

On Thanksgiving¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Paris, Tuesday, February 25, 1862

My Sisters, let us talk about the second end of the sacrifice; namely, thanksgiving.

As I told you, there are several communities that have thanksgiving to the Blessed Sacrament as their purpose.² Among others, there is one at Morbihan, in Mauron. A good holy woman³ established adoration of the Blessed Sacrament through Masses. She has the Mass of the Blessed Sacrament offered every day, and these Masses are offered in thanksgiving. Personally, I offer a Mass in thanksgiving every Tuesday. She is a good woman who lived in Lyons: we knew her very well. She was with the Reparation group – her name is Sr. Anne. She has done great things; I don't say marvels, but great things for our Lord.

What is thanksgiving? It is the contemplation of the goodness of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, his goodness in itself first of all, then in its expansion towards humanity. It centers on how he gives, what sacrifices he makes in order to come to us with such tenderness, the road he traveled to come to us from heaven in order to visit us. Gratitude responds to the influence of love and goodness. It experiences joy, like a poor beggar who is showered with gifts and who is at a loss for words, and cries and mumbles. Thanksgiving, unable to equal what has been given, cries out: How good you are to me who am so wretched!

My good Sisters, note well that all this is meritorious only when it is personal. Adoration is always good, but I would say that adoration centers on our Lord in himself. In thanksgiving, you look at our Lord in his relationship to you. In the practice of thanksgiving you are on stage with our Lord: he is giving, and you are receiving. He is there as the royal benefactor, giving love in its highest degree. Our act of thanksgiving is most consoling for us humans – the other acts are all difficult. I don't know why: it is difficult to adore, to humble oneself, to ask pardon.

Under the spell of a gift, the heart is overcome, crying: How good you are! It is no effort for us to express gratitude. Surprised by a gift, a special favor, we feel tears welling up in our eyes. Eyes and body, and gestures all respond. One feels comfortable expressing gratitude. I'm even aware that some are drawn to thanksgiving. Like a man who gives to a beggar, God is happy to give, especially when he encounters gratitude. Our Lord begins with this, to lead us to say: How good you have been for me!

My good Sisters, recall that when you were converted, if you needed it - there can always be a conversion from what is less perfect to what is more perfect, - our Lord first gave you gifts of feeling. It was something like receiving manna from heaven. You gave yourself to him, because you were happy. Our Lord then asked for gratitude. **We might even say that gratitude should be part of our entire life,**

¹ Number 395. *De l'action de grâces. Explication de la règle, Chap. III, Art. 7. Suite. (On Thanksgiving. Explanation of the Rule, Chapter III, Article 7. Continued.)*

² Guillot and (S7bis): The rest of the paragraph is omitted, and the copy resumes with the following paragraph: *Qu'est-ce que l'action de grâces? (What is thanksgiving?)*

³ Virginie Danion, Cf. letters that Father wrote to her.

since we are constantly receiving – especially us – the gift *par excellence*, the Eucharist. We receive it in the morning through Holy Communion, and during the day by adoration. Our religious life is only a Eucharistic out-flowing, nothing else. It is Eucharistic service. If your life is only that, my poor Daughters, you should always have a Eucharistic gratitude, in order to be always in your⁴ natural state. What is beautiful about gratitude is that it gives us peace and devotion, saying: I am happy; and the Good Lord also says: I am happy. He was generous so that we would return a grateful love, thanksgiving, and homage. This was your earlier experience. Now you can no longer feel the same thing.

When a compassionate person finds a poor person in his last agony, and when she can save him, the giver will certainly be linked by heart and honor to the person saved. She is more loving than the person she helped: that's the nature of things. Our Lord said: *It is more blessed to give than to receive* (cf. Acts 20:35). Our Lord finds greater happiness, opening his heart to give us all his treasures. He prefers to give rather than to receive. Love that gives is more perfect than that which receives. That is why we give great joy to our Lord – we are happy, and he is even happier – on condition that we express our gratitude. If not, then, our Lord is helping a wretch who uses his gifts to offend him.

The greater the gift, the greater will be our gratitude. Let me use a comparison: our Lord is overburdened with his gifts, he can no longer breathe under their weight – to give him a chance to share is to bring him relief. Not to do so would make him unhappy, were this possible. And so! My Sisters, thank our Lord. Notice how he insists on thanksgiving in the gospel.

When the Blessed Virgin had the joy of conceiving the eternal Word, the evangelists don't mention her gratitude. Words were inadequate. Her thanksgiving was known only by God. All we can say is that she must have composed her *Magnificat*, which she expresses not primarily for her cousin, but for heaven and earth. When she went to visit Elizabeth, Elisabeth said: *Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?* (Lk 1:42-43) In her gratitude the Blessed Virgin recognizes her own nothingness, praising the mercy of God for his people and for her (cf. Lk 1:48-50), equivalently saying: I owe everything to you. My poor Daughters, thanksgiving is what we could call the adoration of homage: the first adoration in the sacrifice is the adoration of worship or cult; this is the homage of thanksgiving.

The gospel relates that our Lord cured ten lepers; only one returned to him. Jesus welcomed him warmly, he was a foreigner. Our Lord said: *Where are the other nine?* (Lk 17:17) He was sad that only a foreigner gave thanks; the others did not return. In fact, if you give a generous gift to a poor person who simply turns his back on you, you will be sad. [...].

