

Three Kinds of Life: Life of the Senses, Natural Life, and Life in Our Lord¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
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My Sisters, your meditation will be on the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. St. Paul said: ***I live***, and then he corrects himself, ***it is no longer I, but Christ who lives in me*** (cf. Gal 2:20), and in another passage he says: ***For to me life is Christ*** (cf. Phil 1:21). We should also be able to say: *It is no longer I who live, it is Jesus Christ who lives in me* – he is my life.

My Sisters, there are three kinds of life.

The first is the life of the senses, or the life of the passions. Many people live that kind of life – they are in the majority. In that kind of life, everything ends with pleasure: the miser earns money to enjoy himself; others desire honors in order to have wealth. This life of the senses is found throughout the world. This is what our Lord meant with the words: *The gate is wide that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many and it leads to hell*, and he continues with a surprising statement: ***How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few!*** (cf. Mt 7:13-14)

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The Good Lord has given you the grace of withdrawing from that life [that leads to damnation]. No doubt, we still suffer from some of its wounds. Our tendencies lean that way; our body always enjoys resting: it is lazy in the face of sacrifice; that's its nature. Our soul also shares Adam's weakness. The sin of pride permeates all our actions. As the Holy Spirit says it, pride is present in all sin. Our mind is lukewarm, with spiritual sloth; our imagination is no longer under our control: it torments us in spite of ourselves; our memory recalls more bad things than good ones. With this picture, we see the old self whom we cannot destroy. That is the first life.

The second is the natural life. Those who live by the natural life don't want to commit any crimes, nor dirty their conscience. They do what is right, motivated by what is right and good. Those who remain in that life want to enjoy it; they themselves are its goal. The one who gives alms does not become arrogant about it, but he takes pleasure in it; the one who makes a sacrifice likes it to be known, while disguising it with the veil of generosity and humility; the one who is all taken up with his duties, but who lives a natural life, sees only the contentment of the moment – self-love is always more or less the goal – he wants to enjoy himself. A life that is not lifted higher than this world is a life that God does not reward. He rewards it in this world, as our Lord told the Pharisees: *You want the praise of being lifted up*, and God says: *You have already received your reward* (cf. Mt 6:1).

Is this old Adam present in religious life? My God, yes! He slithers among us; the tendency remains. It is not for pride and impurity, but for honor and appreciation for doing right. When we have worked and succeeded, we would like to have the satisfaction of the moment; when we have been faithful, we would like someone to say: That was good! – that's what we want to hear, and our Lord adds: That is your reward, since you are satisfied with so little. Again, my Sisters, the devil does not love you, because you are the brides of our Lord. He will not push you into vices, like anger and impurity; that's too ugly and

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appalling. He will allow you to do good works, fulfill your duties, and in the end, he will place you in the natural life, and our Lord will say: You have received your reward; you are not seeking anything else. We must beware: our body wants to enjoy itself, our soul wants to rest – we must keep watch. As the prophet says: *we place our wealth in a pierced sack* (cf. Hg 1: 6). He is a poor conductor who collects the fare, and then returns everything.

What is worse, however, is that the natural life feeds off the supernatural life. For people of the world, all this fits in the nature of things. However, we are more culpable – we feed our natural life with supernatural goods: we lower our Lord, his graces and his goods to our level, reducing them to an earthly condition. We act like [Esau] who for the satisfaction of a moment, lost the blessing that should have descended on his race. He sold his birthright as the elder, and it was really sold (cf. Gn 25:33). The devil is there, allowing us to do good works, and he ends by making us do them for our natural life. How do we recognize this? St. Paul says: *After beginning with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?* (Gal 3:3). We begin for heaven, and we end for the earth – we begin for Jesus Christ, and we end for ourselves. This is easily recognizable, since it is happening within us. The devil does not know when we will die, he gains time. To go to heaven, we need a crown – he degrades it. Therefore, avoid cautiously the natural life.

Your life is more intimate than ours. We tend to forget the Good Lord: we have knowledge and our relationships with our neighbor. But, if you become natural in your intimate life, in your family life, you will end up comfortable in your little corner. Apostolic actions preserve the interior spirit more than family life. There are temptations and trials: we are constantly driven on. You have your temptations and those of the devil.

Besides, there's another reason: as women, you live more from the heart than from the head; while we live more from the head than from the heart. The Good Lord does things well. We need strength – we could not live long if we had to live from the heart. For the heart is quickly used up by varied and natural experiences – it is so delicate. It likes very much to be attached and to be stabilized. In a short time, you do more than we do, if you have the joy of doing your actions out of purity [of intention]. There are more great women saints than men. For one poor disciple who remained on Calvary, there were several holy women (cf. Jn 19:25-27). But you have more temptations. I don't know, but I'm convinced that, in the scales on judgment day, the women will have more to expiate in purgatory than the men, because they are seeking more their own interest. Let your love be in the supernatural order.

