

Recollection, Our Life in God¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Paris, Friday, September 19, 1862

My Sisters, use your time well; you have only two days remaining in your retreat. The end is more important than the beginning. It is not a question of merely making resolutions, but of giving oneself to the Good Lord. Let's take advantage of our time. Today or tomorrow, make sure that I see you once, to tell me how your retreat went.

Today, we will meditate on the life of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. It would be useless, my good Sisters, to prepare a beautiful dinner, if you did not eat anything, if you could not digest it well. It would be useless for you to hear spiritual words, if you don't digest them. What do we mean by digestion? This is recollection. Digestion takes place when internal heat produces the transformation of food. It follows that recollection, the interior grace of our Lord, produces this transformation in us. This is true: whoever knows how to be recollected knows everything.

To know how to be recollected in our Lord Jesus Christ is to have found a treasure, not merely to receive it, but to live out in practice the life of our Lord himself. A soul that knows how to be recollected knows how to converse with our Lord, to be united with him. A soul that does not know how to be recollected is one that knows how to feed only on alms received from others; it is inadequately fed. It nourishes its love only on words, on what it sees, on what it feels. The result is that it is very poorly nourished, always hungry, and never has what it needs. People prefer acts of penance, acts of virtue, rather than recollection, because this is difficult. If we were not so lightheaded, it seems that this would not be so difficult. Basically, there is some truth there.

There are two ways of leading souls to our Lord: by the service of others: this road is longer. The second is more perfect, going to our Lord by the soul. This is my advice to you. This way is more perfect and the grace of your vocation, since you are called to honor our Lord interiorly, as your rule says. If you begin courageously, our Lord will finish the task generously. However, you must give yourselves; mortify your senses, in order to attain recollection of soul. One can learn very quickly how to go to God, knowing that his love abides in us; we merely need to seek within ourselves. That is why we read in the Sacred Scriptures: *The kingdom of God is within you* (cf. Lk 17:21). Where? In his love: *I will lead her soul to solitude, and there, I will speak to her heart* (cf. Hos 2:16). Where is this solitude? Within ourselves.

We read in the prophet David: *I will listen within me to what the Lord God has to say* (cf. Ps 84:9). Is he therefore within me, that I might listen to him? You know a little about this already, my good Daughters, since you are journeying towards the Good Lord. You know very well how to listen to him. Go through your soul; if you go through your senses, you will be wasting your time. Our Lord shows us the way. We tend to follow our mind because it entertains us, but that is not the right way. By using other people or by focusing on our senses, we discover that our feeble will is lazy and slothful. Don't take that way; it's not good for you.

What then is this type of recollection? It is the interior life in itself. It is the life of self in God, the soul that leaves self, that leaves behind everything of this world, and flies *directly into God, into Jesus Christ* (cf. Gal 2:20), to use the words of St. Paul. Such a soul passes through the senses, through everything

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material, as our Lord passed through his tomb to rise from the dead. The soul goes to its God; it no longer dwells with itself, as I was saying yesterday. It would expose itself to a thousand troubles by staying with itself. It is like a master that commands: the soul obeys and that's very good. She loves the master more than all things, remaining with him, that is what you should do. Remain in our Lord; you are at home in his house. It is his home, and he feeds you with fatherly love. From the material point of view you are in his house; from a spiritual point of view we can say: you are at his door.

One who loves the master must honor him. Anyone who loves another more than self will put aside personal interests to do what the beloved wishes. Love is nothing other than an outpouring into the person loved. You should go first, how can you expect the loved one to come to you? A king is not invited into a stable; you are that stable. Go rather toward the one who gives, the soul goes towards God, and the adorer towards the Lord, that is understandable. God draws his creatures, attracting them by interior grace. It would be unnatural for a soul to draw God to itself. Come out of yourselves, then; go to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, where you will find him.

How will you do this? I tell you, **leave yourself behind;** form the habit to stop thinking, stop wanting anything in yourself. One who loves sees no difficulty. Where there is love, thoughts follow the heart. The greater our love the more sacrifices seem pleasant. The proof of love is in sacrifice; the thoughts of the heart will draw the thoughts of the mind. The goal is to change oneself into our Lord who is so good, so holy, and so loveable – who is everything. Every virtue – every grace, every good – flows from his heart. After seeing him, it's impossible not to love him. His voice captivates both heart and senses. In paradise, at first sight of him, we will never lose sight of his most gentle goodness. If we loved a bit more, we could not live without thinking of our Lord. You will say, this is supernatural. Yes, it's both supernatural and natural at the same time. His grace within us is attracting us; that's supernatural. Our body and its faculties are like instruments; that's the natural action. We must bring both body and soul, they are attracted by a supernatural principle.

