

Conditions for Direction; What Needs to be Said¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Paris, Monday, September 15, 1862

My good Sisters, we will have direction tomorrow. Today, you can simply take stock of yourselves. **To make good direction, you have to know how to proceed** – we'll talk about that, because the purpose of the retreat is to find the Good Lord, to know ourselves, and to make ourselves known.

The Good Lord has so ordained that to reach perfection, one must not proceed alone, but through obedience. He punishes human beings in the way that they sinned. Man wanted to guide himself, to be his own director. That was the first sin. God wanted man to obey. Our Lord made himself a servant and slave; he never did anything of his own will. He was obedient unto death (cf. Phil 2:7-8), in order to teach man how to die. He ordained that he would give graces of perfection only through direction: the opening of the soul to some Ananias (cf. Acts 9:6, 10-19), some conductor (guide) of his people. And this is the teaching of St. Vincent Ferrer, St. John of the Cross, and others, and all the masters of the spiritual life. There is no perfection without direction, beginning with obedience. Obedience also has its mystery, like its grace. It is difficult to talk about our faults, to be dependent on a director, but the Good Lord willed it so. Internally, we respect your grace, which is the work of God; however, so that you will not be your own guide, this grace is still to be submitted to the examination of the director, so that you can say that it was not your own spirit at work. You will be at peace only through obedience. Inside of us, there is always a battle, and a battle does not produce peace.

This direction should have several conditions.

A motive of faith must guide you as you open your soul to this director. You must approach the director with an attitude of faith. If you saw him merely as one who is more educated, more intelligent, you yourself will be the judge of this exchange. You must go as to a master who indicates to you the right road, the will of God. If you act in a spirit of faith, God will reward your faith with peace – not only peace, but light.

That is the first condition. The second is simplicity. Once we have established that the director is the light of God who makes known the way for you, you must go to him with simplicity. Simplicity is especially called for in sacramental direction. All the safeguards are there, since sacramental direction is linked to confession. Therefore, your revelations have their safeguards, as well as their secret. There is also the safeguard of charity. A true relationship grows between you and us. The title of father that you give us is meant to inspire us with charity. If we did not have it, then there is the Eucharistic motivation, since *you eat the same bread, and drink from the same cup* (1 Cor 10: 16-17), as St. Paul said. We are deeply concerned with the well-being of your souls. We don't have to know the internal movements of your soul for our own sake. We have enough knowledge of internal states; you have nothing that excites our curiosity, or that we need to learn. It is charity that moves us, so that you can become more perfect, and proceed securely in the right way and with the right motivations.

The greater your simplicity and openness, the better you will be guided. Besides, all your reasons for fear and human respect have no basis; any faults you may have are already known by the director and by yourself. Our purpose is not to know your poverty, but to note the obstacles to grace, and place you in a life condition for holiness.

¹ Number 436. *Conditions de la direction, ce qu'on y doit dire.*

You should accept direction with courage and joy. Do you know that one direction session can change an entire life? You are very lucky. See if you can find directors in Paris – they don't have the time to focus their attention. We'll take the time needed; it belongs to you.

Come with a spirit of faith and simplicity, with a spirit of indifference about means. Be ready to learn the will of God and to fulfill it as it is manifested, not to you, but to the director. The director cannot take any measures ahead of time; all will depend on what you say, because he does not know. You must make yourself known, without exaggerations to the right or to the left, putting yourselves at the disposition of God and of his grace, saying only the good or the bad, as you are being asked.

These are the three conditions that replace everything else. In fact, humility and simplicity replace everything. Although direction must be taken with wisdom and prudence, a spirit of faith fulfills all the conditions you need. What then must be revealed? My good Sisters, talk about your self-knowledge, make yourself known to the director as you feel and as you know.

A good director must know three things.

The purpose of direction is to help you accomplish the will of God, his wish for your personal holiness. That's its purpose. It must help find the plan God wants for you. We are in fact aiming at a state [of life]. – Yes, my good Daughters, the confessor leads you into a spiritual state. A state must be learned in order to be lived well. This is one condition.

Above all, the director must know the obstacles to the internal reign of God in you. He must be told these things. We're not talking about sin, my good Sisters. Consider occasions, dangerous or proximate, that you might have, or obstacles to the reign and to the holiness of our Lord in you. Must you tell what is wrong with you? Yes. You must make known the evil in your nature, whatever becomes a temptation, a habit, or a passion at certain times. That's your weakness. Since the director is a doctor, he must know the sickness and the misery to cure you. A healer performs miracles to heal; the confessor heals through spiritual medicine. He must see the spiritual sickness. He cannot know unless you search it out. Some such sicknesses are pride, self-love, and over sensitivity. However, you must know what is involved, what are the passions at work. Study your fixed ideas; fixed ideas of vanity, pride, etc.; temptations because of some person or thing. It's no easy matter to learn about all this.

