

The Recollection of Love¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
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[...]

Let's return to our subject: the more we talk about recollection, the more we see how necessary it is for the interior life; it's everything. Before leading a soul to a life of recollection, an important preparation takes place. Our Lord has to dispose a soul, because everything is so veiled and mysterious that a preparatory disposition is needed. One might reflect: Why was I not directed immediately to recollection? Because you were not ready; it was not time yet. The spouse in the Song of Songs says: *My spouse introduced me into his banquet hall* (cf. Sg 2:4). Before that, a time of preparation was needed. Since the kingdom of God is completely internal, nothing is possible without recollection; without it, we live on alms. With recollection, we always have the same abundance, since God is inexhaustible.

Recollection means going from outside to inside, paying attention to God in us. I deliberately avoided using a word that would have surprised you; namely, loving attention to God in us. Whoever speaks of attraction, speaks of love, since that is its character. Perfection is just that. The desire to make him our center means to desire life, joy, and well-being. One who centers on a friendship will find happiness; whatever pleasure one centers on will also bring happiness. In the same way, to live in God in ourselves through recollection, we must apply ourselves. If we try to do so by an act of virtue, our soul becomes nervous; an act of virtue always involves effort. This would lead to the virtue of recollection, but there would be no spirit along with the virtue, this is difficult, the act would be more or less painful. With a spirit of recollection, everything flows as from a spring, and always presumes love.

The spirit of recollection leads to delight and pleasure. It means to live as a child lives in its mother, as Mary lived in Jesus, and Jesus in his Father. It is a divine center, a center of love. Recollection becomes the source of joy, a need of the soul, without it, one suffers. She gladly serves her neighbor when God wants it, but her heart is with God, while she lends her hands. The spouse in the Song of Song says: *I was sleeping, but my heart kept vigil* (Sg 5:2). Love never sleeps: it is always present, ardent, and devouring.

Do you want to acquire the spirit of recollection? Give yourself truly. To do this, you must have a constant attention to God within you. How can we turn our recollection into a recollection of love? By feeding it, by the practice of love. We must see our loving God in us, giving himself, desiring nothing more than to give himself. Since these truths are attractive and pleasant, and since the heart is always attracted to what is gracious, beautiful and good, the heart will recollect itself instinctively in God. It will be comfortable and make its center there.

That is why whoever has attained only the recollection of virtues merits a great deal; she has the reward of justice. We must change this recollection into real love. When will we reach that point? **We will never experience the presence of God as always present.** We cannot do it in this world because of our human weakness; our poverty is too great. **We can have a spiritual recollection through the sentiment of love**, which makes us act under the inspiration of love without paying attention to anything else.

¹ Number 176. *Le recueillement d'amour.*

Summarizing, we say: **Love cannot be defined; understand me. But you do give loving attention to God.**

I told you that you must recollect yourselves decisively. Your senses do not reason. Proceed with a spirit of faith. The mind will always object. God is there, that's enough. Control the will also through a spirit of faith. Attract the heart through the goodness of God, as Holy Scripture says: ***Taste and see the goodness of the Lord*** (cf. Ps 33:9). The heart is a blind faculty; if it senses that God is good, attracting and beckoning, it will follow. It will recollect itself in solitude, in a center of prayer. The will also is blind, following the heart as a child follows its mother. The spouse says in the Canticle: *Draw me to yourself, and we will follow the odor of your perfume: Trahe me post te* (cf. Sg 1:3-4).

God attracts through love. One who reaches the joy of this kind of recollection will experience the words of the Holy Spirit: *The soul that loves God has a continual feast* (cf. Prv 15:15) where it continually nourishes itself, thrives, and takes delight in God. Since God is within, she enjoys paradise. It follows from this that our love is proportionate to our recollection: the greater the recollection, the greater the love, and reciprocally, the greater the love, the more recollection there will be. These two are inseparable. We love to be with God, to look at him, even if we do nothing; if we are separated from him, we return quickly. When involved in works of zeal, we keep an eye internally on our Good Master: **When will I be with you?** In the works of zeal, there is no greater love of God than recollection in him. St. John rested on the bosom of Jesus, and it was there that he drew the life of love for his apostolate. He said it was because he had rested on the heart of Jesus. The heart never sleeps: it gives itself. That is the contemplation of the love, and truth of our Lord.

