

On Mortification – I¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Paris, Friday [September 17], 1858

We have spoken about two important religious virtues: holy poverty and obedience – virtues that are difficult for human nature. Yet, without the following virtue, a religious could never reach the perfection of her vocation; that virtue, my Sisters, is mortification.

To be detached from the things of this world, and to have renounced your will in order to submit to religious obedience will not be worth much if we are not mortified. **Mortification is the virtue that makes saints**, and you cannot become a saint without it. It was by dint of dying to themselves each day, that the saints sanctified themselves. Everything must die: mind, heart, senses, and will. Oh! We have much work to do! It is very nice, no doubt, to become a religious; it is very consoling to leave everything behind and to consecrate oneself entirely to the service of God. But that's not all. We must be determined to die every day, every moment, until the end. [...] All our sins come from the fact that we are not mortified. If we want to acquire a virtue, we will succeed through mortification. Jesus Christ said: *If anyone wishes to come after me, he must take up his cross and follow me* (cf. Lk 9:23). The entire life of Jesus speaks of mortification. Let us hold this beautiful virtue in high esteem, and work with courage to acquire it.

We must struggle against ourselves in order to triumph over everything in us that is contrary to the kingdom of God. Spiritual books say: Work for peace within yourself; but I think it would be better to say: Have good will. Our Lord said: *I have come to bring not peace, but war* (cf. Mt 10:34). He also said: *Peace I leave with you* (Jn 14:27). There seems to be a contradiction, but first we must wage war against the world that does not want us to belong to God, and that turns against us when it sees that we reject it. We must wage war against the devil who tempts us, and against our passions. The fruit of this warfare is peace, given to the person of good will. She is then given power to go to God generously, looking only at him and what he wants. She passes through difficulties and trials as if going through a cloud. Instead of stopping in fright, like one who sees a ghost, she marches on; that's the secret of the perfection of the saints. **Let us go to God with a firm will, without looking at the sacrifice.** The more sacrifices he asks from us, the more he loves us. **Let us go with the eagerness of love.** Oh! How quickly we would go if we had only one thought and one desire – that of never refusing God anything.

We must mortify ourselves, because we have sinned. [...] It is necessary to mortify oneself, to do penance for our offenses. We might object: But God has forgiven me. Yes, but whoever loves does not forgive itself for having offended God. St. Peter and St. Mary Magdalene were sure that they had been forgiven, yet they shed many tears and did much penance!

We must mortify ourselves in order to persevere in virtue. As soon as someone stops mortifying herself they regress, because sensuality is the cause of all our sins. We must mortify ourselves in order to sanctify ourselves: the more we deny the body, the more the spirit takes the upper hand. We must mortify our mind, our body, and our senses: above all, we need a spirit of mortification that will enter into everything we do; and this habitual practice will become a virtue. How many vocations and virtues were lost because of a lack of courage to be mortified, to deny little preferences and comforts, and whims in food. Some day, God will require from them an accounting of the graces he had offered them.

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Mortification should not become the center of our life. You cannot always live with Calvary in front of you; the body, the mind, and the soul would give up, if they had to live always with sacrifices. There are many examples in the penitential orders. On the natural level, we accept the most painful cures, but we don't dwell on the suffering but on the healing it brings. We accept very severe diets, but we don't stop there. We think about recovering or preserving our health. It is the same when we want to increase or preserve our spiritual life: **our center is Jesus Christ – his love must be the norm of our mortifications.**

Jesus is our model. How mortified was his life! We want to imitate him. We offended his love and wounded his heart. By ever keeping our Lord before our eyes, we hardly feel the sacrifice, or, if we do feel it, our motivation is so strong and beautiful that we find therein our peace and our joy. Hermits, whose life was totally given to self-denial, found the secret of this joy. By acting in this way, we don't risk the danger of wearing ourselves out and becoming discouraged.



Points for reflection:

Poverty, obedience, mortification, and love. For St. Peter Julian, these virtues support and complete each other. But their value consists only in transforming us into Jesus Christ and in making him the center of our life.