

Detachment¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Paris, Friday, May 16, 1862

My good Sisters, let's examine an important question, the question of death and of grace. What kind of work does grace do in us? How does the Good Lord lead us to himself and even to heaven if you love him enough? So far, this question seems simple enough: it is the fundamental question of holiness, of the work of God in us. **What is the goal, or if you prefer, what is the work of the love of God in us? The Good Lord is always detaching us – he gives us everything in the natural and supernatural order, and then he asks for the sacrifice of everything.**

First of all, the Good Lord gives us everything in the natural order. You know that a person owns nothing in the natural and supernatural order. He can give away only what God has first given to him. This means that when a person gives something, he is simply giving to other poor people what God has given him. The Good Lord asks that we sacrifice, one after the other, all the natural goods that he gave us, and he ends by asking for all of them, and sometimes he even requires them all in reality. You don't have to look very far: just look at your own life – you are now all of a mature age, in the maturity that lasts until old age. Notice already the things that God has taken away from you in the natural order of his Providence – how many “goodbyes” you have said up to the present!

First, you left your native land. Few persons live in their native land, where they grew up – our true country is where we were born. We follow the example of our Lord: he was born in Bethlehem, but never remained there. He was a pilgrim. The same happened to us: we lived and passed through many places! We have gone away from the spring of our life-stream.

Consider your early childhood, when **you made many friends:** the dislikes of children don't last long; it's not in their nature – how many friends we have had! We left them behind, in such a way that, for many years, we were merely saying “goodbye” to friends. It was less painful for you than for us. In our regular education and in the seminary, we had many farewells; similar to the army when the assignments go from one garrison to another – so many goodbyes. The Good Lord does not want a man to find his center in another man; he does not allow us to keep anything.

Look at our relatives: the Good Lord wants us to make the sacrifice of our relatives, friends, and others – this happens through circumstances, through age, and through death. In our natural life we are obliged to live far from our relatives: people get married, they separate. There are always separations, and we see each other once in a while – there are constant goodbyes. Why? The Good Lord does this to teach us that we are only on a journey: we are like a stream that will empty into the sea.

Some persons want to attach themselves to another human being, to dwell in them, find their satisfaction there – that is a natural end. After one is finished, another replaces her. They are like impure water, no more than a polluted marshland. That's what happens when they attach themselves to others – they become like muddy water, stagnant, and still. Flowing water purifies itself. God acts as he did with the Israelites: for forty years they wandered in the desert. They never got sick, their clothes never wore out; God preserved all their goods. Why? They were living under his leadership. The Good Lord helps

¹ Number 414. *Le dégagement.* **This instruction is completed by the following: We must leave ourselves in order to enter into our Lord.**

us: we don't receive the same grace he gave to the Israelites going to the promised land – our clothes wear out; everything deteriorates: our will becomes weak, our mind gets tired, our heart becomes disgusted with everything. Why does the Good Lord do this? He did not create us to find our goal in human beings – we will find only emptiness; we will not find what we are seeking. From that fact comes the wise words of Solomon: *All things are vanity* (Eccl 1:2). All except to love God and to serve him; that's everything.

That is the natural order. [...] For saints, a dwelling is nothing else than a tent for a night (cf. 2 Cor 5:1, 4) – in the morning they take it down and continue towards their homeland, towards heaven, towards the heavenly Father – their baggage is lighter. This doesn't mean that they don't feel the loss of a father and a friend; they feel it deeply; but a saint detaches himself from everything.

[...]

It is through this natural despoiling that the Good Lord begins: *it is the beginning of wisdom* (cf. Prv 9:10). That is where the soul is converted, as Solomon says. That is how God shows his great goodness to us. If we found our happiness in others, we would forget the Good Lord. We are more flesh than spirit; more earth-bound than heaven-bound. God's work in us is constantly despoiling us, detaching us, and purifying us, from what? Rust.

Here, there is something else: it is the sacrifice of our self. The other sacrifices are done by everyone. *The Imitation* says in a chapter of the second book: If you give all your goods, that's nothing; if you do serious penance, it is still small; if you dedicate yourself to your neighbor, it is not much. What is truly great? It is when you empty yourself, to place yourself in God. To leave yourself is to leave these ruins, this old shack, this hospital in order to place yourself in God. Do you know that this is more difficult than doing all the penances in the world? It is more difficult to make an act of humility of the mind, than to live in the most penitential kind of life. This is something we tend to avoid.

A poor man was once asked – (I can still see him on a street corner in Rome; I know this man) Why don't you go to one of the houses of refuge of the Pope; you will be well fed and well lodged? – I went there; but I left in order to have my freedom. – But now you are exposed to all the inclemencies of the weather. – I prefer to eat dark bread than to surrender my freedom. The cleric who was with me said to me: he told you the truth – we can't put the poor in houses of refuge: they want their freedom. Why is there so much suffering in prisons, in penitentiaries? Give them freedom, and it will no longer be a prison: the guards live in the prison like the prisoners – they sleep there, but they are free. Men who have positions of authority are also confined like galley-slaves, but they are free – they can always resign. That's the real cause.

