

Openness of Heart¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Paris, Tuesday, July 31, 1860

During a retreat, days go by fast; the first day is already finished², and maybe you didn't do much. You should use your time well; seek yourself and seek God. Ordinarily, this is a difficult day: hard for the body and for the soul.

This conference will dwell on openness of heart. The principle of perfection for each of us depends on our fidelity to grace. This is all-important. God calls each one to a particular perfection, to follow counsels of perfection. On the other hand, all perfection is based on obedience. [...] Obedience is faith in practice, humility in action. Because our Lord based perfection upon abnegation and abnegation is the sacrifice of the whole person, the practice of obedience must be made to a person, who may be less perfect, and possessing fewer lights, but with a mission.

St. Vincent Ferrer said: when God calls someone to perfection, he gives it a spiritual director. The opposite is also true: when a person does not have a director it is not called to perfection. Precisely, whoever does not have a director lacks the means to aspire to perfection. That doctrine is not mine but St. Vincent Ferrer's. God gives perfection only through a director; all the saints received grace through direction.

There are two kinds of directors: the director for the journey, and the director for life.

Direction for the journey, for principles is the best. It is better, because it leads us on the path toward God, helping us to know the will of God. The director says: this is the way the Lord has shown you. Once a person is happily on her path she is very content.

There is also direction for life, which means for activities, virtues, for details. A person can have two directors, one for the journey and the other for life. The director for the journey is primary because he shows the way; he is the director for principles. The other one is only the director for applications; and can be mistaken.

How describe the director for principles? He is the one telling the person: the Good Lord wants you in such a religious vocation, or in the pious world. That is not sufficient; he must also show the way of perfection. The director, therefore, must know how grace moves in that person, what is her dominant virtue, the character of her holiness, or more clearly her spiritual routine. He has to guide her into practices according to her grace and her needs. He should balance her needs and her attractions of grace, by saying: you need this much prayer, to be done in this way; you should be mortified, especially on such and such a thing. You need few or many vocal prayers – all this according to the [needs of the] person. That is what we call the regime (practices) of life. While you know it, you should go forward. Once told what to do, you have all that is necessary. Not every detail can be known, but once light is given it must be followed.

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² Copy A, variant: première journée *passée* (the first day is already *finished*)

A director for principles helps to know when one is wrong or right. This becomes known by the peace or war, by light or darkness, and by attraction. The person feels that this system is good for her. She should really feel it: I feel that I am right were God wants me. She needs that consolation; the Good Lord does not always ask from us an act of pure obedience. Sometimes, he gives some consolations, in obedience, as in faith. Everyone must experience this divine approval.

There is also the director for details. He guides a soul in practical applications. Very often, when God gives a great grace to a person by giving her a director for principles, he will leave her for a certain time. Why? She hears: *Here is the Lamb of God* (cf. Jn 1:29). If she has her director constantly beside her, she will be like a child never daring to walk, crawling on the ground near its mother. The mother steps back, and it tries to follow her. It falls hurting itself a little, then stands up again and walks. Or again, she could be like a little bird in its nest, not daring to fly. Its mother calls, it tries and flies. That is direction. The Good Lord withdraws the director for a while so that she can fly or at least walk. Ordinarily, she is desolated having no longer a stick to lean on. She no longer has anyone to tell her how to follow God. But since God wants it that way, she will be able to fly.

Waiting can be a sign of laziness. Such a one must be spurred on. If she falls, she will stand again. God frightens her. When the devil and the world come, what can this poor person do? She runs away: she goes to God out of fear, when she was unwilling to go out of love. One of the greatest joys of heaven will be to see God compensate for our weakness. We will see that God allowed apparently harmful events to compel us to turn to him with greater dedication.

Here you can be happy: your way is the Blessed Sacrament. It is perfect then. Your vocation is to be Servants of the Most Blessed Sacrament. You have a system of practices spelled out by the rule. That's your life. You don't need anything else to perfect your holiness. **What remains is your personal vocation.** Your own system of personal practices is to be discussed with the director. Evidently, he is the judge of your interior state. He needs to know you very well, in order to guide you towards your goal, and give you the means for perfection, a personal rule. In a garden, there are many flowers, but none are alike. Perfection of one is not the perfection of the other: each one has her own personal grace. You need to know your place in the Eucharistic garden. To do this, open your heart; the director should know you perfectly – he will perceive it, if you can't say anything.