Consider also persistent thoughts, not pride, but rather a temptation. The devil tends to afflict us with such thoughts, which make us forget all else and even lose our minds. Be careful, because this is more dangerous than vanity. "Fixed ideas" [obsessions] are always a danger. Many persons have become discouraged because of some persistent thought, even a seemingly good one, believe it or not. My good Daughters, you must then tell me of any persistent thought, when you are sad or feeling discouraged. If this lasts, it can become very dangerous. It may be a mental illness that will end up in a catastrophe, a storm, if it continues for a long period of time. Other troubles are much less important because they can be overcome by an act of virtue. My poor Daughters, don't let yourselves be fooled. If some idea struck you, especially if it grew in the shadows, talk about it and it will be lessened. Mention it again and it will be cured. Personally I insist on manifestation of an illness of the mind more than on anything else. Other issues are not so dangerous.

Sicknesses of the heart are not serious, since you already gave your heart to God. You may have some fondness for little things; just mention this and you will quickly be healed. Since it is love or affection that is the temptation, it can be eliminated by a simple act of the will. What is all this for a heart that wants to love the Good Lord? There are also bodily sicknesses, which may sadden you. Since you cannot control this painful state, the devil may enter in. Talk about your internal illnesses. If the Good

Lord is reproaching you about your effort to gain virtue, if you may not be doing enough, this may be a vague and general reproach of no value. It may also be a sign of a general uneasiness that the director notices. You must evidently go into details. When the Good Lord is not pleased, he may show it by allowing a person to remain in sadness.

After removing obstacles, you must learn to practice the virtues. This is an entirely new level. An apprentice does not know his trade; the master must teach him. You also have an apprenticeship to follow. A single act is easy, but you must be led step by step to progress in the state of holiness. Without a guide, you may begin well, but you will soon set aside what was started and abandon everything because you have no one to guide you. The purpose of direction is to form in you all the virtues of your holy vocation. To do this, the director must know your virtues, your character, your greatest needs, and even the graces you receive from God. He will teach you how to enter into the supernatural order.

What virtues? First of all, humility, which leads all the others. That's not all. You must nourish the virtues: you must find your other graces, because every person has a dominant [mother] grace that gives energy to all the others. The director must know this, so as to give food to all the virtues. Where is this grace? In your prayer. The Holy Spirit forms it and remains with you (cf. Rm 8:26-27). Every soul has a gift of prayer, and it is in that grace that is found the character of your holiness. That is why the director must look for it – as long as you have not reached that point [of knowledge], you will not fly on the road to perfection. You will drag yourself and suffer – your soul will not be acting with all its power. You have a gift of prayer, of adoration – see it clearly, so that you may know what the Good Lord wants of you. When you are at ease in your spiritual gift, your work will go on smoothly.

You must not finish your retreat without knowing these three things:

There is a dominant fault or obstacle to the reign of God in you. I show you special respect by saying that this is not a fault, but an obstacle that prevents you from walking. There is one; if you don't remove it, you will be like a little bird caught in a net, unable to fly.

You must discover if you are trying to avoid the virtues. Many persons come close to virtues instead of entering into them. They are always acting naturally; they naturalize everything. These poor souls spend their lives vegetating; if they entered, they would experience life. We must know if you are making progress in virtues; we will see clearly if you are acting through virtue. Let us see clearly if your virtues are rooted in humility, with the love of God as its sap -- safeguarded by vigilance and modesty. Then your tree will grow. If you are drying up, if your roots are dry, that means you lack humility. If your sap is going into useless branches, you lack mortification. These useless branches must be cut and pruned. Can't you see that your sap is being wasted and lost? There is no mortification, because you are telling yourself: There are many roots and beautiful flowers, why are there no fruits? All the passers-by are there and the tree is left unguarded (cf. Ps 79:13) – there is no watchman. We must put one – we must always remain vigilant over ourselves.

What is your gift of prayer; how is it formed? Look for it; how can you fly without wings? – I don't know. – Let's see, let's talk, and let's examine, so that you will know what to do. In this way you will always be on the right path.

We can come to the end of our lives without knowing these three important things. We should have started with that, and now we finish with that. The devil diverts souls so that they will not know them: If I cannot prevent them from getting into heaven, I must prevent them from making progress in virtue. We, like fools, think that all will happen by itself. We don't see – except for the major things – and we believe that all is well. We gather wealth to place it in bags full of holes (cf. Hg 1:6). You must not act like that, my good Daughters.

Reflect seriously on this conference – these three things are serious and personal. If it takes time, then, of course, we'll take the time. Tell me what you know. If you act simply from authority, you won't make any progress; but if it becomes part of you, you will succeed. There is a spiritual conviction that will never burn out: the Good Lord continues to stoke it with his grace. Work in that direction.