which is on the precipice of reopening on December 8, 2024.

On our last day as pilgrims, we visited the great village and hallmark 1,000-year-old cathedral of Chartres. After an exquisite tour, we celebrated our last Mass in the crypt. Our final dinner together that night celebrates the journey's memories with a nighttime river cruise on the Seine River. On the last day, several of us visited the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament, their shrine that dates back to the 1870s as well, and the international headquarters of the sisters. With Fr. Eugene, I met Sister Fe Manalo, Superior General, and two of her council members to have a nice light supper (*SSS Vietnamese eggrolls!*) amid their fundraising Craft Fair. Others went to Normandy, explored the Auguste Rodin Museum (*former disciple of Eymard*), and enjoyed Paris's fine souvenir shopping.

Along the way, we marveled at the simple but moving ways Eymard interacted with his culture and people of his day. Today, the good people that we encounter demonstrate their love for our founder and how, even today, French hospitality continues to celebrate the story of Eymard and the Eucharist. It is a story of worship, service, and outreach to those most in need, followed by deep prayer



that leads to more action/service. Saint Eymard's life touches folks today; miracles are celebrated daily around the Table of the Lord.

We treasured the many memorable encounters with our General Team in Monteynard and LaMure and the airport personnel who saw us wear our Eymardian Family crosses. We were moved to know that pilgrims still walk, fly, and ride to holy places to grow in their faith. We completed the pilgrimage with a deepened faith and a remarkable resolve to continue to live the Eucharistic mystery and be faithful disciples of Christ and Eymard. Eymard was called the "Apostle of the Eucharist." As our confessed atheist bus driver said at the end of our tour, "I now see Eymard everywhere, and his story has changed me."

We feel called to share this story, too, and to manifest Christ, seeing all in light of the mystery of the Eucharist, inspired by our holy founder. We are all renewed!

## Eymard Pilgrimage Photo Gallery

*We have thousands of photos to share, but here are a few...*



Blessed Sacrament Fathers Eugene van Heijst  
(*provincial of the northern Europe province*), John  
Thomas Lane (*USA provincial superior*), and  
André Guitton (*noted author of Saint Peter Julian  
Eymard*) in Paris



Our beloved Founder in Corpus Christi Chapel in Paris



At the Prado in Lyon with members of the General Council: Fathers Armando Pasqualotoo (*Superior General*) and Luc Lalire (*local superior*)



Chapel of Saint Romans with the famous stained glass window of Saint Peter Julian Eymard



Basilica of Our Lady of LaSalette



Some of the Pilgrims who climbed the hill to the Calvary overlooking LaMure d'Isère





*With the members of the General Council at the parish church in Monteynard*



Eymard Family home in La Mure where he died.  
Today, it has been transformed into a Chapel.



Sister Fe Manalo SSS (*Superior General*) of the  
Servants of the Blessed Sacrament (*center*) with 2  
other sisters and Fathers Eugene and Lane