



SSS Grapevine

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Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament

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Celebrating Our 125th Anniversary in Houston at Corpus Christi Catholic Church

By John Thomas Lane SSS, *Provincial*



The planning team members: Fr Jaime Rodriguez SSS, parochial vicar, Mona, CEE Director, Greg Dufour (*national associate council and local lesader*) and Mercedes and Daniel Juarez, local associates

In planning the various 125th anniversary gatherings across the province, we were mindful of choosing dates and celebrations that coincided with the name days of our parishes and other events that occur during these festive periods. Knowing that Corpus Christi parish in Houston, a place where the Blessed Sacrament religious (SSS) have administered since 1987, celebrates a grand weekend of 40-hour devotions on this Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ solemnity each year, our planning team selected these dates and offered to have Eucharistic retreats to mark both the name-day weekend and the SSS's 125th anniversary.

Father John Thomas J. Lane SSS, our Provincial Superior, Mona Grigsby-Suarez, Director of the Center for Eucharistic Evangelizing, and Scott Gongos, Mission Advancement Director, flew from our province headquarters to collaborate with the local planning team from the SSS and the parish. We were grateful for the invitation to give retreats and meet with various benefactors of the province who contribute to our mission, events like this retreat.

Father Lane began the 40-hour devotion weekend Friday night, June 20, with a concelebrated bilingual (*Spanish and English*) Votive Mass of Saint Peter Julian Eymard. The local SSS community gathering of Texas religious also included the newly arrived Father

Arul Tharcus SSS, from India, as well as the pastor of Downtown Saint Joseph in San Antonio, who took the bus to join in the festivities. Two hundred fifty parishioners participated in the Mass that led to the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. After the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament began, the two language groups proceeded to their respective retreats, one in English and the other in Spanish. Mona shared the "Life in the Eucharist Retreat," the long-standing initial formation process that teaches about the charism of the Eucharist and the values of the SSS, created by Bob Rousseau, a former SSS priest. Father Lane stayed in the church with the English-speaking community to lead a retreat on the Beatitudes and the Eucharist, including reflections on the scripture, the parts of the Mass that demonstrate the Beatitudes, the Rule of Life, the Project of Life, and Pope Francis's encyclical, *"Rejoice and Be Glad."* *(This encyclical highlights many aspects of holiness, with the pope seeing the way to holiness through these mantras of blessedness.)*

After the first sessions, parishioners kept vigil throughout Friday night, praying in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, continuing with exposition. The usual Saturday morning schedule at the parish, featuring Morning Prayer and Mass, deepened the community's sense of prayer.

Retreatants gathered together at 9:00 AM for a brief welcome and prayer time before separating into their respective language groups and retreat topics. They joined together for lunch and an afternoon Holy Hour, with the worship of the Eucharist led by local leaders using the Novena to *Saint Peter Julian Eymard*. The 125th Anniversary Bilingual Mass, held on Saturday at 5:00 PM, featured Father Lane sharing the history of the province and the local Houston MISSION, giving thanks to God for the mutual service and care that stems from our sharing of gifts and talents. The Gospel says, "Multiply the little gifts we have and share them to feed the world." Father Lane said:

No one goes on the road and hears talks without food, especially in the desert. You always bring something when you travel. Part of the miracle is that Christ asks us not to be selfish and think only of ourselves, but to share our gifts, talents, and stewardship with others, thereby multiplying God's love. That love has led to 37 years of the SSS working together with the parishioners of Corpus Christi and a special bond of communion.

After receiving Holy Communion, the community processed with the Blessed Sacrament to keep the ancient custom alive, reminding us that we, like Eymard, hoped to bring Christ Eucharistic to the four corners of the world and proudly show our faith in the Eucharist to others. *(Each Mass this weekend had a procession.)* After the Saturday vigil Mass, all but a few, who had kept vigil in prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, enjoyed the Anniversary Dinner. Praying continued through the night until the Sunday morning Masses, with processions in the church again to the streets after the 1:30 Mass. Our 40 hours ended with Benediction and another social in the parish's Prefontaine Hall. We are grateful to the hard-working team local associates who collaborated with Mona and me, led by Greg Dufour, Laura Edstrom, Mercedes and Daniel Juarez, Madeleine Dias, Blanca Gonzalez, Mark

Ciesielski, the pastor Father Sekar, the parochial vicar, Father Jaime, and countless others who made this such a very special weekend.

We also greatly appreciate the new icon created by our parishioner and artist, Joan Steinman of Saint Peter Julian Eymard. This was created in honor of the 125th anniversary of the SSS in the USA. Thank you, Joan!! We plan on using this with new holy cards next year.