Why should you open your heart? In order to make an act of humility, since we don't like to talk about our wrong-doings. There may not be so much to say that is good. God veils our weaknesses and always hides something from us. It is an act of humility – a child does this in simplicity, without pride. As adults, we blush. We must admit our weaknesses. We might think that none of these things were ever said to the director; but his knowledge is not limited, since it is the wisdom of God. The Good Lord permits us to perspire out of timidity and fear; to feel ashamed so that we can have a little bit of merit. A proud person will never open his heart; therefore he will never have peace. Simplicity makes the soul transparent: she becomes a crystal exposed to the sun – it becomes transparent. Simplicity is like a child thinking and speaking at the same time. His thoughts and words are coherent – he speaks in order for you to understand.

My Sisters, you have to make that act of humility, otherwise you will suffer. You will be like a light that is snuffed out. [...] I may be mistaken, but I think that it is only by obedience and in obedience that the soul lives in peace. It is good to obey, as it is good to humiliate oneself. This is obedience of the heart. Our Lord Jesus Christ made it a condition for his grace of love. He said to St. Paul: *Ananias will tell what you should do* (cf. Acts 9:6). There would have been too much glory for the great apostle if our Lord himself had taught him. He had to practice obedience. We could say: St. Paul starts by obeying before commanding. And when our Lord heals the lepers, he tells them: *Go, and show yourselves to the priests* (Lk 17:14).

You might say: I really want to make myself known, but how should I do it? As best you can. Some want to say only good things. The moment you analyze yourself, you mislead the director, and muddle up everything. What will happen? If the director has no experience, what he might say to guide you would not be good. Remember that it is hard to reveal oneself. You need great openness. The director has more light than you do, he has divine light. One who talks a lot misleads the director if he is not careful. – But I don't know what to say. – Then the director might ask you some questions: answer as best you can. The director follows a divine light, not yours. He is not guiding you according to yourself; his approach is different. For example, a sick person thinks he has such and such a sickness, but the symptoms reveal some hidden sickness. The doctor does not tell him that he is mistaken, he just listens. The devil trips us up on some small detail. Self-love misguides us – we share our small faults, but the biggest remain secret.

We have to open up, as best we know, and as we can without torturing ourselves. To torture yourself is a proof of self-love. Self-love may well impede your insight. We should say everything simply. When we embroider, we are punished by self-love. The one who speaks naturally will speak well, the one who speaks badly will speak badly; just be natural. But if I don't say it well? – We will see: gradually you will be known; nature reveals itself: To know a person you have to surprise him; otherwise human nature disguises itself.

The director needs to know one's weaker nature. We don't have to tell our sins, they are absolved by confession. We let our bad nature be known, our passions, what is bad within us, what leads us to evil, the tendency of our mind in handling antipathies toward such-and-such a person or thing.

Regarding the body, we must let our temperament be known. Evidently the body influences the soul. A sanguine temperament tends to two excesses. A choleric temperament is different. Nature influences the mind, and leads it to sorrow. A phlegmatic temperament is given to laziness. We should make known our tendencies: because our natural passions will lead to actions and habits. This happens quickly, and the director recognizes it immediately, if we talk about our habits. Some say: I am very proud, and this makes me blush. All the saints were proud; your pride is nothing – just a little mud. This is true, but if you were in another situation, there are some who blush up to the white of their eyes. That's a sign that you have very little pride, or that you have a lot of it.

It's very hard to talk about our disordered affections. To say that we are lazy and slothful is nothing, but to share about our disordered affections is something else. You, Ladies³, in the world, you are attached to bits of nothing, a pin, a white or black hair. St. Teresa admits caring for her hands; she had beautiful hands. Remember that you will blush, perspire and say: If I mention this it will be taken away from me. Self-love always says that. That's our bad nature: get rid of it. Then, there is also our good nature – after all, everything is not bad. If you tell me: I'm very humble – I would not believe you. – I'm very gentle. – Let's see, once I prick you a little; you are very gentle when you sleep, of course. I'm not asking about your virtues, you will have them once you are in paradise. A poor traveler is on his way: after having covered quite a distance he still has many miles to go. He must keep walking. By a good nature, I don't mean the qualities of the mind – we always seem stupid with somebody more scholarly than we. Nor do I mean magnanimity, but there is always some counterweight.