And so, my Sisters, be women of thanksgiving⁵. Thank our Lord for having instituted the Eucharist. Thank him for his loving intention to embrace the world. Thank him for all the sacred hosts, for all the tabernacles that exist and that will exist – thank him for giving himself with so much love. This is the time to examine the nature of the gift: the grandeur of his gift, both hidden and magnificent that is himself. Why? To make you appreciate his desire to come down to you in your nothingness and weakness, to make you appreciate his hidden life where he is giving himself to you with so much tenderness, since our Lord in a way is born anew through the hands of the priest at the altar in order to come to you. This is the outburst of love: How can you be so good, so loving? One must be humble like the Blessed Virgin. Consider your lowliness, nothingness. If the Blessed Virgin could say it, what should we say of ourselves? Have you forgotten what I am, what I was, and what I could be? – Yes, I know, and I come to you. – The soul says: I understand that you would come when I am very pure, but when I am so

⁴ Guillot and (S7bis), variant: dans *un* état naturel (in *a* natural state)

⁵ literally: daughters of gratitude

full of faults? Our Lord answers: I come to you because you are sick, surrounded by the miserable leprosy of sin; I come to you.

If we felt this deeply, how beautiful our thanksgiving would be! When gratitude is well understood, it is rare that it does not produce some signs of love, some tears. So then, we must be very grateful. If you choose only one among all the fruits of sacrifice, choose thanksgiving. It is sufficient: it contains everything. My dear Sisters, what happens in paradise? There is adoration, **but in heaven** there is also constant gratitude (cf. Rv 7:12), as St. John says in Revelations. Why is our thanksgiving so incomplete? We center on ourselves, unimpressed. We remain inside ourselves, in the fog of our minds – our actions follow our state of soul. While if we consider things from the standpoint of our Lord and how he gives so lovingly, everything changes.

Consider the apostles. Rude though they were, when our Lord instituted the Holy Eucharist, they became humble and silent. That's gratitude. Notice the disciples of Emmaus. When Jesus blessed the bread and gave them to eat, they wanted to keep our Lord with them. Immediately, they took up their walking sticks to return to Jerusalem (cf. Lk 24:33). Do you know what heaven really is, my poor Daughters? The love of God, known, possessed, and eternal – the love of God for us, as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have loved us... what their love drove them to do for us, to reward us. If we understood clearly this infinite goodness, we would already be in paradise – we would be charmed by such goodness.

Happiness on earth consists in enjoying goodness or apparent goodness, of what we know. In reference to our Lord, it is the enjoyment of his holiness. Should we stop there in our gratitude? We must also express gratitude for those who fail to do so; otherwise, if it were just for you, beautiful Ladies, if it were only to enrich yourselves before the Blessed Sacrament, you wouldn't have an apostolic love: you love our Lord for himself alone, since we said that you must embrace his love in all its amplitude. **We must give thanks for those who are not grateful**, for those closest to you, your parents and friends. There is a family debt. Give thanks for those whom you might have scandalized, whom you might not have edified properly. We must pay our debt of gratitude; we need to compensate our Lord. If a poor girl marries a rich man, a king who makes her a queen, he will also enrich her entire family, and raise them in rank according to their degree of relationship. Would not this queen thank the king, her spouse, in the name of all her relatives from the first to the last? If some among them were ungrateful, would she not compensate him fifty times more? That is what we should do, as our Lord is so good to us and to our families!

Some persons receive Communion and leave immediately! They utter a few vocal prayers, but they don't know how to say one word to our Lord; they go away. In many parishes, you see people receiving Communion, and as soon as the Mass is ended, leave. If we told them: our Lord is in your heart for a quarter of an hour, and do you still go out⁶ into the street? We should follow you with two burning candles. They don't think. I tell priests: Since you receive a host four times larger, and you communicate under both species, your thanksgiving should be longer than that of the faithful. That is why our rule requires a half-hour of thanksgiving. Do it for yourselves and for those who don't do it – the devil always tries to cut it down. I was telling one priest⁷, If you would lose a sinner, go and hear his confession; but the general rule is, do not abandon the master to care for domestic helpers. One word spoken to the master would do one hundred times more good than the wish of a penitent and our natural activity. After all, without our Lord Jesus Christ, we can do nothing. That is why it is strictly forbidden for us to be disturbed during thanksgiving, unless there is a real need; then only do we comply.

⁶ From Guillot and (S7bis): *sortez* (go out) rather than S7bis: *restez* (remain)

⁷ From Guillot and (S7bis): *Je disais à un prêtre: un pécheur* (I was telling a priest: a sinner)

Therefore, make a good thanksgiving, not only in the morning, but throughout the day. Stay under this beautiful sun. If you want to be generous, begin by great gratitude, by joy, then you can do anything; if you always begin with tears, you will get discouraged. I like the gratitude of St. Paul! It is as brutal as the blow that knocked him from his horse: Lord, what shall I do? (Acts 22:10) He recognized our Lord reproaching him for his cruelty: *Lord, what shall I do?* How beautiful! **That's thanksgiving.** Our Lord will tell you. Love is so eloquent; that word of thanks is enough. Express this constantly in your adorations. If our Lord could show us his heart, he would say: You are ungrateful; you are very good in asking, but you have no affection, no gratitude, and no thanksgiving. I don't know where this comes from; perhaps from us priests who don't express enough thanks. Fire spreads fire. In our community, we must do this very well, not just for ourselves, but so that our Lord may be known.



Points for reflection:

The Eucharist is the Church's greatest act of thanksgiving. Here, our Founder fosters this idea through practical reflections and biblical references. He explains it with spontaneous prayers. He makes it flow from our personal relationship with Christ. He suggests means to deepen this attitude within us. What touches you most?