Let us go to the third life. What is this life? It is the opposite of the other two. It consists in living the life of Jesus Christ, and not the life of nature and of the senses. What does this mean? It means to think, to act like our Lord; to love what he loves, to do what he has done and in the way he has done it – to place our soul in his, so that we can say: *It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me* (cf. Gal 2:20). And when a soul is at work, when it loves and suffers, it rejoices.

If we are in the natural order, all our faculties are in the natural life – we are our own goal. If they [our faculties] are in the corrupted order, they tend to sin – their goal is hell. If they are in the supernatural order, their goal is Jesus Christ, who told St. Peter: *Feed my lambs, tend my sheep: they belong to me; nourish my sheep, take care of the shepherds.* That is what our Lord was saying, and he added: *Do you love me more than these others – you should; do you belong entirely to me, and for me?* (cf. Jn 21:15-17). St. Peter did not seem to understand – he did not dare tell our Lord that he loved him more than the others.

You should love more than the others, with a sovereign love; that is the life of Jesus Christ. Notice how well our Lord puts it: *I am the way, the truth and the life* (Jn 14:6): the way we must follow by placing our feet where his feet went, by acting as one with his actions; an apprentice does what the master does. Truth is the rule for right judgment: let us judge like him. Bread is the life of the body; **God is the life of**

the soul. How do we possess it? In the Eucharist: *Whoever eats me will have life, and will never die; he will have eternal life; if you do not eat my body, you do not have life within you* (cf. Jn 6:50-53). Therefore, the life of Jesus Christ is only in the Eucharist, and he explains: *You remain in me* (cf. Jn 6:56).

How shall we do this? Like a domestic helper, who works and whose master is his goal; like a child who lives for his parents; like the angels who do the will of God. To remain with someone, you must leave your own house: no one can serve two masters (cf. Mt 6:24). Our Lord does not say: Remain with me; but he says: *in me*. In Latin this word means reciprocal love: remain in me through love. Let love become the ruling force of your actions, of your sufferings, that I may be the center. **Notice well that he makes you live of this life, of the life of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.**

The other day I was saying something, but right now I cannot say it clearly: I was saying that **the Eucharist is the extension of the incarnation.** The Fathers of the Church said this, but I added that **we continue Jesus Christ risen: he is risen – he raised up his body;** that is the fulfillment of the mystery: **now he is risen in us.** The first resurrection has its crown in heaven – that is finished: there is nothing more we can do for him. But, since Jesus Christ is double – he has not only his human nature, but all the children of Adam that he wants to raise up, he is raised up in them by Holy Communion where he is glorious, by giving them his body. He takes flesh, grows, and matures in us by reason of our generosity and love – that happens through the grace of his resurrection. It is in paradise that he will raise us up on the last day: (now) he places the seed – it is the Eucharist that incarnates Jesus Christ in us, makes him grow and mature, as St. Paul says. We will remain on earth until Jesus Christ has become perfect in us (cf. Col 1:28; Eph 4:13).

How does this take place? Through grace and our cooperation. Here's a comparison: when nature is plunged into darkness and night has come, we see nothing: the imagination sees only death, and things that can frighten us. Why? Because there is no light. As dawn appears, and the sun rises, light steadily grows brighter; when the rays of the sun cover the world they reveal its beauty. The sun not only reveals the beauty of the world, but communicates its power, for the plants could never live without the sun. Some plants are so delicate that they fold up at night – they open up, wake up, revive their beauty and their new life with the rising sun that comes to share its heat with them: everything is born again. The more a plant feels the heat of the sun, the more beautiful and fruitful it becomes – without the sun, it produces nothing.

At night, a crystal is a simple rock; with a little light it becomes transparent; place it in sunlight, you can no longer look at it: it is like the sun. That is our Lord: he wakes up at dawn, he rises, and when he reaches noontime, the soul becomes transparent in true love. Little by little, gradually, our Lord remains in us – but in order for him to give himself, he relies on our cooperation. Gradually, like ore in its refining process, the alloy is slowly removed. The more profoundly we enter into our Lord, the holier we become, the more we are transformed into him – the process goes on. We should ask ourselves, how much of our Lord is in us. Have we reached a third, a quarter, or half? The sanctity of the elect is complete only when they are transparent, when Jesus is in their heart, and they have only appearances remaining. Jesus Christ is in us. We must not lessen his influence. We must put him to work. Let us meditate Jesus Christ.

