

## Religious Life, a Means and not an End<sup>1</sup>

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament,  
Angers, Saturday, May 28, 1864

Our Lord said to a young man, *If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and come, follow me – you will have treasure in heaven* (cf. Mt 19:21). When this young man heard these words, he became sad, because he held tightly to his goods and his wealth. He was holding on to glory, and he went away sad. He did not do what our Lord had asked of him; he kept his goods. He did not follow our Lord. [...]

My Sisters, our Lord speaks the same words to you: *If you want to be perfect, go, sell everything you have, and come, follow me and you will have treasure in heaven.* You have done this: *Go, sell everything you have.* You have done more than that: you left everything behind, you did not bring anything, and now you own nothing. *Come, follow me,* be poor, and follow me. If you don't, you will not live from my life. Do this, and you will have a great treasure in heaven, in exchange for the goods that you have left behind.

**Treasure in heaven is great, but there is a more perfect vocation; namely the Eucharistic vocation.** Our Lord does not tell us: You will have a great treasure in heaven. For us, he leaves heaven. He offers something totally different. To those with a Eucharistic vocation he says what he said to his apostles: *Remain in my love, as I remain in the love of my Father* (cf. Jn 15:10). What do these words mean: *Remain in my love, as I remain in the love of my Father?* This is what they mean. This is a vocation of love. Love remains with the person loved. Love shares the life of the beloved. One who gets married in the world goes and lives with her husband. She becomes the companion of his heart and the joy of his life, as God had told Adam (cf. Gn 2:24). One who wants to serve our Lord Jesus Christ must also come and live with him and serve his adorable person. A servant remains with her master, to care for all his goods. This is what it means to be a servant.

**The apostles spent all their time with our Lord, day and night, because they formed his family.** And our Lord had two kinds of disciples; some who went home once in a while, like the seventy-two; and the twelve who were always with him. To these twelve our Lord said: Remain with me always. The apostles remained constantly with our Lord. They left their nets and their boats, and stood at his service. They were his heirs. Our Lord told them: *I do not abandon you; I am with you until the end of the age* (cf. Mt 28:20). For the seventy-two who represent the mixed religious life, and for all religious groups that don't have adoration, our Lord has this to say: Follow me by practicing my virtues, live my life and you will have a treasure in heaven. On the other hand, our Lord does not tell the apostles: You will have a treasure in heaven; he does not talk about that. A treasure is like payment for service rendered. Whereas love simply gives itself.

**My good Sisters, your specific vocation is Eucharistic religious vocation.** Our Lord may be adored in every state of life, since the Holy Eucharist belongs to everybody. Any catholic can receive Holy Communion. However, you need religious life [...] as a state of life. The reason for this is that you cannot adore [the exposed Sacrament] individually, if you don't belong to a family group. You absolutely need that community. One person cannot adore our Lord day and night. Religious life is necessary to organize a perpetual service [of adoration]. Hold fast then to religious life, since without it you would no

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<sup>1</sup> Number 509. *La vie religieuse, moyen et non fin.*

longer have any rights and privileges. No one, not even the bishop or the Pope, can give you exposition [for yourself alone]. However, when gathered together, you form a family.

**There is another reason. Religious life is essential, even more than necessary.** In other words, we make profession of the religious vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, and the Eucharistic vow which is the essence of our vocation. The three vows of religious life are meant to make you practice poverty, chastity, and obedience by freely binding your will, in order to do only the will of God. You could very well make private vows, but the Church does not recognize them as vows of religion. A community is always necessary.

Since religious life is a condition for perfection, and to come to adoration you must aim at perfection, you must pass that way. If someone tells me, I want to be an adorer; I would reply that you cannot be an adorer without being a professed religious. You do not have the vows necessary for your formation, you do not have any new means, you are left to yourself. Consequently, I would never accept someone who says I want to be only an adorer. The reason is that she would not have the royal mantle of adoration. The first condition to be a good adorer is religious life. This religious body gives you its spirit and its rules, raising you to the spirit of our Lord.

