

Bread. Communion. We Must Reflect ¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Angers, Sunday, March 22, 1868

My good Daughters, we will not sing the *Te Deum* at the closing of the retreat – nothing at all. As a closing, do nothing, because the retreat has no ending, it will simply continue, it will continue bearing fruit. You will remain on retreat, to cultivate, water the divine seed which our Lord has sown in your souls. Consequently, it is unnecessary to break this chain, useless to stop the stream; let it flow. We have done nothing but open the door, now it is up to you to eat – the door is open, you must eat. There’s a wonderful and very beautiful thought in the Old Testament. God never told the people of Israel to eat – **eating is reserved to the prefigured and promised Eucharist**. Look for the Lord, savor him, and taste him as much as you want. In the Old Testament there is no eating, no meal, no nuptials, in a word, no Eucharist.

Notice: God told Adam and Eve, *You will eat your bread by the sweat of your brow* (cf. Gn. 3:19). This was the **first word that the Lord spoke to them**, to show them how they were going to have to live. The earth will be cursed; it will produce nothing but weeds and thorns. You have paralyzed my power, in return, I give you the power to cultivate the earth, you will eat your bread by the sweat of your brow. You need to know that in this case, the word bread applies only to the wheat grain, that is why in today’s gospel we read about barley loaves, bread of an inferior quality.

See how good God is. God’s first word seemed to be spoken in anger. Poor Adam, had he understood this word, he should have said: Thank you, I prefer bread to the most beautiful fruits of paradise, those are only for my body, but this I can make grow by the sweat of my brow. It is the grain of wheat, the Eucharist. He didn’t know what this word “bread” meant. He should have said to God: I don’t know what it is. God spoke this word to him; but he didn’t understand, he had cultivate it; but we get to eat it. Is it because the land no longer produced fruit as good as that of paradise? Indeed, the earth remained fruitful. Notice that in the sixth chapter of his gospel, St. John always speaks of bread. This word had been spoken in the earthly paradise; it is the fruit of paradise; this one doesn’t lead to death, but to life.

The second time that God spoke this word was to the Israelites in the desert. God rained down manna. It was a sort of sugar, which had all sorts of tastes according to the desires of each one. It looked like small seeds of coriander. Manna covered only the camp of the Israelites, fell only for them; the desert did not produce it. If it did, then they would not have been astonished. They saw this white snow, and they were all astonished. You can understand why they said: *Man hu ... (What is this?)* (Ex 16:15) Moses told them: It is bread from heaven. [...] God himself made it, as our Lord said: *My Father fed the Israelites with manna in the desert, and they died, but it is I who give you this bread* (Jn 6: 49-50). Our Lord now speaks of the Eucharist. Manna was a figure of the Eucharist.

Our Lord said: *Those who eat me live by me; they will have eternal life* (cf. Jn 6:51,54,57). He always says, Eat. Notice that when our Lord instituted the Eucharist, he said: *Take and eat, this is my body* (Mt 26:26). One day a woman inspired by the Holy Spirit cried out: Blessed are those who eat the bread of God in heaven! What did she mean by “Blessed are those who will eat!” In heaven, one is always fed. That is why it is said we must always eat to sustain ourselves, to fortify ourselves, or to have a certain pleasure.

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Our Lord did for the soul what sensual people do for their bodies. They live only to eat. All they talk about, all they do is for the sake of eating - to satisfy their gluttony. That is why the evil rich man was punished (cf. Lk 16:19-25). His stomach became his God (cf. Ph 3:19). For eating, there is preparation and work; in the Eucharist, there is also preparation and work. The preparation does not concern you; it is the priest who prepares the bread, who consecrates, and the Church who sets the table. She is the daughter of Zion, Wisdom. She sets the table, she invites her friends: *Come, eat my bread, all is ready* (Pr 9:5). God spoke in this way a thousand years before the Eucharist.

Come with the nuptial robe. You cannot be received without it, for it is the state of grace. If you don't have the nuptial robe, you cannot come (cf. Mt 22:11,12). Then there is the chewing. The work you do must prepare our Lord's coming to you, this is the work of eating. God made eating pleasant and tasty. Were it not for this, many persons would die of hunger. God, in his goodness, wanted to make eating a pleasure and a stimulant. He only says [...] don't make it your goal. [...]