The first life is that of the senses and of the devil. **The second** depends on you if you want. **The third** is very easy for you, because you are rid of the world, everything is for Jesus Christ: that is your state. You must not be foolish, amusing yourselves by removing spider webs, bargaining with our Lord. Your boat is on the sea – it is useless to look back at the port you left behind: you are no longer on the land, but at sea. When the natural Adam wants to return, you must say: What are you doing here? You are already committed. **You must keep your eyes constantly on Jesus Christ, so that he will become transparent in you, and that you will be changed into him.**

In the chemical sciences, nothing is as wonderful as the separation of the elements, especially a liquid, as it passes through a filter. Today, you can take a material thing composed of four elements, and you can divide them all – marvelous! It's the same with gold: it's a piece of copper mixed with rocks. Copper is an ore; placed in the crucible, all the impure bodies are separated from the gold. It's the same with silver. That's what you must do: you must allow yourself to be purified. Our Lord will enlighten you: follow the light; he will nourish you: then eat; so that he may be alive in you: live in him. How unhappy you will be if you want to mix the natural life with life in our Lord! I will not speak of the other life (that of the senses): it is too appalling to mix (life in our Lord) with sin. But since we can act with greater purity, by acting in this way, our Lord will live in you.

There is one idea that we are not aware of, namely: **we are afraid of our Lord**, afraid of his graces. It's true. Ask yourself deep in your soul – **we are afraid that he will ask too much**, that he will ask some new sacrifices. We have a certain natural fright. I feel it, and you must feel it like me: we are afraid of our Lord, of his grace – we avoid asking him, out of fear that his reasons become too convincing. What happens? There is a battle: we turn away from our Lord, or we remain at the door out of fear that he might ask too much, that he give us too many instructions. Most devout persons are just amusing themselves: they stop at the garden near the entrance where there are such beautiful flowers – they stop to listen to a melody, the concert of singing angels. **Few souls belong entirely to our Lord: – free, king, master, and spouse.** I can tell you this without embarrassing you, because you are not there. We are afraid of God; our weak nature always dominates. Is it possible!

Our Lord is so good, so loving, and so generous, yet we are afraid. Why? We are weak and lazy. There are many devout persons, but practically none belong to our Lord. I don't call frequent Communion and penance devotions: these are good – they are not signs. The sign is when our Lord reigns in us, all for him: Jesus Christ is my all, as the *Imitation* tells us: live in him. And if you are not in this state, what is the reason for that? It is my fault; it is the fault of priests. I say it is my fault, because I am not showing you the way. We say: See how beautiful the virtues are! We place the souls in the garden, and we don't tell them: Over there, a little further, there are beautiful fruits – we tell them: That's good, and they go to the virtues, they listen to the beautiful melodies of the angels, and they remain where they are. We teach them to audit their sins, by telling them: That is so ugly. We teach people to be good, and happy, but we don't tell them: Go further! Should you be your own goal? We don't tell them: we prevent them from going – we merely keep them happy.

[...]

We might say that many love religious life only because it lifts them to a princely rank. There are not many who choose the contemplative life, but there are many in the active life! A servant will be well fed, well dressed; she will be called lady. Her charity is so beautiful! This costs a little, but self-love is happy. They grow, their charity is rewarded with money. In the contemplative life, there are few persons. Whoever wants to belong to Jesus Christ does not go to the active life. They tell me: That's my attraction. Poor you! – It is my nature: I need the active life; I am sanguine, nervous, I have to move. – Is that why you became a religious? – It is not my inclination. And I add: a natural [inclination]. Again, the prestige of religious has fallen very much, in my opinion; they are running away [from holiness]. Can't we become saints there? Yes, but we stay far away. When I will see a religious vocation become interior, Eucharistic, and contemplative, I will say: That's the right road. It is harder to give one's liberty, to belong completely to our Lord, than to go to fifty martyrdoms – it's a very different form of dying.

Now, there is one more thought I must leave with you, since we've come this far. We make Jesus Christ into a treasurer, almost a miser, as though we had to extort graces from him. This idea is at the bottom of all hearts: it seems that we have to ask him many, many times, and that he grants only with regrets. We dare not ask for something very great and large, and so we are satisfied with becoming meticulous – we focus on some small action, some little virtue. With the remnants of the feeling of fear, we dare not ask

for great things, interior virtues, out of fear that he might take us at our word. We prefer to shrink our heart.

God is infinite: he enjoys giving. His heart would suffer if he could not pour himself out on creatures, applying to them the merits of his incarnation, of his Eucharist. One condition is needed: it's trust. The more God gives, the happier he is – he gives himself, what more can he do? He opens his hidden treasures – for whom will he keep them? They don't need them in heaven – there is glory there. Humility, wisdom, prudence are useless for heaven – he can give them only in this world. Yet, we remain in poverty, and we are afraid of his goodness. Look at the sun, is it growing poorer? It gives its light and its heat – whoever wants may receive it – but it will always give.

Points for reflection:

What vision of the Eucharist do you find in this instruction? What are the challenges to transformation and what means are given to arrive there? What images do you find that express it? Do you have other personal ones?