

# Self-annihilating Love<sup>1</sup>

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament  
Paris, Wednesday, March 4, 1863

[...]

My Sisters, before I leave, I want to give you a little more to think about. I wish that you would never be sad and never uncertain about your vocation.

**In the Eucharistic life there are two distinct elements: the goal and the means.**

**The goal is our Lord Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar, and his good and adorable service.** You came here to commit yourselves to this goal, just as we did, to fulfill the first commandment: *You shall adore the Lord your God and love him alone.* (cf. Mt 4:10) Adoration includes many parts, even all the virtues. Besides adoration there is canonical office in choir as a style of adoration, the prayer of the Church. Finally comes zeal to have our Lord served by every pure and unselfish means. This is your purpose.

**The spirit of our congregation is one of love and annihilation.** This is none other than the continuation of what Jesus does. The Eucharist is the continuation of all of our Lord's mysteries, virtues and actions. Love is the source from which will flow fruits of love.

It is unthinkable that a Servant of the Most Blessed Sacrament may have any other spirit than that spirit of love which is the starting point of her life. She should be full of love, since fire produces light. Since the light of faith is greater than all the other virtues, it must give rise to strength. Let love also be the power that leads us to be dedicated to the love our Lord. Love will be our strength and our life. Without love, nothing happens; with great love, great things happen.

My good Daughters, you are here to live this spirit of love. What characteristic should it have? It should have a spirit of annihilation. I am not talking about a zeal for humility and penance. That's not enough. This is the love of annihilation that transforms the soul into our Lord. In the Eucharist, there is transubstantiation of the bread into our Lord Jesus Christ, a change of substance. Transubstantiation cannot occur in human beings. It's impossible for humans to become Jesus Christ. But transformation occurs: the freedom of our life and our love are changed into him.

**How does this transformation occur?** Through certain virtues that are our dominant grace. There is a transformation through the practice of virtues and another by love. The latter is ours, and it's more rapid. To be transformed, we have to die to our human ways. When a silkworm becomes a butterfly, it is the same insect, but its form has changed. To become a butterfly, it passes through death to a resurrection. Likewise, the grain of wheat must rot (cf. Jn 12:24), for the seed to give new life. We must die to our self-love. By self-love I don't mean mere vanity, but love of the ego. We must die so as to become one with the love of our Lord. Our love becomes alive, for this is made possible by God's grace.

It's essential to surrender work, mind and will, to put everything into God's hands so as to become only what God wants. [...] In a way, this transforms the person into our Lord, leaving only an external veil. While keeping our freedom, we give everything else to our Lord. All that is left is the external form, as the substance is given away. While the external human form remains the same, the interior is totally

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<sup>1</sup> Number 480. L'amour anéantissant An expression from the French School which expresses the biblical concept in Philippians of "self-emptying".

altered. Now our Lord lives within, hidden under the veil of the human form. Strive then for this transforming [annihilating] love so as to come to a genuine love.

**How will you reach this point?** It's very simple - never seek anything for yourself. Never stand out as having qualities or gifts that bring you personal esteem and perfection, as a person distinct from our Lord. Do not ask for qualities of the heart that lead to your being loved outside of our Lord, that make you stand out [...] Never. Besides, never worry about external glory. As soon as you become a personality, you are no longer one with our Lord. If you seek these things, you are stealing from our Lord, taking back what you have given him – your body, your life – if not by vow, at least by your words, what you have given to build a personal account. You would be corrupting what is divine. You would be preparing your own punishment.

**This is difficult.** The ego repeatedly asserts itself. If we could reach this kind of annihilation, we would be truly happy. I know that it's possible. Even though the heart tends to return to earthly things, our Lord will constantly uplift us. How hard it is to maintain this kind of self-annihilating love. Only an extraordinarily powerful love will make it possible for us to love our Lord with this level of purity and surrender ourselves totally to him. The tendency is to hold back, but one dedicated to the Eucharist must go beyond. Since the love of our Lord is immense, it requires an immense love in return.

Make up your mind, then, that you must give yourselves to our Lord. Moreover, ask yourselves what is your center of life. You cannot be a center for one another. Even all the angels and saints in heaven cannot be your center. If the Good Lord asked you to take a saint for your center, it would be like exiling you to hell, because you have already seen our Lord, the ultimate in perfection. You have already gone too far to be a center for one another, so find your center in our Lord.

