

## Admonition. Spiritual Direction. Religious Practices<sup>1</sup>

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament  
Paris, Wednesday, September 17, 1862

Retreat is a time to pay one's debts, and also to make great strides in correcting one's faults. It's a time to consult a monitor, to talk with our mother [superior], to ask her advice. Mother must see all the novices – they can also see their mistress [of novices].

**You should talk about your external defects**, because our character, our routine, and our forgetfulness can fool us. That's why fraternal correction should warn us about these external defects. We should not make a big problem about admonitions. We should never include interior defects – the interior conscience, temptations, and sins are the concern of the confessor – but there may be transgressions of the rule and external acts. When the defects are internal, you know that failures happen to everyone – forgetfulness can happen to anyone. There are some defects of character that are not so clearly observable – they become natural to a person. The monitor must exercise charity and mention them. There are defects of posture, and modesty – since we are talking about simplicity – we may be unaware. These are the principal areas for admonition.

**Then, we should also see if there are faults in our way of speaking.** If some things are said with unbecoming words – no doubt, education has affected your way of speaking – if there's a habit that you notice, then it should be mentioned. If there is a lack of charity in relationships, it must be mentioned; if you notice failures against the rule, then no more. [...] And you must not get upset. Your motive is to honor our Lord by your [...] religious education.

Mother [superior] can go further, since she has known you for a long time. **She can go into the spiritual area**, to examine the means, reveal certain things, that's maternal charity. The other is fraternal charity that wants to heal, so that next time we'll do better. This direction is for external actions, while sacramental direction concerns the interior. We don't draw your attention to these things to hurt you, or to humiliate you, but to help you avoid having real defects, first of all, and then to avoid any scandal, and for the glory of our Lord. Now, admonitions should not be made if we see that they would cause harm – this duty must be done only out of charity. Some things should not be mentioned, and we must always presuppose good will. In case of doubt, or when there has been bad will, if we see a defect in a Sister that would harm the community, we should notify Mother [superior]. She can admonish with charity to avoid any upset that might occur if the warning came from an equal.

If we earnestly sought our spiritual growth, we would desire the admonition as a great grace. When humiliated, we could say: That proves that I still have self-love, that I have a fever. I know very well that self-love makes us blush, and that we are not always in control of our initial reaction; but, on second thought, we can exercise virtue – that's what we should aim at. In a community, if we want to be happy, we must be very simple, and transparent with our superiors, [...] transparent before the community, [...] A sister sleeps well at night because she hid nothing; her soul is like a mirror. This is not the peace of self-love, but of rest; like a child that sleeps while its mother is watching over it. When notified of a mistake, a person can say: I'm very sure that I have it, since I have been warned out of charity. [...] Such a one makes progress in the greatest confidence.

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**Be very transparent.** Remember that when you hide something, it is like a growth on the body; it enlarges and becomes an abscess; then comes agitation, and everything explodes. What happened? We had hidden something. Therefore, as I told you, be very simple – the Society is at stake, so that you will be good adorers for our Lord. She is forming you and caring for you – aren't you happy? Then, be like children in simplicity.

Regarding the direction of the soul outside of the sacramental secret, you are free. No one can force you to reveal your interior, your thoughts – that's your territory. You are always free, but since you are free to allow whoever you please to enter into your heart, I would say: Opening your heart is easy; although you may not feel drawn to do so, I encourage you to go beyond your feelings. A tiny dental nerve seems to be nothing, but when it is irritated, that's the end! Faced with some small problem, when the devil enters in, and irritation sets in, we now have something enormous. Burn all of that; it's no sooner said than done. You must not spend your life bathing. You would not work. You must become free of yourself, your faults, so that you can focus on the proper service of our Lord and his glory. My poor Sisters, you must not live in darkness; always purifying yourselves. Do it out of love, and then allow the sun to bring light, purification and productivity to the earth.

Besides, my good Sisters, just as religious life has its rule and life, it also has its practices: you must learn them and live them properly. The Society has its own practices – you must allow them to take precedence over your own, since they are community graces. Besides, these practices of piety will continue, we hope, until the end of the world – you must catch their spirit. **Although these practices are simple, still you must learn what is common usage in our Society, like the examen and adoration, and other practices.** [...] You must learn the proper way of doing them, the way to say the Office, the rosary, the *Benedicite*, the meal prayers, the small prayers that everyone uses, the Eucharistic invocation. You do the outer action, and our Lord will bring in the proper spirit. Be convinced of this thought that everything that comes from the Society is of greater value; there is a family spirit. As for your own particular practices, if you have the time and permission, that's good; but make sure that you fulfill the others first.

In community activities, act in conformity; when you go to the chapel, in your posture, your genuflection – these details form the spirit of the Society. We have only a few practices, compared to the ancient orders that have many external ones. To feed body and spirit, they use reverential practices, practices of external penance. We use some of them – nothing spiritualizes a soul more than simplicity and humility. Even kneeling – everything is done simply. [...] Have courage; accept these rules of direction, these pious practices – they are necessary. [...]

**God proceeds step by step:** he shows you his holy will gradually, because you are children. The Good Lord is waiting to give you a new grace, a new light, because your formation is on-going – grace is enlightening and sanctifying. Never put limits on the work of the Holy Spirit. However, **my Sisters, be very holy for God; base your holiness on a firm and immovable rock: and that rock is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ.**



#### **Points for reflection:**

In September 1862, Father Eymard gave two conferences in a row on direction. This one and the preceding one. On the road of transformation and of prayer, spiritual accompaniment is a privileged means. Here, he gives a detailed explanation on how to benefit from it. How could this instruction be useful to you?