

# Hidden Life in the Virtues<sup>1</sup>

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament  
Paris, Tuesday, October 16, 1860

My good Daughters, I think you understood what I told you the last time, namely, that you should be happy. To be happy is already good, but you must even be joyful. It is my desire that your charity with each other should be a heartfelt charity. And so, try to do things as they should be done. When you are [involved] in a religious exercise, it calls for the charity of edification; when you are with the sick, the charity of compassion – the sisters who care for the sick must be very gentle, very compassionate. When one sister needs the help of another, of course, be thoughtful in helping her. When you are in recreation, it is not just to look at each other; but to gladden your hearts – you are there to relax. One day, St. Louis, king of France, was relaxing with his court, and some religious were there. One of them wanted to give a Christian lecture, he wanted to preach. Good St. Louis said: Father, recreation is meant to relax, to rejoice in our Lord, and not to philosophize – we can do that later. [...]

**Nothing unites people more than simplicity.** If you were united only by the virtues, one day everything would blow up – I would not have confidence in you. The bond among you must be a bond of affection and congeniality – the result of your love for our Lord and for our mission. St. Paul said, *Your love must be heartfelt* (cf. 1 Cor 13:4), that is the literal translation – what comes from the heart is done with joy. In that way, you will be a family: you must love each other because you are part of the same mission.

Now, let us reflect on our hidden life. **What must we do to practice the hidden life?** We must find the way to practice the virtues in all their external and internal perfection, in keeping with the characteristics of the hidden life.

What's the secret of doing the greatest, most beautiful, and most magnificent things in the sight of God, and yet remain most ordinary in the eyes of others? How do you hide the gold of your charity from the public eye, so that the fire within you is unnoticed? Externally Jesus Christ was poor in his human nature; he was internally rich and externally poor. We must find his secret. As long as you have not found it, you cannot possess the virtues of our Lord in your grace and vocation. You will be somewhat unnatural. How can we reach the perfection of all the virtues, and appear to have none? The means is to make them look natural, so that these virtues will be suited to your situation, your age, and your state. Then you will practice them perfectly and in a very ordinary way.

Our Lord is the model. He possessed all the virtues in their greatest perfection, both internal and external, and he practiced them in such a way that seeing him you would say: He's a good man. He was not singled out in his hidden life. People said: Here is a good Israelite. However, his virtues were extremely perfect! He had a very deep humility: no one could go so low, nor so high. His humility was so engaging, that no one noticed it: it suited his age, neither that of an old man; or of someone younger, such would have been too childish. His poverty: you will never equal the poverty of our Lord. He found the way to live as a poor carpenter: he lacked many things; he owned nothing, yet he never complained, in order to live an ordinary life in the sights of others, and avoid being different. His chastity was never noticed; his modesty was gentle and strong, yet unnoticed, so consistent with his age, and no one said: Notice how serious and recollected he is. He appeared to be as any good Israelite, perfect before God, but

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living an ordinary life. So he came **to teach us to combine the sublimity of the interior life with the most ordinary life of the world.** Evidently, he succeeded.

Our Lord was very gentle, and yet no one paid attention to it. He was careful to make his gentleness ordinary, so that it would be unnoticed. During thirty years he lived a hidden life, with virtues according to his age, and these were never honored nor respected. Even the evangelists don't record his hidden life: they simply say that he was obedient, without even mentioning the character of his obedience. They speak of it as that of any child: and he does not have a crown for that. **Here, then, is the virtue of our Lord: it was the most perfect, and it appeared as the most ordinary.**

**The Blessed Virgin** behaved in the same way. Her goal was to share the hidden life of our Lord. No one praised her: she appeared among the daughters of Israel as a true Israelite, because, like her divine Son, **she was careful to make her virtue appear as the most simple and the most ordinary as possible.** If someone had been able to see the interior of the Blessed Virgin, he would have said: How great are the virtues of this daughter of Judah! She found the secret of being the most humble and most gentle of creatures. Her humility and gentleness did not single her out; she was the most mortified, yet no one noticed it. That is true greatness. There's a price to pay to reach that point: self-love gains nothing.

[...]

We must live so as to cover what is glorious about our virtue, to be ignored. As soon as the sun of a virtue makes a hole in the clouds, life is no longer ordinary, because the soul becomes noticeable. To live virtuously in an ordinary way is not an easy study, not an easy task. It means death to pride in its smallest roots. Pride does not die when we practice virtue – in fact, it feeds on it by saying: Look at that person, how she humiliated herself before God and men! **Our last temptation will be a temptation to self-love.** Live simply, and become humble to the point of nothingness: no one will notice you. Live your virtues in a way suitable to your age, your character, and your condition – if you do this well, no one will notice.

How can I reach that point? Through humility, and the simplicity of the common life, so that you can say: I want nothing for myself – all for our Lord. Yet, you must not say this out loud, because they will say: How she loves our Lord! If there had been a better way, our Lord would have told us. If virtue did not have this shape and form, he would have chosen another way for his holy mother. The Blessed Virgin never performed miracles, nor uttered prophecies – no one paid attention to her. **She had to consecrate her self to the hidden life, in order to crown her life with love.** [...]



**Points for reflection:**

Self-love is our greatest temptation. But simplicity sounds the death knell to self-love. It includes several virtues. How do you see this precious virtue? How do you recognize it in yourself and in others?

This instruction and the two that follow form a whole; (October 16, 19, 26, 1860). That is, these conferences are organized around the same theme. Once again, we discover the importance that St. Peter Julian gave to simplicity as the road to transformation and as a characteristic of a Servant of the Blessed Sacrament. It also reflects a reaction against the yearning for glory and honor in the French society that preceded the Revolution. Are there echoes of this today?