What does our Lord think, what is he doing, what is he saying, and what does he want? We normally ask such questions with our parents. In the presence of a teacher or a genius, we are afraid to think. What did papa say? The Christian asks: What did the Pope say? The interior soul asks: What did our Lord say? How will you know? By consulting him through an interior life. The soul sees God's truth better than with physical eyes. The movement of grace and its power is more convincing than sight; this conviction is a supernatural vision. The soul sees God, senses his truth, and can no longer doubt. However, we must rid ourselves of everything that is disturbing, everything that prevents us from seeing God. He himself is within us, as I said earlier. This happens quickly: the soul merely consults God; love acts more quickly than words. With a simple glance, you know that love says everything; one word says it all.

This is the interior life. In the interior life, the soul finds its practical judgments – its advice, the law of its heart. Our Lord is the master, she is the servant. The soul can do without many things because it is under the obedience, the direction of our Lord himself. Its rule is direct obedience. To guide its obedience and its holiness, it does not need a confessor nor books – none of that. Our Lord entrusts to the confessor the interior guidance, conscience, vocation; principles must still be given. As for love, that is not the concern of the confessor. Do we not see, desire, or hear something? Our Lord reserves for himself the guidance of our love. When we sought guidance for our hearts, it led to nothing. I would not dare say this if you were not my daughters. Do you not see that you turn your heart toward him, if he is too kind and understanding?

All this is too mysterious for people in the world. **Our Lord reserves for himself the direction of our primary love.** The soul who goes directly to him to guide its love finds our Lord. There is no need of an intermediary for a soul that loves: *I will lead her into solitude, and there, I will talk to her heart* (cf. Hos

2:16). You, pious souls, always want an intermediary to take your heart and give it to God. But all that is muddy water, cobwebs that cover everything. The soul does not have the courage to take its own heart to give it to God; that soul will only regress in goodness, because it is not properly centered. This soul would like to express its love, but it cannot. It would be sufficient to tell her that she is not wise, but our Lord does not want us to say this. These are mysteries that must be respected. It is *the secret of the king* (Tb 12:7), as the Holy Spirit says. There are some things that must be respected, never verbalized. If you talk about them, you will break your heart.

Our Lord has three loves: love of the law: this belongs to the director. Here you are under obedience to the law. There is the obedience of virtue: this, too, belongs to the director. These two laws belong to the director; leave them to him. There is the direction of love: do not go there; this is the Holy of Holies. We are only servants who must remain in the antechamber. This is *the secret of the king* (Tb 12:7), as the Holy Spirit says. The groom speaks and the bride listens.

Place yourselves, therefore, at the disposition of our Lord. If you are not recollected, you will not understand this delicate feeling, because, from time to time, he touches your heart. You are used to being guided like a blind man. Be careful. **As a soul advances in the interior life of love, our Lord takes the place of the guides** – and he is enough. Occasionally, however, he sends certain situations wherein we must humble ourselves; then consult a director. If you were pure enough, courageous enough, it would be better to suffer – but go, if you wish.

The interior life not only gives life to the way of truth, but it is the interior path. You love our Lord as he loves you, his love is ever varied. He loves our souls as he created them, with their particular graces; as a consequence, the soul must act according to its gifts. **We must abandon ourselves to the action of the Holy Spirit.** He forms us; he is as in his temple (cf. 1 Cor 6:19); we must abandon ourselves by giving ourselves to the Holy Spirit. Therefore, if you want to understand, live from love – there is no other way to understand. The words of our Lord are so strong and powerful, that we cannot hear them. He communicates only as love knows how – a fire that is felt. Put yourself into this fire.

This is the love of Jesus Christ, wanting to enlighten us in him. How? Don't ask! The heart knows. This cannot be expressed, for words are inadequate. To transform oneself into our Lord is the most difficult thing to do. **What can a person do to allow our Lord to become his soul, his thought, to take his place?** Here is the ordinary means – I cannot speak about the other means because I don't know them. When you go toward our Lord, begin by exterior recollection: close the door to externals, otherwise, you will not succeed. If you don't do this, your senses will become an open door and you will be agitated. You will need to treat it like a sick patient. Begin by closing the doors of the senses, if you want to go towards to our Lord.

When a soul wants to go towards our Lord, it closes its eyes. Let us be clear: the soul sees our Lord, and our Lord looks at her. He is there exposed on the altar. This is my own preferred attraction. Our Lord is visible here. It is possible to proceed differently. Still, when I speak of closing our eyes, I mean closing them to creatures. If you are very attentive to our Lord, if you pay less attention to what is around you, you will be more recollected than distracted. This will happen. Imagine a wounded soldier: he is losing blood, but he does not feel it.

That is the first disposition. When you have done that, you must place your soul in silence at the feet of our Lord, without babbling, without searching for formulas – nothing. We must place our soul in the adoration of silence, present there like one who is dead, completely ready to listen to our Lord. The soul waits for him to come, fully disposed to listen to him. This is very important. That is why you must not begin your adorations with vocal prayers, like the *Our Father* and others that you have long known by heart. Your mind is no longer active; your heart murmurs without clear words. If you want to listen to

our Lord, do what I say. Try it, even for a moment. If you are not ready to listen to the Good Lord, how can he speak to you?

