

Three Kinds of Peace: of Conscience, of Virtue, and of God¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Paris, Friday, August 17, 1860

[...]

My Sisters, there are three kinds of inner peace.

There is peace of conscience, which you surely have. Peace of conscience consists in having nothing to accuse oneself of before God. I'm not talking about mortal sins, but about venial sins. This peace is a sign that all is well with God. It is not lost by the intrusion of the senses; nor from our evil nature which is not premeditated. These are mere odors from a dunghill – excuse the word. It does not disturb our peace if we know how to return to God with compunction. On the contrary, our peace becomes even greater than before. The devil tries to prevent us from making this act of compunction: he knows very well that it would make us stronger. What disturbs us is the sin of voluntary affections which are contrary to the light of our conscience – that's what troubles us. I'm sure that you always have that peace. Mortal sin alone makes us lose it. Sadness, however, can arise when the Holy Spirit wants to speak, to reproach us of something internally, and we don't want to listen. That's an internal struggle.

Always keep in the state of grace, you can always be pure. Your purity relies on the sacrament of penance. Since you receive it only every week, you may think that your soul is black, don't think that way. Remain always like a flower in springtime. Use the means that the mercy of God offers you, like the sacramentals that he set up so that we can always be in the state of grace. For you, this is easy: an act of contrition, the Mass, holy water – all these take away venial sins. You can always be as pure as going to confession. Of course, there may be some laziness; we don't like to confide in God or in ourselves. When you have a spot on your dress you don't throw it into the fire; you clean it. If you want to be white in the light, in the love of God, remove the stain. You can do this by yourself – you don't need the help of others. Always have the peace of humility; I don't ask anything else from you. The more a soul approaches God, the more violent will be the reaction of nature, the old self will rise up against the interior self – there can be no agreement between sin and virtue.

There is the peace of virtue; this is greater. There is a joy that comes from the good we do. This is like someone whose joy increases as he continues to succeed, or like eating when we are hungry. It is the peace of enjoyment, of joy, the peace of someone of good will. Thus, when you do something good, you enjoy the peace of a good work. This is a consequence of what you do. The whiter the flame, the stronger its light; the more the flame is impure, the less light does it give. This we understand. The more an act is pure – done for the love of God – the greater the joy: the reward is commensurate to the work – more is paid for work well done. Hence, those who serve God with purity of conscience have the joy of God's virtue in them.

I think that you have this peace; perhaps, however, not to a high degree. You do have peace of conscience. When you have offended the Good Lord you probably feel very grieved, since you are an unclean spouse before the king. That's ugly. But the peace of virtue, you probably have it only slightly, because you are not rejoicing, like devout souls, over the good that you are doing. You might say with embarrassment that you are happy. Yes, under the aspect of the good that you are doing. Sometimes you tell me: I was very devout – but you don't dare tell me: I was very happy. You are telling the truth: in trembling you are saying something very true, because you were even happier.

I don't encourage you to run after this peace from good works. Be consoled.. You are no longer in the same state – the one you had in the world was less perfect. What did you have in the world? You were free: you had the freedom of your Communion, you were working out your salvation, that was

¹ Number. 251. *Trois sortes de paix: de la conscience, de la vertu, de Dieu.*

very clear. The thought of earning a crown, your merits was with you. You were daily laborers who are paid at the end of the day. You were treated like that: a devout person who is free. You needed that; without it, you would have left everything. You needed that little manna to keep you there. This replaced your religious vows: the Good Lord kept you there through the consolation of a greater good. You must have noticed one thing: you must not have been satisfied with your Communions, your devotions, and your prayers – if you were satisfied, God protect you! You would have arrived, and yet you have a long way ahead of you to travel.

What are you now aspiring to? To become totally Eucharistic, living from Jesus Christ and for him. You are aspiring to become his spouses, to become his very self. Since to reach that goal demands that you give yourself totally to him, this gift [of self] for a Eucharistic life requires that you not seek anticipatory joy. You want to serve with the purest love, not looking for payment in this world, but only in heaven – otherwise, your reward would be imperfect. Since the perfection of this union is ongoing, our Lord does not give you any joy when your intentions are mixed – he acts this way so that you will not be attached to the means, so that you will not be tempted to serve him for self-interest, but completely for him. My good Sisters, don't become attached to the peace of devotion, because you will become selfish, you will be like mercenaries, like beggars who ask you: How much will you give me? [...]

What, then, is the third kind of peace? It is the peace of God and in God, not in yourself. You end up losing yourself in God and in his good pleasure, his will, and his glory. This is peace in God, peace from God. There are no more storms; no one can take it away from you, since it is too lofty. St. Paul said that *this is the peace that surpasses all understanding, or can be imagined* (cf. Phil 4:7) – this is a royal peace, and not subsidiary. The peace from God is the peace of love, of enjoyment – St. Paul gives it another name: *the peace of joy from the Holy Spirit* (cf. Gal 5:22; 1 Thes 1:6). Why are we joyful? You would be very wise to say that it is not the joy of doing well, nor the joy of sacrifices. It is the joy of the gift: we are happy to give, and we are always giving – yes, that is real joy!

These are the three kinds of peace: the peace of conscience, the peace of virtue, and the peace of God. Enjoy this last kind of peace. You will possess it only by giving, so give yourself fully. The Good Lord has arranged things in such a way that the more we give, the more we have to give, like God who always has something new to give us. We never receive the same grace, or the same light – we are always experiencing new gifts. He finds his joy in giving. And he gives us that same grace, not an infinite grace, but in the power of an infinite love – we give our freedom. We remain free in the action only, not as a habit. We can always give, no one can take away our freedom, they can (only) oppose its acts. If we could give up our freedom, we could no longer sin. The gift is always increasing or decreasing: in a Christian soul, the gift can always be greater, as in the Good Lord, it continues multiplying itself, since it always finds something new to give. God increases his love and his grace, always doubling it – the soul acts like God in his infinity, always doubling her gift.

Give your heart. The heart belongs to God, but its affection can always increase and grow. That is where we must place our virtue; then we will enjoy some of that peace. **What is this peace?** We cannot define it. It is the peace of love, and we cannot define love. Love is the gift, but the manner of giving depends on each one. We cannot describe it: only God knows. St. Paul tells us that *this peace surpasses all understanding* (cf. Phil 4:7) – what is sure is that it nourishes. The peace of conscience is a rest; the peace of virtue is a spurring onwards, but the peace of God is a nourishment – it is the life and peace of love: it creates life, and presupposes union. Ah, what goodness! What will it be like in heaven? Here we see only a ray that makes us no longer hold on to body and soul. In this way, divest yourselves completely of yourselves, and give yourselves totally to God.

❖ **Cf. “The Good Lord unites us to himself through sweetness (gentleness). We must place ourselves in the will of God” May 27, 1862: Book # 3 Section D.**