No one can be the judge of his own case or heal his own illness. Someone else must be the judge or doctor. My good Daughters, evangelical profession is the necessary condition for adoration. People in the world may also adore, but not in the same way. **Many love our Lord as a devotion, not as a vocation.** They love him, but they lack the courage to serve him. We see this often: I love the Blessed Sacrament. – So you are a good Christian. – I would like to belong to the Blessed Sacrament. – That means death. You see the difference; in order to die, you must renounce your own mind, and your own will. So that we can discern whether you can do this, you must pass through the postulancy and the novitiate, and you must become humble. – But I am proud. What happens? They did not really come for our Lord, whoever who comes for our Lord will always find the yoke of religious life to be light.

Religious life is the most perfect means to arrive at divine life, but it requires abundant good will. **A good religious is one who loves community life,** a true family member. If someone claims to love the Lord, I will say that the Lord can clearly be loved anywhere, but it's important to belong to a religious family. Do you think that our Lord would have kept a disciple who would have wanted to be with him alone, without ever associating with the other disciples? My good Sisters, community life is the foundation of your holiness. Be careful, for the devil will try to lead you astray. Since he is against the master, the devil cannot favor adoration. Rather than entice you directly into sin, he will always test you through fear that the Good Lord may ask too many sacrifices.

Adoration does not require sacrifice, since it is your glorious service for the master. There is no greater joy for chamberlains and pages than an hour of service. This is their greatest honor. When the papal prelates are on duty, even if they have to wait two or three hours in the antechamber, they [are happy to] carry out the functions of their office. In their home parishes, they are simple priests, but in their duties they share the Pope's importance.

You are at the service of our Lord, so your religious community endows you with everything that is most sacred. Before entering this service, you need obedience, a life of self denial, a dying that leads to life. This is hard. Do you know what fraternal charity is? I will not say that it is the love of God, but it complements the love of God. [...]

If you had come here only for the religious life, then the religious life within the Society of the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament would not be enough. You would not attain the fulfillment that others have in their religious communities. Why? **The point is that here religious life is organized in a different way,**

**as a means and not an end.** If you turn this around, you will not be happy. Here the religious life is not the ultimate goal, as happens in other Orders<sup>2</sup>. A Franciscan who embraces poverty will be called a good religious. A Trappist who is truly mortified will be called a good religious, fully in the grace of the Order and a child of the family. Members of religious Orders that have a mixed purpose, without adoration, are disciples of the second rank, not the first. They can attain happiness and the respect of their superiors through good relationships and a peacefulness that is their grace of state.

This way of acting will not make you happy, because religious life is not your goal; all this will leave you utterly poor. You will soon realize that this is not why you came. I would not accept someone in these conditions. If you are looking for something, talk with the master. If you are given to penitential practices, even heavy and corporal penances, you may be working for your own good only. You will not gain any special reward for obedience or good works. Here our superiors don't have the grace to make you happy, as is the case among the Carmelites, where the superior plays a dual role as both superior and mother representing God's charity. You will not find any of this here, even if your superior were very motherly. God changes all this. **The whole purpose of religious life is to be a passage, a help to lead you further.** If you prefer to keep your wealth and your health to assist other ailing persons, go rather to the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul. I have authority to tell you this. If I don't, no one else has.

[...]

[In the other communities], anyone who is victorious earns a degree and a place of honor. The attitude is this: you will gain heaven. That's the way people ordinarily talk; you cannot expect anything else. When a religious is popular and everyone is looking for him, he is working for the glory of the Good Lord, but actually, he has his own personality.<sup>3</sup> In our community, the [only] person is our Lord and we are simply his members. **Our Lord receives all honor, glory, and service**, this is our objective: as you will increase, you must become like spreading fire. **Anyone who comes for her own perfection is not coming for the service of adoration.** She wants to serve herself, to take advantage of the goodness of our Lord and of his graces to crown herself. She is out of place here. She will not find satisfaction here, and fulfillment in persons. What will happen? She will be more miserable than in the world. She is sitting in the antechamber, doing practically nothing.

