

Simplicity¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament,
Paris, Friday, March 9, 1860

My Sisters, let me speak to you about your external virtues, what you should be, and what should be seen. Let me be completely open with you and say what I think.

Simplicity must be the goal of your relationships. True love, real charity makes all our relationships very simple, because it destroys self-love. Where there is love, there is no self-love. Self-seeking will lead to embarrassment or loud behavior. A child is simple, without self-love. God is simple; he comes to us because he loves us.

But, since relationships vary, we must look at simplicity in action.

Be simple with your superiors, very simple, truthful, transparent, especially with your superiors, since they take the place of God. If you are, you will always be very happy; if not, you will never be satisfied. A secret in the heart is like a little vinegar, unsavory. Be simple with your superiors; keep nothing hidden or mysterious from our Lord Jesus Christ, who is hidden in the person of superiors, and who sees heart and conscience. Fight off any temptation against simplicity; it will make you very unhappy.

Be simple in your relationships with each other. This simplicity goes beyond truth, for the bond among you is not truth but fraternal charity. How is this charity defined? This charity leads you to love God, our Lord Jesus Christ, and his grace in your sisters, to love them as our Lord loves, to love them in the Lord. Through spiritual affinity you form one family and one society. Your goal and your life is the same. You have two particular graces, from our Lord and from affinity. In practice, what does this mean? Observe all that is good in your sisters, for charity centers on goodness. Notice their graces and merits. See in them the Blessed Virgin and the goodness of God. If you see in them the child Jesus, still small and weak, your charity will become a compassionate simplicity. No one can be as compassionate as a child. When the child sees a poor person, he will beg on his behalf. He sees no evil, does not wonder whether this poor person is suffering through some fault of his own. The child will simply tell its mother that here is one who is suffering and unhappy. Alms will be given if only to satisfy the child. Do not look for defects or sins in your sisters, never. If you notice any, make excuses for them in order to remain in charity and the love of God.

Be simple with God. This is obvious, but how is God approached in simplicity? Go to him with filial confidence because he is good, and with an awareness of your weakness and wretchedness. A child, the weakest of human beings, will turn to its mother precisely because it is weak, has faults and lacks knowledge. None of this will keep it from relying on its mother. Approach God with a loving simplicity and you will touch his heart. As for myself, I count for nothing. I am your father and understandably I love you in God more than anyone. However, if you treat me with honors and solemn bows as happens in the palaces of the rich, I will be sorely displeased. Then I will have to treat you in the same way. By this kind of behavior towards me or even towards God, you would forego your title as children, and become strangers. Be simple with God, with the Blessed Virgin, and the saints. Go directly to God.

Be simple with the world, but a simplicity mixed with prudence. Why? Because our Lord Jesus Christ said: *Be simple as doves, among yourselves, but prudent with the world* (See Mt 10:16). The world is evil,

¹ Number 200. *La simplicité.*

false, stirred by passions. If you had no prudence, it would become for you an occasion of scandal. To act with people outside as you do among yourselves would be a big mistake that would show presumption and a total ignorance of the world. Simple and trusting persons will easily be caught unawares by clever ones, surprised that they were deceived. This is true especially of women, the spouses of Jesus Christ. Be more prudent than simple in your dealings with outsiders, for you can be easily deceived.

As spouses of Jesus Christ, be modest. The modesty of the Blessed Virgin demands this of you; she felt disturbed in the presence of an angel (cf. Lk 1:29). You must remain veiled, and be prudent with everyone, with the laity and with priests. With anyone outside the community, be careful. Show respect to outsiders and dignitaries of the Church, but keep your heart closed.

As soon as some naïve young girls see a priest, they open their hearts to him immediately, even when he has no business with them! They are imprudent and badly guided. **Be simple, but be more prudent than simple, with propriety; keep** the secrets of your family, of your sisters. We must say what justice requires, and not go beyond the limits. Do not fear to have the prudence of the serpent. You can still have the simplicity of the dove that foresees danger and does not allow itself to be surprised by the enemy. The simplicity of the dove is noticeable especially in eyes that are clear. The eyes of the serpent, however, are false, like darts; while the eyes of the dove are gentle. Live in simplicity, in truth, with confidence in God. The dove is white, living in the desert (cf. Ps 54:7-8), not in the cities.

Be simple in your life. Luxury would be a crime for a spouse of Jesus Christ. Negligence would be out of place for a spouse called to be seated with him in the palace of Nazareth which though poor was decent. Have neither too much, nor too little in your belongings. Too much would not be proper, and too little would not be any better. Be like the Blessed Virgin, who lived between the two extremes.

Be simple in your speech, without high-sounding words that irritate. [...] Do not use stilted phrases and affected language. Our Lord did not speak that way, neither did the Blessed Virgin. Do not be excessively polite, as occurs in parties of high society in the world. That's for distinguished persons. Here, all of you are noble and spouses of our Lord; you should have his virtues and way of life. Furthermore, there's nothing more annoying in community life than excessive mannerisms – some have them, some do not. Nothing is more hurtful in external relations: one who has better manners is noticed, while another who has more virtue is ignored by the world, because people of the world are more concerned with externals.

[...] **You need a prudent simplicity,** not worldly ways, no affectedness. Everything must be proper and dignified. This is what people should see in you. No one is noble as our Lord, or the Blessed Virgin in her mortal life; she was the model of true greatness and true virtue – imitate her, and immediately you will have your rule [of action].

Have the same attitude with your clothes. Do not be too affected, but don't be neglectful. When you receive Communion, dress properly; on feast days, wear something a little special. Add something festive at the dining table, as we do at the altar. Why? Because it is a time for celebration: therefore, if the soul has its food in Holy Communion, why can't the body, which is half of you, also be honored? Some day you will have a habit; meanwhile accept some variations. If we priests have a little better cassock, we use it at Easter. To celebrate the resurrection, I am pleased to buy something new for my good brothers. We are made that way: since God wants to show us special honors, he does the main part – he allows us to do something, and he does even more.

How do we recognize that a person is simple? Simplicity is not nonsense: a person can be so naïve that she speaks nonsense. That's okay for children, but it would be ridiculous for an adult. I described your simplicity with superiors by calling it truth; with your sisters, it is fraternal charity, always seeing the

good in others, being compassionate to suffer with your neighbor. Then there is still the simplicity of prudence toward yourself. I did not describe this yet: for your body, be proper in all that you need, be decent; for your soul, be trusting and thrive not on evil, but on good. Why is a child simple? It trusts its mother. Trust is the sign by which you will recognize that you are simple.

There is still another kind of simplicity: that of feelings. When you have a fever, something is wrong in some part of your body. Your life is no longer simple. Instead of regular beating, the pulse goes two or three times faster. You become feverish when your relationships are burdened by tension and worry; there is no peace in your actions. You lack simplicity which has peace of soul as its center. Then, you fall back on self-love. You have been preoccupied with someone, you have not been simple; that's the whole point. Examine yourselves on where you got stuck. If that doesn't work, go visit the doorkeeper of all wretchedness, self-love. [...] The real problem is [usually] self-love: you did something to excess, and your stomach is upset; you didn't work with simplicity. Be a little more simple, and you will be happy. How happy are those who are united with God.

❖ **Cf. Number 314: The Annunciation. Book 1 B**
and Number 355: The Gift of Self. Explanation of the Rule. Book 6



Points for reflection:

Fr. Eymard explains how the quality of simplicity can transform all our relationships: with God, with our sisters, and with the public. How do you react to this? What picture does St. Peter Julian have of the ideal Servant?