It is easy to misunderstand the meaning of this teaching. There are two centers. The first is one that gives peace and consolation. This is a special gift from God to which one should not become overly attached. It is a grace that allows one to rest at the feet of our Lord. The other center, which is the principal one, requires one to consider our Lord in detail, not merely in a general way, since he is too vast. I cannot describe these details for all of you, as they will vary for each one according to particular grace. This is like heaven, where God reveals himself in an ever new way, focusing on a new truth. **Let your center be in our Lord, in the grace of the moment.** Were I to ask you to center upon a particular virtue or activity, this would not be possible if it is not your proper center. Follow the constantly renewed grace of the Spirit. – You will say: But I don't know how. – Just keep searching. A tradesman practices his skill easily because he knows his trade; a learned man can easily share his knowledge, a Eucharistic soul must be always adept at working for the Blessed Sacrament.

Try to avoid the following error. Do not rest merely in the words, actions and virtues of our Lord, for these are not a center, but only flowers that presuppose something else. Those who stop at this level soon exhaust this divine fruit.

**Where then should our center be?** In its source. So we can say: Jesus loves, me; everything he has done, is doing and will do have been prepared personally for me because of his love. It comes from his love and goodness, since these were his motives. Notice that when you act in this way, you start from the root-cause, its positive dimension. It becomes a habit for you and keeps you on course. We must continually refer back to the source because it cannot be depleted. With time, this will become a habit; you will penetrate into Jesus himself, Jesus' words and actions. Whoever does this will find great inner freedom. She will share in everything that our Lord can do without binding herself to any particular means. It seems to me that with such a starting point you should introduce the love of our Lord in your vocation and it should introduce you in him by that same very love.

This is why a Servant of the Most Blessed Sacrament should try to remain recollected, in control of herself (cf. Ps 130:2), not like the saints in heaven but in a communion of love. Our Lord **should always be before you**. Work with his heart, joyfully; otherwise you will be like a slave doing nothing but isolated acts of virtue. Go further; don't stop at the doorstep. What will happen? If even once you experience going all the way to the Lord, everything will become easy. You will not be troubled or shaken by humiliations; nothing will take you out of your divine center. If we're still on the road when it rains, we'll get wet; but if we're in the house, it won't matter.

You must reach that point, otherwise you will be unhappy in your vocation, so unhappy that your vocation may even be shaken. Although you may not have all that you could have externally, you do have all that you need for your goal. – You will need a lot of generosity and constancy to reach that point, you must die. A self-annihilating love must be your life, and I will prove it. When you feel uneasy and adoration is no longer profitable, it's because you went outside [your center]. Come back through recollection, do penance and open the door; that's all. We shall be punished only for having lost sight of our Lord because of our external misbehaviors. It's cold in winter because the sun no longer shines brightly.

Other little devotions, helpful for ordinary people, are useless for you because you are like the spouse of the Canticle searching for her divine spouse (cf. Ct 3:1-2); like Magdalene whom nothing can satisfy while seeking the Lord. (cf. Jn 20:11-18) Having tasted our Lord, a soul can find rest only at the feet of the Master. Beware of the devil trying to bring you out of yourself, to entangle you in briars. Be aware that your three hours of adoration, your praising the Lord many times a day is meant to set you more deeply in your vocation, in holy recollection. Regarding virtue, books and holy practices may be helpful, but for your adorations and recollection, no one can help you. It is your responsibility to die to yourself. I can show you the way, as John the Baptist did, (cf. Lk 1:76) but it's up to you to follow it.

The second element has to do with means, not just a means but the reality itself. I'm convinced that if you belong to the Lord alone he will work miracles for you. Because our Lord's love is his very life, he will do all he can for you when you are totally his. Perhaps until now he remains only a tiny means.

For instance, if you put your trust in me to help you go forward, it is useless. Tomorrow I must go on a trip; I'm simply passing by (your life). I can show you the way and I have done so, but your progress depends entirely on you. I cannot bring this about, nor can anyone else. Keep in mind that our Lord will not be satisfied with intermediaries. If he were, I'd be very sad to go away, leaving you without my needed help. Actually I can only indicate the way. Once I see you with our Lord, I will be happy. What could you lack at the Lord's table? I only fear that you may allow yourselves to be deceived by certain temptations.

It seems that those in heaven enjoy complete peace, while on earth we tend to vacillate. Why are we not at peace? We experience dark nights, days when the sun is hidden, and we add to our troubles by looking at the past. At times we imagine that a previous condition of life was better than the present one. Who told you this? The past had its own value, but it would not apply to today. Live now in this new grace.



**Points for reflection:**

Father Eymard proposes a way of transformation in Christ. How could it be achieved? What is the meaning of the phrase: To put our center in our Lord. Against what deviations is our Founder warning us?