In Communion there is also pleasure; it is sweet, delicious, and divine, the delight of God. When he invites us, he always says: *Come, my dove*. He says this in the Song of Songs; to invite the soul, he always uses gentle expressions: *Come, my dove* (cf. Song 2:14). The dove is simple: *Come, my sister* (cf. Song 4:9); no one is afraid of a brother or sister. *Come, my spouse* (cf. Song 4:8), one is not afraid of a spouse. *Enter into my chamber* (cf. Song 2: 4). It's not even a question of mercy, or forgiveness but of the encouragement that comes from his goodness. You must answer our Lord's invitation.

What goodness, what charm! There are voices that charm. Our Lord's words attract and give joy. Do not come merely because he is good and attractive, otherwise you will become your own goal, looking only for your advantage. The manna of paradise is sweet and you would not notice it, like servile persons who pay attention only to sensual pleasure and forget the master who invited them. They end by falling into excess, becoming like a brute. So what should we do? Not to thank the master who invites you is to act like animals. May your eyes be not on the hands, nor on the gifts our Lord gives you, you would be like a beggar. Rather may your eyes be on his heart.

Eat then! But why? We eat only to have strength. When we have to make a long journey, we eat a hearty meal, because without food for strength, we will collapse on the way. Our food must be substantial, because the road is long and difficult. Our journey must be smooth as the flight of birds, so then our food must be such as to sustain us, or we will rapidly become weak. Food is the sign of strength, our Lord nourishes us with himself, he who is the strength of God.

Like Elias, we must cross the desert, fleeing the wicked king who wanted to kill him as did Jezebel. He fled to Mount Horeb, to escape the blows of this evil man. Tired, he sat down in the desert, and fell asleep while praying. An angel said to him: *Elias, arise and eat*. He had nothing to eat, but the angel had prepared bread cooked under ashes because he still had a long way to go. Elias arose, ate the bread and slept again. The same angel said to him; *Eat*. This happened three times: *Come now, you are well fortified, arise and go to the mountain of your vision* (cf. 1 Kgs 19:5-8). And Elias walked for forty days. The angel is the priest who prepares this unleavened bread on the mountain of God, so that we can drink and eat. God says to us: You have a very long road to travel, you must take food to give you strength, for you will have to fight many enemies. Our food determines our health, light food forebodes weakness and sickness.

My Daughters, **strength is the first and natural effect of Communion.** People say: It sanctifies us. It is true that it clothes us with the merits of our Lord, yet that's not its primary effect. Its primary effect is to give us strength. We live in our Lord, not to be made happy, since we are not yet in paradise, nor to be sanctified, one should be so beforehand. Before seeing the sun, you will see the moon; you will see the sun again, but the rays are not the sun. The light that we receive is absorbed by a greater light.

Then our Lord will give us an overflow of his beauty -- a little of the saints' beauty in the next life. He gives us a ray of sunlight. A ray contains all colors except black, since black has no light, all the colors are in the sky. They are only the effect of the sun's rays, a physical effect desired by the Good Lord.

The Eucharist also gives us virtues. It is God himself who makes us beautiful when he comes in Communion. If we put a bouquet of flowers before a mirror, it will be clearly reflected. Still, there is a difference. Since our Lord is alive, he will be a living reflection in our soul. Understand me, if you embedded me into yourself, you would have my living image in you; I would be the body in which you are embedded. Behold the soul which mirrors our Lord. How beautiful is the soul which communicates! If you could see how our Lord is shining in it, how lovely it is! Look at a crystal in the sun, how beautiful it is! It's like a lens burning even more brightly than the sun; it can light a fire. It concentrates the rays of the sun.

The love of our Lord for his Father is a paradise in itself. Our Lord is very much at home in the person who has received Communion. Such a soul is just too beautiful to be seen by anyone else. Why is that? Otherwise it would be overcome by pride and become powerless. Imagine what would happen, my Daughters, if you could see it. When St. John saw the angel in the Apocalypse, he fell at his feet. The angel cried out, *Do not worship me, I am only your companion, like you, I am but a servant* (cf. Rev 19:10). The soul is even more beautiful, similar to the beauty of our Lord. [...] If you could see it, your love for them would be excessive, believing them already in heaven because our Lord resides within them. Imagine the contrast if we could see those who cause our Lord to suffer! I prefer not to see the ones that are beautiful rather than have to look at the others. How good is the Lord! It would be impossible to live on earth together with the wicked. We would be tempted to kill them, especially when they crucify our Lord. What God has done is well done. Let us pray that He may grant such souls the strength to love him.