Reject all absurd thoughts. I want you to act like the Prophet who said: *I hold my soul in my hands, and I will always hold it* (cf. Ps 130:2). We have not reached that point yet. Sometimes our Lord will make you wait. He gives you time to free yourself from all else. To desire virtue, the soul must free itself from itself, so that it can become master of itself. Even if you remained there one hour merely trying to control yourself, that will be worth more than all the rest. Doesn't the sun give more light in one minute than all other lights put together? The Good Lord comes into us with joy.

How should one meditate? You can begin with your imagination, if you feel dry. This is not difficult. There you will be recollected, at peace, on a calm sea. Or [you can take] a grace, a mystery, a truth, and feed on it. Or, our Lord will place you in a state of sweetness, a heavenly emotion. Or to reflect on the silence of virtue, you can take something from the life of the saints. For example, Mary Magdalene, listening at the feet of Jesus, weeping (cf. Lk 7:38). Personally, I like this approach. It is helpful to imagine her there. Then, imitate her silence. At another time, reflect on the Blessed Virgin adoring our Lord as a child, or before the tabernacle. This is very important, even if it should last only for a few minutes, let us control the imagination by giving it some picture.

Is that all? No, we must be silent, in order to listen to our Lord. This is a time of longing, of waiting; longing for his coming, to let him speak. Then the conversation begins: God speaks, the soul responds, as the bride does in the Scriptures. The soul calls, searches; the Good Lord is there, watching – he is pleased to see your struggles. The soul then is searching, flying, running; and our Lord is satisfied, and accompanies her. But, as this loving bride wants to love and devote herself to him, she runs and waits. This soul must have reached a certain degree [of perfection]. If you take a prepared subject, and enter into conversation with our Lord, you will be drawn away from his person. When you are recollected you enter into the spirit of the person. You already do this, my poor Daughters, although you would not describe it in this way. Do you not understand that once you sit down with him, you will have food and rest, and all you need to work? You will be happy in a steady center. Go then!

That is recollection in God. You must apply your attention to it. Sometimes you may be at a loss: What shall I do during this retreat in order to please the Good Lord? Do what I just said. You have been clothed and adorned; now, he takes you by the hand. What are you waiting for? Why remain in the outer chamber? Go then. There are too many souls who want to go to God, but are afraid of the solitude, the nothingness. There are very few who want to go into this Cenacle of his love. At least, may there be a few. Don't say: I do not have the learning; I did not receive a brilliant education. All you need is a heart; if you did not have one, you would not be here. You left your home; why remain in the mud-house that we call self-love? You should have stayed home. *Penetrate into that house,* (cf. 2 Cor 5:1-5), as St. Paul said, and do you know what will happen? You will be happy forever, you will be living in our Lord, and you will fulfill these beautiful words: *He who eats me will remain in me* (cf. Jn 6:56). Is there another paradise on earth or in heaven? How pitiful we are! We know these things, but we don't think about them. My good Daughters, concentrate on this. Practice recollection; begin by entering into silence. Go towards our Lord by leaving yourselves behind.

One thing I omitted is that **to go toward the Good Lord you must come out of yourself.** Never look back, or you will be terrified by your faults, your defects, or questions about grace. You will be held back if you cannot find the source of the evil. When walking in a high place, it is wise not to look down, to avoid becoming dizzy.² **Keep your eyes on the Lord who walks ahead of you** to lead you to his tabernacle, to his Cenacle of love, from where he sends out invitations to paradise. Do not hold back, or

² Alternate reading: our head would start spinning.

you will no longer see him. Do not waste time thinking about yourself. Why worry about all that? Even if God himself granted you all the Christian and religious virtues, how would you carry all this baggage when the Lord himself chooses to carry it himself and to give you his crown and his virtues? Keep in mind that if the Lord warns you it is because he wants you to go forward, to detach and rid yourself of your own ego. [...] Free yourself then from holding on to this so-called treasure, come out of yourself and go into our Lord. In him you will find all you need.

One day [I heard someone say, or rather,] I read in a life of the saints that a king married a servant-girl, who eventually became both queen of France and a saint. Prior to the wedding, the girl said, I have nothing; I am but a servant. The king replied, I am the king of France and very rich. I don't want you to bring me anything. Once you are on the royal throne, just know that I am the one who placed you there. The marriage took place, and the servant became both queen and saint, for she has been canonized. Although you are nothing, our Lord wants you as a spouse. A spouse must leave her parents. Our Lord offers you a noble kingdom, wealth, and all you need. Come with nothing; he will give you everything. However, he asks only one condition, that you truly have nothing, for **he wishes to fulfill all your needs.** **Ah! My Sisters, may the Lord be enough for you!**



Points for reflection:

In this instruction, St. Peter Julian describes the second movement of recollection, of contemplation: to leave oneself in order to live in God.

What motivations and means does he suggest?

What Scripture texts support this idea?

What is the role of the Holy Trinity in this presentation?

What dangers does he warn us about?

What way does he suggest to enter into meditation? To go beyond meditation and enter into contemplation?