All sacrifices that don't require that you renounce your will and your liberty are nothing at all, because you are holding on to yourself. In order for the Good Lord to give himself to you, you must, of course, leave yourself. A woman cannot have two husbands: that cannot be – you cannot belong to God and to the world. We must leave ourselves. That is why grace is in the process of despoiling you – notice how you always need to let something go. When you are converted, you are happy; nothing is difficult – our Lord is preparing a divine table for you. Then, he gives himself to you by his peace: to show you that he is pleased, he tells you so. [...].

Now, my poor Daughters, the Good Lord has forgiven us for being too attached to his saints, to his angels, and to his ministers whom he sent to help us through difficult times. What does the Good Lord do? We are no longer able to listen to him: we have centered our selves in a meal, in a flower, and the Good Lord takes it away. He not only takes it away, he cuts all connections – and then the person weeps, because her candy has been taken away. The Good Lord asks: Do you love that more than me? And the one who is in the process of detachment, says: You did well to remove that from me; I thought I was a saint. She humbles herself: I will love you more than your good meal, more than your angels and saints.

Then she becomes detached. If the Good Lord had done otherwise, she would have become so sensual that she would serve him only for his consolations.

Since the process of conversion is a daily matter, this is what will happen. We will say: I now love the Good Lord more. You have had enjoyed too much satisfaction in such a sweet liqueur, until the Good Lord said: You love this liqueur more than me. He puts a little vinegar and bitterness in it, and he removes this consolation so that you will tell him: I am contented with you. That's what causes a change of state: the Good Lord removes a knife that has wounded you – he kills the serpent that had bitten you: it's already done – he will never bite you again. The Good Lord only intends to remove your sources of imperfection. Surprisingly, we don't see it. The Good Lord ends up by removing himself from us, not in his mercy, but in his tangible form – lest we would act like Magdalene. Sometimes we say: If only I could see the Good Lord! It is better that you don't see him – you might become attached to his eyes; you would hold on to his earthly glorified body which is yet the least of his person. The Good Lord proceeds to detach you from himself. That is why he did not want Magdalene to touch him (cf. Jn 20:17); her affections were too impure. The apostles did not recognize him: St. John, who was purer, had to tell them: *It is the Good Lord!* (cf. Jn 21:7) when our Lord was on the shore. That is the work of grace: the Good Lord leads us from one detachment to another. [...]

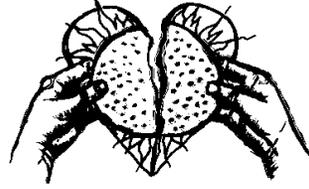
Renouncing one's ideas is the most difficult thing. If you don't believe it, then why do we have wars? We hold on to our ideas. Why do we quarrel and lack charity? We hold on to our ideas, and we are not satisfied. Good Lord! We hold more to our ideas than to our own will – the will is a blind faculty that never has two consecutive ideas. It's the same with the heart: the impulse of the heart lasts only a moment, while our mind, our own ideas, our self-love, and what have you, is very different.

Do you know that the grace of God is always working to make us surrender our spirit²? What is our spirit? It is the master of our house. What is Satan? The spirit of pride! Sin and evil exist only where there is pride – malice is there. That is why the vow of obedience costs more than the others. Why did the Good Lord base our religion on faith? Because this is the real sacrifice, the submission of man's mind to the sovereign will of God.

The Good Lord catches us where we have sinned – he knows how to humiliate us. Can't you see that man is born ignorant, and as he grows old he becomes dull? In early life, a child's mind is controlled by the Good Lord – he keeps it weak, so that the child will have no pride in its thoughts. In old age, the Good Lord removes the memory. If not what would happen? One would experience the despair of suffering, or the pride of Satan. The Good Lord sees to it that this poor human machine will deteriorate. Didn't you notice that as we grow older we cannot put two thoughts together? The Good Lord ties up the mind, and removes the occasions for evil.

The heart inherits from the mind: the more that the mind loses, the more the heart becomes powerful. The life of man, of the Christian, is in the heart, not in the mind, the Good Lord strips it from us. Look at a block of marble straight from the quarry: we trim it down, remove what was burned by the sun, until we reach the heart, the center which is magnificent because it has never seen the light of day. That is what the Good Lord does: he trims us down; he hammers us into detachment – that's the work of perfection. It is the same with you, my good and holy Daughters: what must remain in you is only your heart – everything else must go.

² '*notre esprit*': another translation – "our mind"



Points for reflection:

This instruction and the following 2 form part of the same subject (May 16, 20, 1862). Notice this key phrase to describe the process of transformation: **“Our Lord detaches us from the world and from ourselves in order to fill us.”** The various purifications of our soul are found in the work of transformation. We discover here the deep insight of the Founder to lead us to the transformation needed for an authentic spiritual life.