

# The Complete Gift of Self <sup>1</sup>

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

During this retreat, you will receive Communion every day. This is not a retreat of conversion but rather a retreat of love; we must love the Good Lord. For spiritual direction, you will come individually – there will be a list. Today, there is not much to say, it is a time for self-searching. Not tonight either; leave me free for today. I need time to put my things in order.

**Now, my Sisters, we will begin meditating on the gift of self.** You must give yourselves totally to God. Everything depends on that, all the rest is nothing. Giving what we own has value, but it means merely giving back to God what already belongs to him. To give our work entails giving only part of ourselves, the fruit of our labors; but we hold on to “the self”. To give ourselves little by little is not possible, and is an insult to God. He made the world for us and us for himself (cf. 1 Cor 3:21-23). He is our end, our grace. We will be happy only when we have given ourselves to him totally. We shall explain this further on.

**What is love? You shall love the Lord your God with your whole mind, your whole heart, and your whole soul and all your strength** (Mk 12:30) – that is the law. Jesus Christ came to bring fire (cf. Lk 12:49) – religion consists entirely in loving. He is our goal. Love is giving: two persons in love give themselves to each other. Otherwise we would love ourselves more than God, it would be offensive. **What is the reign of love?** It is nothing else than giving. Of course, God accepts our gift. He reigns in us, according to this saying: *God is love* (1 Jn 4:8). He must live in me as my God, and I must love him as my master. I must obey him as my ultimate purpose, and I must work for him. That’s the beginning, that’s the reign of his love.

**What is this gift?** We must define it clearly. Evidently, it is a donation, but what are we giving him? Our body, our soul – there’s nothing that does not belong to him, since he gave us everything. An owner rents out a field. During the entire farming season it belongs to the servant who rented it, but the field still belongs to the landowner (cf. 1 Cor 3:9). We give God the use of our being, our will, our senses; we even give him our freedom. In one sense, God cannot take away my freedom, since I am a person of grace and merit. He cannot take freedom away, if he wants to leave me in the state of merit. I give him my will, the use of my being, but it costs me much effort. The world, my passions, the devil attract me – they challenge me to break this contract by saying: It’s too much; it’s not possible. But if I am faithful, this will be the very perfection of my gift: I will serve God in all my actions.

**One more quality is needed:** the gift must be made out of love, and not out of fear. Fear (...) is mercenary, it is not Christian. Since the Good Lord loves me with a great love, my love for him must also be great; since he loves me with a pure love, my love must also be pure. It is this unwavering love which will be praiseworthy. This is what the Good Lord wants; nothing more, he wants me to give myself totally to him.

**See how good God is!** Grace is an expression of his love. This wonderful grace is sweet and gentle, in order to dispose my heart for joy. It is strong, attracting me to God. On the other hand, the world tries to draw me to surrender my freedom to it, tearing me between life and death, between heaven and hell. God says: Give yourself to me; and world also says: Give yourself to me. The world offers me its honors, its

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<sup>1</sup> Number 231. *Donation entière de soi.*

pleasures, and so on. These are only lies, vanity, and unhappiness. **What must I give? I see clearly that I must give something, but what is it?**

**1° I must give my mind.** This is no small task: that my thoughts and judgments would only be like the thoughts and judgments of God, to consult his will in preference to mine. You can see this renunciation in religious life. That's why so many leave; they don't want to renounce themselves. The mind holds on to its thoughts in spite of God's promises and warnings. In some ways, we give more by giving our minds than by giving our heart. Does that surprise you? So, listen. When you give your heart, it is an act – the heart does not think, it cannot have any insights. The proof of this is that people who act according to their heart are inconsistent; duty, pleasure, and self-interest are based only on feeling. But the mind is positive, enlightened and steady – it can sustain us a long time. However, God does not say: Give me your mind. He says: *Give me your heart* (Prv 23:26). It's so easy to give our heart and to love. But to give our mind, to follow the judgment of God and to follow his will is not easy. That is why God did not make this a law – it is the call to perfection for consecrated souls. To give one's heart is required of everybody, but *whoever wishes to come after me, says our Lord, must deny himself* (Mt 16:24)

**What does it mean to give one's mind? Our Lord** makes it a simple condition – he is not talking of the heart; in religious communities, the mind and the will are one. Heresies, schisms, pride do not come from the heart, but from the mind. Unruly affections come from the heart. Give your mind to God; if you let it go, if it no longer belongs to you, you will have his light, his law in its place. This is what God wants. Do not consult the world any more, consult God. The prophet says: *Whoever is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him* (1 Cor 6:17).

After receiving the Holy Spirit, the apostles now possessed the truth in their minds; as for their hearts they already loved him. Our Lord said: *Peter, do you love me? – Yes, Lord.* (cf. Jn 21:15-17). Magdalene loved him too; but love had not been sufficient for them to be faithful. After receiving the spirit of truth they were faithful, they were ready to die. If you have the joy of giving your mind to God, you will no longer be mistaken – the spirit of faith, the spirit of God will guide you. **When will I know that I gave my mind to God?** When my thoughts are from God, for God, and in God.

**2° The Good Lord placed man's self-determination in his heart** [Cf. Sir 37:13].

Our love determines how we act. If what the heart loves is good, we will be good; if it is bad, we will be bad. Disregarding everything else, God wants our heart, because it is the seat of power. God demands our heart; he wants us to love him with a perfect and sovereign love – evidently, because he is our Creator, our Father. It would be insulting to be told that we don't love him. Yet, look at what is happening: we offend God because of things and persons that we love. The one who loves will not disobey, especially if he has a Good Master. We must therefore love God more than and above all things – this is the first degree of love. He must be our ultimate love; he must be the end of all our loving in this world – may all our other loves be flowers that we offer to his love. Do you not notice that self-love prevents us from loving God? That people can draw this little flame away from God who is its source? The heart is made for love; and the mind depends on the heart. An impure<sup>2</sup> love obscures both intelligence and virtues and can degrade us; all this is part of an impure love.