What do we mean by a good nature, and aptitudes? These are strong natural qualities. When someone has the aptitude for something, it is good for the director to know it; one day the Good Lord will say: What did you do with the talent I entrusted to you? (Mt 25:14-30). One has an aptitude for a particular

³ In a footnote, we can read in the manuscript copy: « There were two. » Not mentioned in the *Journal*.

task; the director should know it in order to develop it. There are character tendencies: one likes charity, is attracted to care for the sick. In the world we call that quality a virtue, but here we understand that there is no virtue in that. Therefore, the director must know the aptitudes. Even without his asking, the director knows the weaknesses of our bad nature, when he knows our good ones. Someone could tell him: I feel drawn to particular friendships; then you must have a very good heart. More than that, you should be faithful and constant. Therefore, with that faulty particular friendship, there is the other side: if you love, then you are capable of loving the Good Lord. Another person might say: I like music, painting, and things of beauty. Here is an artistic nature: since the imagination is strong, it must be harnessed to guide her toward God. You understand this point.

What more must be disclosed? Your grace. The director does not need to know your ordinary graces, but he must know your grace of attraction if you have one. That grace will help him to show you the way. If you have a grace of attraction, it is none other than a particular grace calling you: Come to me through this sacrifice, this means, or this prayer – the Good Lord himself will manifest this. The rule to follow for the penitent, who cannot guide himself, is to submit to the director, who will show him the plan of God. He spares us, you and me, of a great burden; this is how you discover the will of God. Go ahead.

St. Paul had an apostolic vocation, and that calling was great. He loved our Lord more than anything. Immediately, our Lord showed him the way by telling Ananias: *he is a chosen vessel – I myself will show him how much he himself must suffer for my name* (cf. Acts 9:15-16). Thus, with his grace, God showed him the way of pain; no other apostle suffered more. To counterbalance, our Lord also gives him a love for the cross – he constantly talks about it.

Another way: to Magdalene, our Lord gives the attraction for silence, solitude and contemplation. Our Lord keeps her in that attraction by obedience. Before having St. Maximin as director, she had our Lord and the Virgin Mary. St. Martha had a mixed attraction for charity and contemplation.

St. Francis de Sales had charity, like all the saints, but love has its nuances. He was prone to anger: that leads to self-love and ends in selfishness. What would our Lord do? He attracted him through gentleness of heart. St. Francis de Sales practiced all the virtues in one, *he became the most gentle among men* (cf. Nb 12:3), as the scriptures say of Moses. One day, his brother wanted to make him angry because of a few prisoners, he answered: For twenty years I have worked to collect this bit of honey; do you want me to spend it in an instant?

There is an attraction of virtue, and sometimes one of prayer. You may ask: Isn't there a general attraction, since the goal is the same for all: the Eucharist. Isn't there some common virtue, although distinct and varied for each one? I don't know, but it seems that I would answer: flowers are varied, not two are alike. However, Eucharistic perfection should represent all the perfections of religious communities. It seems to me that each one of you should represent a perfection of paradise or of a religious congregation. This is why I say: Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament sums up all the virtues, and continues them in a sacramental act. All the mysteries of his life are included in his state of sacrifice: it is the paradise of his love; we can find whatever we are looking for in it. His love and his power have found this secret: he is the bread, the light and the life for all – and each one discovers, therein, his own attraction.

You have the Eucharistic vocation: Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is your goal, your law, your means, and your grace. Live in his grace. To attain this, you should find within your family, your religious community, all the aspects already existing in other orders, for the service of our Lord. Since you are Servants of the Blessed Sacrament, you are a religious body seeking the same goal, the same end, with the same direction. That goal is the organized service of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Love is like the sun: in its rays all colors are combined. We can see it on earth in the rainbow. You should be like a ray of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. I cannot define the attraction: the moment you are a member

of an existing group, you are like a crown around our Lord. This is a beautiful thought; it must be true, if you are in your grace.

It seems to me that in our community a saint will not be distinguished by any one virtue; that would be too small. A virtue is not a goal; it is none other than an exercise. Love should be the characteristic of everyone, with some differences, as I told you. How would I know that I represent my religious congregation, what is my nuance? You shall tell me your grace: if our Lord does not tell you, he might tell me; if not, we shall wait. **Now, an attraction has three states: We are never mistaken with the first, we need vigilance with the second, and much more with the third – an attraction starts with death.**⁴

Points for reflection:

This instruction was given during the retreat of foundation in Paris when the founding sisters were preparing for their vows. He describes the importance of spiritual accompaniment not only to make ourselves known, but also to know ourselves and to journey faithfully. The means of opening oneself in direction are developed in great detail. Did you ever explore this means of spiritual progress?

⁴ A sense of sacrifice that leads to strength