The new icon of Saint Peter, Julian Eymard by Joan Steinman, in commemoration of the Congregation's 125 Years in the USA



1Artist Joan Steinman with her work, unveiled during the 125th Anniversary Mass



Father Lane blesses the new icon



Father Lane sharing during the retreat



Thank you for musicians, sharing music during the retreats



Anniversary Reception and Dinner





Priests of the Congregation stationed in Texas concelebrating Mass with Father Lane and Deacon William



Procession of the Blessed Sacrament



Procession of the Blessed Sacrament with Father Jaime



Fathers Jaime and Sekar cut the 125th Anniversary Cake



We were truly blessed with a wonderful gathering to celebrate the history, the Congregation, and the life of Corpus Christi Parish

Appreciating Members of the SSS Congregation that Serve our Parish

By Patty Pizzitola

Editor's note: Associate Patty Pizzitola, and former CEE Assistant, read this note before the parish dinner, celebrating 125 years of the Blessed Sacrament Community (SSS) in Houston. Patty is a long-time parishioner of Corpus Christi, predating the SSS Community's invitation to administer the parish and hospital ministries in the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston. She helped create the first Life in the Eucharist Retreat team in Houston.



Long-time Houston Associate of the Blessed Sacrament, Patty Pizzitola, read the letter of gratitude to the Congregation before the evening reception

One hundred twenty-five years ago, Canadian men left Canada to establish the first parish to be administered by the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament in New York City.

One can imagine how difficult it must have been for them to leave their homeland and travel over the border to a foreign country, but answering God's call and spreading the charism of their founder, Saint Peter Julian Eymard, was vital to them, so they said yes.

We gather this weekend to honor and say thank you to the Congregation for their service over the last one hundred twenty-five years throughout the United States. **On August 1, they will have administered Corpus Christi Parish for thirty-eight years.** That's hard to believe!

We are also celebrating the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, our parish's Feast Day. Thank you to Father John Thomas Lane, the Provincial Superior and our fifth pastor, for selecting this weekend to celebrate.

It was on the Feast of Corpus Christi in 1845 that their founder, Saint Eymard, had a profound experience while carrying the Blessed Sacrament in procession through the streets of Lyon, which would change the course of his life forever. On that day, he experienced an attraction to Jesus in the Eucharist, vowing to bring the knowledge and love of our Lord to all the world: to preach nothing but Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. A Marist priest at the time, this desire consumed him for the next several years. Finally, in 1856, he left the Marists and founded the Congregation that serves us today.

The number of Blessed Sacrament Fathers and Brothers has declined significantly over the last several years (*in the United States*); however, the charism of Eymard and their love of Jesus Eucharistic, the fire is still burning in the parishes they lovingly serve. The Associates program, also known as the Aggregation by Saint Eymard, is flourishing worldwide. The United States currently has 450 lay people who have committed themselves to the Eucharist by placing it at the center of their daily lives through Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, serving in various liturgical ministries, and actively participating in feasts important to the Congregation, among other activities.

In Father Lane's pastoral letter to commemorate this Solemnity, I was struck by the following because it has been my experience that the Blessed Sacrament Community model this. Father Lane wrote:

At Pope Leo XIV's recent ordination of priests, he told them to give of their whole body to the church. He invited all priests to model their lives after Jesus by binding themselves to the real world, since the people they serve are flesh and blood. Consecrate yourselves to them, without separating, isolating, or turning the gift you've received into a privilege. Pope Francis often warned us about this because self-centeredness extinguishes the fire of the missionary spirit. Father Lane also emphasized that both religious and lay people should remember our baptismal priesthood, when the Sacred chrism anoints us to be like Christ.

Father Lane and all the religious with us tonight, on behalf of the parishioners of Corpus Christi Parish, we extend our gratitude for answering the call to the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament. We also give thanks to God for the Canadian men who said yes and immigrated to the United States.

We also remember and give thanks to all the Blessed Sacrament Fathers, deacons, and brothers who have graced our parish: Deacon Joe Bourgeois, Brothers Anthony Ornelas and Matthew, Fathers Donald Jette, Roland Laliberte, Roger Prefontaine, John Thomas Lane, Frederico Ablog, Dominic Thuan, Jose Barandiaran, Thomas Wiese, William Fickel, Robert Rousseau, Dana Pelotte, Scott Haig, Father Peter from India, Father Peter from Vietnam, Robert Chabot, Joseph Thai Minh Tran, Kit Mendoza, Arul Tharcus, Thomas Smithson, Ravi Ernest Sebastian, Paulraj "Sekar" Gnanasekar, Christian Christopher, Jaime Rodriguez, and all the visiting Blessed Sacrament religious who shared their love of the Eucharist through retreats, missions, homilies and especially their presence.

May the Eucharistic fire continue to burn in your hearts and the hearts of those you serve.

Please Note:

Send us your highlights of your Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ so that we can feature them in a future *Grapevine*!