[...]

In other communities, aspirants and novices count for nothing, only the professed are seen as members. Here, **as soon as you enter, you make adoration.** At adoration you share in the grace of your vocation. You might object: What about religious perfection? That is merely to increase the perfection [of your vocation]; just proceed with generosity and love, which is our gift. Religious life serves only to nourish these virtues and sustain you. That's why religious life is only an education.

No one can be fully professed until three years of temporary vows. You might say: That's too long; you deprive us of our end. However, Carthusians make their vow of stability only after five years. [Besides] you are not deprived of your purpose, since we send you to the prie-dieu. This is the grace of your vocation, your relation with the master. The three young men could not appear before Nebuchadnezzar before spending three years of training with the one in charge of the eunuchs (cf. Dn 1:5). Do not be surprised that you also need a time of preparation.

**Don't you see that you need formation?** Since we lead you immediately to your goal, nothing else matters. All this is to nourish you since you need courage, to motivate you so that you will not grow lazy and cowardly. Surely you should look forward to making your profession, but you are still preparing yourself for solemn profession. Other congregations may differ. One might hesitate and be tempted at

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<sup>2</sup> Orders (bodies): An expression that means the group, or the religious congregation.

<sup>3</sup> Here, the Founder is warning us about self-interest, and moves us to purify our motivations.

times. Strive to become a good adorer. We will give you the wedding dress, you will make a covenant with Jesus Christ. You already carry out your service. What remains is to climb the mountain. Aspire to the heights of Eucharistic life. Because you are adorers, you will make even the greatest sacrifices in order to go towards our Lord. Storms and clouds cannot reach that high. Always strive to arrive at the perfection of love. When God takes hold of an adorer, she belongs to him. If we give ourselves unconditionally, will not our Lord give us more than what we give to him?

**I'm confident that our Lord will always provide for the parents of an adorer** who has just given herself to him. Isn't his honor at stake? We can find a parallel example in Esther, whose people were condemned to die. Since the king loved her very much, what does she do? She prostrates at his feet and he asks: What is your request? *Mercy for my people* (cf. Est 8:5-6); and the Jewish people were saved. This can happen. Do you think our Lord would not do more for an adorer than Ahasuerus did for Esther? He is ever faithful to his honor; but you must be an adorer.

**What is an adorer?** An adorer is a torch of love, a burning candle, an ever glowing flame. Our Lord waits for her and she gives herself. Then our Lord gives himself to her so that she can go to him. But if the flame is obscured, the candle does not give much light. The more light there is, the greater the warmth. My good Sisters, long for a more ardent charity that will activate your heart accordingly. What will happen? Your little fire will seek out Jesus Christ who is the divine hearth. Then there will be a fire of love, a great fire. In this body Jesus Christ is the head and we are members (cf. Col 1:18).

Do not lose your place – our Lord is the divine master. In the other congregations<sup>4</sup>, a man sent by God leads. For you, it is always our Lord who leads. What need do we have for the stars when the sun is risen? Our Lord will have you expand, but he does not want to divide his little family. Therefore, have courage. **To adore you must have recollection.** Do not say: In our community, when our Lord is on his throne, all is well. His throne is our heart, our mind, and our will.

Our Lord must not wait: either there is adoration or there is none. This does not refer to the organization of adoration, but in the chapel, in the exercises outside of adoration, there must be recollection and modesty. That is all I ask of you, for the love of God<sup>5</sup>.



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<sup>4</sup> Bodies: religious communities.

<sup>5</sup> The meaning could be: There is adoration as time of prayer, but there is also adoration as a state, so that outside the prayer times of adoration, there must also be recollection and modesty.

**Points for reflection:**

What are the main points of this conference? What are the secondary points?  
Make the connection between the important points and the numbers of the Rule of Life.