Love that is made up of union and devotedness ignites a fire that is not meant to go out but to consume everything. When you light up a hearth, its flames will absorb and consume everything. One may create a current, but this current will be 100 times stronger after Communion, because after Communion, we have the strength of God himself. In time of need, we will find all the strength necessary to us because in Communion we store up the resources that will be used up during the day.
[...]

Normally thanksgiving time is difficult. [...] Don't expect too much joy from this moment or you will spoil everything. [...] You may feel restless and desire to move about. Please be courteous; don't become agitated in our Lord's presence, seeking grace and mercy. – Shouldn't one say something? – Yes, if you stay calmly at his feet but don't get upset or hasty, else later you will say: - Was I guilty of sin? Since our Lord says nothing to me, did I make a bad Communion? – Why get upset? Know how to remain at his feet, for our Lord is quiet [...] Communion is a moment of rest.

In fact, my Daughters, [...] remain in quiet peace; in love, calm, and restfulness you will accomplish much. What happens when you sleep? Nothing; but you rest in order to work better afterwards, you wake up cheerfully. Note how the angel lulled Elias into sleep, while he was asleep, the angel brought him food. Three times he did this, so that he would sleep deeply. Only then did the angel command him to walk in strength. Gentleness follows upon the Eucharist; our Lord confers a certain sweetness as he waits for you. We realize that we are stronger than when we did not receive Communion. Just let go of the self, that constant ego, and concentrate only on our Lord. This is what you must do at the time of Communion.
[...]

What can I tell you? You must always reflect; you will find ever new sweetness. Here you are on retreat. It has begun; it will finish, or rather continue. All its graces will come back to you in due time. God has his moments of grace, he will make you recall a thought that you didn't even notice. You will reflect upon it, you will feed on it, you will be well nourished. It's good to take our Lord in Communion, but he must be eaten, incorporated into oneself, reflected upon. Look at what our Lord said at the Last Supper: *If you remain in me and my words remain in you*, reflect upon them, digest them, *whatever you want will be done* (cf. Jn. 15:7). How will this take place? Look at the Blessed Virgin: *And Mary kept all these things in her heart* (cf. Lk. 2:19,51), that is to say, to ponder them as if to see and savor them in her heart, if you wish, because the word of God is life, to be laid hold of.

Reflect then, as Mary did. You want to read much, reflect a lot, but go slowly. You are reflective creatures whom God has chosen, whom he himself wants to nourish. Piety which always wants to act, do much work, is not real piety. It's a fever that leads to continual indigestion. Notice that the more a soul approaches our Lord, the more it is nourished – one word is sufficient. Why? Because she finds everything there. It's very little, but as it is divine nourishment it dilates the soul. [...] That's why the soul which always reflects upon this word of God has an intrinsic, inexhaustible supply. Paradise never comes to an end. God never shows himself completely; he shows one beauty after another, that is enough.

Now, what resolution have you taken in the retreat? There's a Christian resolution and a religious resolution. Take a Christian one that can be seen from the exterior. If not, check fidelity to the Rule. What about the interior attraction? What brought you joy during the retreat, what thought? This is the one. You will understand the attraction of our Lord more by taste, and by peace, than by movement and restlessness. [...] Don't choose what leaves you centered on self, towards sorrow for evil, but what will refresh your soul, to what will lead you to God, who is life.

Behold the great principle: you must live by God rather than by the means that lead to him. We must live by him, by his goodness; even if we have sinned, we must live by his goodness, by his mercy. One of the great missions of the apostolate is to nourish souls, this is our mission. Know well then, my Daughters, that what mortifies you also corrects you. You will crucify yourself more through love than through penance. Notice that health is strengthened more by gentle medicines than by bitter ones.

Finally, my Daughters, eat the good bread of God, the bread of the Eucharist and nourish yourselves with it. Then you will no longer hunger for creatures or for anything that is not God. This is the grace I wish for you.



Points for reflection:

God draws us to himself by peace and goodness. Take the time to reflect upon the word of God and his goodness. Let yourself be nourished by God. How can you make this teaching of Father Eymard concrete and profit from the graces received after Holy Communion?