**When will I know that I have given my heart to God?** If I think of him, that's a sign that I have given it to him. Our Lord said: *Where your treasure is, there also will your heart be* (Mt 6:21). Naturally, we are happy and delighted to think about what we love. If you think of God, if your heart is inclined to him with joy, that is a sure sign. When we love someone, we try to please that person. The greater the object

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<sup>2</sup> Copy A, variant: a *disorderly* love [...] all this stems from a *disorderly* love.

loved, the more we want to love. That is the sign of giving our heart to God. How far we are! This is only the first degree of love – not its perfection.

**3° We must give our will to God**, and replace it with his, a kind of exchange. Our Lord said: *Not as I will, but as you will* (cf. Mt 26:39). That is the law. We must give him our will, to do whatever he wants, in general, without conditions. A good servant says: Do you want to hire me? – I'm willing; what can you do? – A little of everything. That's a good servant. So, we must say: My God, whatever you would like. This will never be beyond our strength; grace is greater<sup>3</sup> than the law. When a servant says: I will give you so many hours of work, but the remaining time will be mine. These are not the words of a good servant, of a loving child for love has no conditions. We must have unconditional love, without reservations.

It is impossible for God to ask us to do something beyond our strength, since he is goodness itself. In human relationships, some extraordinary things are beyond any contract. A hired worker may say: I will do everything you want, even sacrifice my life, and I will defend you until death. When a king is involved, we call this heroism. We must tell our Lord: I will give myself to you and to whatever you want, I accept all sacrifices; such a soul becomes beautiful before God. We must give our mind, our heart, our will. And our body? Shouldn't we give that to God also? You are the master of your freedom; you must give it, so that you may be *holy in body and spirit*, as St. Paul says: *offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God* (cf. Rom 12:1).

**4° How can we give our body?** By giving the actual condition of our body. That condition comes from God: health, sickness, well-being, and suffering. By doing this you sanctify yourselves in that condition. This is no small matter. When we feel well, we give ourselves perfectly to God. In times of success, there is satisfaction. When the Good Lord touches us with sickness and suffering, we change: we love God in the condition [of well-being], but not beyond it. Do you want to love God? Give your present condition. Who made it so? It was God.

This is not enough; **we must give the Good Lord our talents**. Each one has a status, a task, a skill, an aptitude. We must give it; but this is what we don't give, because God gave it to us as a seed that we cultivated by our education and experience (cf. Mt 25:14-30). Now God makes a contract with us: he will give us his beauty and take ours; he will give us his goodness and take ours. What he gives you will never be an occasion of pride; but since what you give him could lead to pride, God takes it away. A good domestic helper can enjoy the fruit of his work; he has a right to two things: food and wages. God hires us, and our pay is heaven; but the Good Lord gives us something in the meantime to encourage us. When self-love says: That is for me, that's mine – we must rather say: I gave it to God. We must not act like thieves who are always taking something back, not at all.

**Do you see now what this gift of self means?** Examine yourself well; you will notice that you have not given everything. Every time I make this meditation, I see something I took back, some little corner that I did not give. I acted like old misers who hide their money, or like bad house helpers who always find a way to steal something from their master. How did I do that? By the deception of a self-love that disguises things so skillfully that we are not aware of it. Can that be? Yes, certainly! But enough, now let us close our reflection on this subject. Let's proceed.

It's not much, and yet it's a lot. What do I mean? **We must give our external life to God**. What is that? This costs us more than we think. What is involved? The esteem of the world, of people, of saints, and angels here on earth. Believe me, that costs more than everything else. No longer to enjoy the esteem of

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<sup>3</sup> Copy A, variant: stronger

good people – I did not say of bad people. Yes, we crown ourselves in their esteem, this is self-love. You must give this self-esteem to the Good Lord; it costs more than all other sacrifices. You must also accept the opposite: God may allow people to forget you: the heart gets sick thinking about it. One of the greatest sacrifices is that of our honor, of our reputation, when we have a little self-love.

**And the sacrifice of our affections.** More than anything, we hold on to the affection given to us. We work hard for this, especially when we have a right to it. When God is involved, it is a pure and holy heart that loves us. When we have the joy of finding someone who loves us with a pure, holy and divine love; we must give it to him. And if the Good Lord wills that no one will love us in this world, that we will be like strangers, like Jesus in his passion, like his 30 years in Nazareth, forgotten, unknown by everyone – we must give up the esteem of others and whatever the Good Lord wills.

**And our external life, is this something more?** We must give up our choice social relationships. This, I admit, is an agony and death. When the Good Lord places us with crude people whom we dislike, and when aversion is present, it is a constant struggle. Let us avoid telling the Good Lord: I don't want to go with that person. When you can reach that point, I will admit you non-stop into paradise.

If you don't give yourselves completely to God in this way, you will give yourselves piece by piece. Daily, we take ourselves back a little at a time, like thieves. We give with one hand, and take back with the other.

**What do we mean by gift?** It is the fruit of love. The greater the love, the purer and greater is the gift of God. Giving is the measure of love. To love the Good Lord sincerely you must give him everything at all times. The sun rises until it reaches its zenith. Meditate on this; it is the foundation of the Christian and religious life. Heaven is only the crowning of this gift. If you have the good fortune of doing this, all will go well.



**Point for reflection:**

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength.” The total gift presented in this instruction touches our life in all its dimensions. Note and meditate on the biblical texts referred to. At this moment in your life, what aspect of the gift challenges you the most?