

## Characteristics of Religious Life, Its Purpose, Its Means, Its Spirit<sup>1</sup>

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament,  
Paris, Tuesday, September 14, 1858

A new sister has joined us today<sup>2</sup>. Let's all praise the Lord for deigning to increase his little Eucharistic family. In today's chapter, our Reverend Father explained the three characteristics of religious life.

### **There are three characteristics<sup>3</sup> of religious life: its purpose, its means, and its spirit.**

Every human project or science has a goal. Likewise, every religious order has its own goal. To attain it, there are means to be used, and a particular spirit. In this community, **our purpose** is to serve our Lord in the Holy Eucharist, to serve him always, and as perfectly as possible, in so far as we are able. **The means** to attain this end, or rather the characteristic of this end, is the immolation of ourselves in the service of our Lord.

If we were to serve our Lord for our own benefit, or because we find happiness in doing so, or for the sake of consolations and joys, all this would be acting like mercenaries. There are people in the world who serve others for their own benefit. There are also servants who devote themselves and sacrifice themselves out of affection for their master. We must serve our Lord, not for joys, consolations, and personal benefit, but **we must serve him out of love for him**, through the immolation of our body, our health, our life, our will, our mind, our heart, in short, our entire self. Immolation is love in all its purity; immolation is Eucharistic perfection.

**A lover tries to imitate and to resemble in all things the beloved** in order to become, so to speak, only one in life, in mind, and in heart. The more we love our Lord, the more we will conform our life to his. Our Lord said: *Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself* (cf. Mt 16:24), which means that he must immolate himself, die to self in order to follow me, to imitate me. **What is our Lord doing in the Eucharist?** He is perpetually immolating himself for us: he immolates his glory, his freedom, and the use of his external faculties. You must become victims, imitating our Lord. This attitude must not be forced and depressing. Be victims of love. Then this state of constant immolation, of perpetual victimhood will bring you joy not sadness, make you happy because nothing is difficult for one who loves. Such a one aspires to lower oneself, in order to lift up the beloved and give him all the glory.

Note the words of St. John the Baptist, who called himself the friend of the spouse because of his love for our Lord, to those who came to tell him out of jealousy: *The one whom you were pointing to is becoming greater than you, and he is attracting your disciples; see how they are abandoning you to follow him* (See Jn 3:26). He said, *He must increase; I must decrease* (Jn 3:30). This is true love. In fact, St. John was correct in the spiritual and natural sense. Our Lord was lifted up on the cross, and John had his head cut off.

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<sup>1</sup> Number 71. Les caractères de la vie religieuse, la fin, les moyens, l'esprit.

<sup>2</sup> Miss Dantoine, from Lyon. After a few days of retreat, she left with the intention of joining; but she never returned. Cf. *Journal I*, p. 233.

<sup>3</sup> Aspects/elements

**The spirit of love is what must animate and move us.** Love will give us the sword and dagger to cut away all obstacles so that our Lord may live in us. Do everything in the spirit of love, small as well as big sacrifices. Let love be your way in everything: Communions, adorations, and prayers.

Besides this spirit of love that must animate and guide you in all your actions, each one of you has her own personal spiritual grace, that must bear fruits. Look for God's grace in you and discern your particular attraction. God gives everyone an attraction that appears to be permanent, but often is only a preparation to reach a more perfect state. Nevertheless, you must work with the attraction of the grace of the moment, as though it were to be permanent, until God changes it. Listen and follow faithfully the voice of the Holy Spirit.

**The conclusion of all this** is that we must discern what God's grace wants of us, act on it as though it would be a permanent state, work with actual grace, and consult the Holy Spirit in us so as to do what he inspires us to do. Be happy in this law of grace, in your purpose, happy in this most beautiful role (cf. Ps 15: 6) given to you by our Lord Jesus Christ. Do not dwell in yourselves, as your joy will not last. You have nothing; the sight of your wretchedness will sadden you. Remain in our Lord. The servant remains with his master, enjoys everything that belongs to the master. Rejoice in our Lord, such a Good Master; be happy and joyful with him. To serve our Lord is to reign; therefore you are queens. Out of love and respect for him, remove from your life what displeases him; adorn yourselves with the virtues that please him. God gives to one that loves him graces of light to know what displeases him, and these graces of light are to be preferred to consolations. Ask our Lord for these insights, otherwise everything that we might tell you would amount to nothing. Our Lord himself will enlighten you.



**Points for reflection:**

The spirit of love is the foundation of religious life.

How do we conform our life to the Eucharistic life of Jesus?

Take time to write down your own experience of religious life in its three aspects of purpose, means, and spirit.