

The Spirit of Sacrifice. Necessary Sacrifices, Freely Chosen Sacrifices¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Paris, Tuesday, August 27, 1861

In the last conference we mentioned that you must not remain in your sacrifices, because they are not a center of life, but of death. Our Lord never told us to remain in them. Secondly, do not place your virtue there; otherwise you will be the judge of your own perfection. And thirdly, you must not run after sacrifices. I have not developed this last idea sufficiently: I will finish it today.

You must not run after sacrifices, as sacrifices in themselves. This would be like a servant who is unwilling to remain next to his master; worried and impatient, he prefers to go out and work for him, rather than remain with him. That's what happens when we love our sacrifices as sacrifices, when we place our life in them, when we make them our center – preferring to work for God, rather than work with God.

It is noticeable that persons who always think about sacrifices dwell only there. Unable to remain calm, they are restless about what they want to do. Since they achieve less than their duty, they are always sad. Besides, there is a certain rigidity in souls of sacrifice – they speak only about death, and Calvary, etc. All this is not the doctrine of love – it is nothing else than a certain activity that has slithered into the service of God. **In general, true love does not use that language – it lives in God, rather than in the things of God.** This is what I'm telling you not to do: don't live in the things of God like mercenaries. That's the life of those who are only working people, like Martha. Become like Mary (cf. Lk 10:38); that's better.

You will object: But our Lord speaks only about sacrifices: therefore, he wants us to dwell in them when he says: *If anyone wishes to come after me, he must take up his cross daily and follow me!* (cf. Lk 9:23) Every day, and at every instant of the day, there is a cross. If on a particular day there would not be any, is that, therefore, a lost day? Our Lord always requires sacrifices from outside: our relatives and our friends – love is always demanding, and never says: That's enough! Now that does not contradict what I proposed – on the contrary, it confirms it.

The perfection of sacrifice is in perfect love. The soul that loves God thirsts for sacrifices as a proof of its love. It is the work of love: love is the principle of homage, and of life. Sacrifice is merely the wood thrown on the fire to feed it; the fire takes hold of it, eats it up, and consumes it. Remain in the love of sacrifice, and you will really be in the spirit of your vocation, of your rule that bids you live by the spirit of love and of sacrifice.

We said that there are two kinds of sacrifices: the necessary sacrifices and the sacrifices freely chosen. The necessary sacrifices are of two kinds: to avoid sin and imperfection – these are the sacrifices of salvation for all times, and all places, and in all things, because we must avoid sin, at the cost of our life. These are obligatory sacrifices, and are always binding.

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Now, **there are sacrifices of virtue** that God desires, but they are not obligatory, like those sacrifices needed to avoid sin. However, as God wants them, they have their time, their place, and their manner – then, they must be done, since the Good Lord wants them. He manifests his will through the states of necessity, such as the sacrifices from the weather: we must welcome them and sanctify the states of our body, independent from our will; suffering and sickness, the states of our soul that are ordinarily states of sacrifice. God imposes them, whether we want them or not – we must pass through them: love takes them and sanctifies them, while laziness and worldliness reject them. There are duties from the law of our vocation, such as the rule, the positive prescriptions of holy obedience, and the duties assigned to us. God wants this: it is the law of his will and of perfection – we must want these duties, because the love of God wants them. This is the work of our lives.

The other sacrifices are those that are freely chosen. There are very few that God leaves to our free choice. We must then be very careful, because we are always prone to do our own will, rather than the things of duty. It often happens that a person will set aside the sacrifices of duty and of the will of God, in order to do those freely chosen, that have no other value than that of the love that motivates them. Such a person leaves the precept for the counsel. That's where it becomes reprehensible – that's one of the great dangers of persons who direct themselves, or who have false principles to guide them, and who take on sacrifices of their own will. I call sacrifices of their own will those that they have chosen. My Sisters, beware of the sacrifices that you have chosen – allow God's love to guide you.

There are sacrifices of gratitude, of homage that have God for their end, and that God always requires. Love hardly ever commands – it is sufficient for love to show its desire, so that it becomes a rule. Those who truly love God always live from sacrifice – if they don't have any, they have the desire for them. Seeing that these great and noble souls have such good dispositions, God gives them opportunities to make sacrifices one hundred times a day. God uses, so to speak, his divine initiative to create and offer to them occasions for sacrifice. They love, desire, and devour sacrifices, as a fire consumes the wood that is well prepared. When a person has no sacrifices, she desires them and needs them, because they feed her love. Everything becomes a sacrifice, even God, who saturates her with sacrifices, so that her constant hunger and thirst for love may be satisfied. A truly loving soul is always in sacrifice – it is the delicious food for her love. When she has none, she says: My God, you are letting me sleep.

If we could see the goodness of God, always looking for these occasions, we would be astonished and tempted to say, if he were not infinite: But, he is too concerned about me, as he is with others. How can this soul be free? **It is very free – its sufferings are not chains. They are wings.** Not only is she very free, but she is very joyful – she is being served according to her desires. As love exercises itself by gladdening the heart, the heart is more at ease – God communicates to it a more abundant life: the constant sacrifices are for her the proofs of this abundant life. My poor Sisters, we go from light to light, from grace to grace – we have the strength. It is all a state of virtue and of sacrifice.

But how do we perform these sacrifices so that they may become the peace and the reign of God? Our sacrifices sometimes make us sad – our poor human nature is always afraid. But the saints don't look for sacrifices in their mind. We look for spiders in our soul to kill them so to speak, can you see that by looking for these little insects to be sacrificed, we are sad, and we live in our self-love, in our misery? There is always a brief moment of sadness. The saints do not live in their sacrifices: they are free. They look at their sacrifices only in so far as they are shown to them – **it is in love that they see their sacrifices.** Since love expands when it reaches its perfection, a sign tells them everything: these souls have an instinct for sacrifice – they can guess the desires of our Lord. They act; they remain in his love and in his grace – everything becomes beautiful and bright under the light of the sun of love.

But don't they suffer? Yes, of course. Remember that the more a person tends towards God, the more the body is inclined to the earth. The more love reigns, the more self-love suffers. Our Lord experienced two things: humility and glory, joy and sadness. One belongs to the body of the son of Adam, the other to the Son of God. That is what happens to the saints: sadness, fear, and all the rest exist, but a saint does not remain there. He takes these sacrifices and quickly looks at the Good Lord to see what he thinks. He does not enclose himself in a prison.

My wish is that you will live like that. You will have the spirit of sacrifice, or, if you prefer, the sacrifice of love. Doing that, you will truly be Servants of the Most Blessed Sacrament. The world will not understand the joy of a life that seems to be in chains. **No one is freer than the one who lives in God – just as no one is more enchained than one who lives in self-love.** My Sisters, let us live in God.