In the gospel, St. John speaks of the open heart of Jesus. The other evangelists don't mention it: *I saw it*, he says, *I saw the blood and water flow. My testimony is true; it is confirmed by God himself* (cf. 1 Jn 1:1-2; Jn 19:34). Let us be a little like St. John, let us sleep often on the heart of our divine master. This rest of the soul places it closer to him. Love does not always speak; it watches and rests. Love that is always talking, and flitting around, is self-love. Rather, love gives itself. It is improper to be always talking in front of the master.

When God, in his goodness gives us a grace of recollection of love, it takes hold of us, embraces us, and, like a book, enfolds us into ourselves. You have tasted this occasionally. With the grace of recollection, we are so permeated, that there seems to be only a mere veil separating us from seeing God; we see him more clearly than with all the reasoning in the world. By this grace, we are under the influence of his goodness, of his mercy. We see the chain of the graces of our life. Our soul is completely filled up, and thanksgiving flows as from a spring. We need nothing else. In this state of recollection, the soul seems to be flowing into God; she disengages herself from her senses to the point of almost losing consciousness. For her, an hour passes like a quarter hour – time passes quickly, minutes no longer count. In this semi-contemplation, if I dare say, in this ecstasy of recollection, we feel so taken up that we dare not open our senses to the world. It is a sweet odor, a grace of Tabor that God offers us, in order to prepare us for sacrifices. What a beautiful moment! This is my wish for you!

We must not judge recollection by this one which is purely a grace from God. We are attracted by his love; it is the recollection of abundance. Here, there is the merit of cooperation – we are so attracted that we merely follow. We should not think of going to paradise yet: there is too much to do – but now we start a new life. The fact that there is virtue and love in our zeal, in the external beauty of a work, in those who are sanctified – all this is good; but the kingdom of God is internal – God and myself – why should I be concerned with the rest? But if we paid attention to the world without having God in us, we would not live from this interior life, then everything would crumble.

I bless God for not sending us many vocations. What would we do if devout and curious people came? We would not have time to speak to each one. A little while ago, someone told me that he was surprised that with such a beautiful end, and such a beautiful grace, vocations did not come to us in droves. This is a great grace; we would be overwhelmed. There would be no recollection and well-being in our Lord.

Quiet down your mind bit by bit, and your human activity, give yourselves to God. Let him be your purpose in all that you do, and may everything serve only to help us go to him. I must confess; I told my mind: Friend, you will no longer know anything – when you know, you will ask permission for it; you will be stupid: you will examine your thoughts later in God. And the books, the scholars, the professors, and the doctors? It's good to read them, but God is my master. My heart, you shall love only God, and the rest insofar as God wants, no more – and the heart is not without feeling. The imagination, is a great fool, as well as the will. It suffices to recollect ourselves in God for all this to vanish, like leaves in a forest blown by a strong wind.

One day, in adoration, I said: My God, I give myself entirely to you, in order to do nothing. I admit that I have done only one thing: gather leaves. The imagination and the memory come in, especially the reasoning mind: when it can put its nose in a thought about God, the imagination quickly embellishes it: a Father of the Church, a sermon: who told you that? But, you should not bother yourself with that kind of thought. My God, if we did not realize our human weakness, we would think ourselves to be insane – I ended up laughing. I could not believe that my imagination picked up something so ridiculous. We understand what the prophet said: ***I was in your presence, Lord, worse than a brute beast*** (cf. Ps 72:22). I dare not say: I am insane; I am a fool – that's not enough. Do that once in a while, and you will see how nice it is. Distractions absorb us but we learn what we are. We begin to understand the natural wandering of the mind; we learn about our weaknesses with the Lord.

The mind is not used to recollection. Its wandering made the saints so sad, self-love can also interfere. We end with barely a quarter of an hour for God. To think about the Good Lord all the time will never happen to me; when it does, the gates of eternity will be open. It will never happen that I will have nothing more to give; perfection in this world is something limited. It will be completed only when we reach heaven where the fulfillment of justice will take place. **In this world we must always move from one grace to a higher grace; there is always something new: we go from one prayer to another; from one experience of virtue we rise to something new** (cf. Ps 83:8). We are on a battlefield. The enemies come, and our souls must work.²



Points for reflection:

We find here the link between recollection, love, and the gift of self. Also, the relationship between recollection and the senses, the mind, the will, and the heart. We also find a description of the active and passive aspects of recollection and contemplation. Try to grasp this teaching.

² N.B. This group of instructions on recollection is supplemented by the teachings on the grace of attraction. Cf. Book # 5, Section C

