

Joy¹ in the Service of God

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament,
Paris, Monday, October 1, 1860

My Sisters, the topic of my conference is joy in the service of God. The Holy Spirit says, *sadness kills the soul* (Prv 17:22). This does not mean that the soul actually dies, but that sadness kills the strength and courage of the soul, placing it in the state of death. It is commonly said that someone who is discouraged feels defeated. Sadness in the service of God is a most dangerous temptation, because under the weight of sadness one tends to look for consolations. If these are not found in the service of God – perceived as looking for chains and a state of bondage – one will look for human consolations and thus become very vulnerable. Many abandon religious life and lose their honor in a moment of sadness or discouragement. The devil insists that this way of life is too hard and cannot be maintained. Such unhappy individuals open their heart to creatures and so lose their way. It is clear that sadness in the service of God is the main cause that has led many virgins to stray and many religious to lose their vocation. The devil is fully aware of this; when he can lead a pious soul into sadness, he knows that he has conquered.

My poor Daughters, guard yourselves against allowing sadness to come into your service of God, against dirtying your soul, against becoming discouraged when you cannot find what you are looking for. Our life is such that you must either go towards God or towards the devil. You cannot find human consolations, since everyone is trying to be spiritual, to be free of the old Adam, to be in our Lord. One who is not trying to disengage herself from her human weaknesses will not find any compensation; or if she does, there will be twofold suffering. On the part of God, if she grows lukewarm, she will imagine: No one loves me; even God no longer loves me. Her prayers will be badly done, and she will be tempted to stay away from Communion. What a terrible sadness! This is a state of temptation that must be avoided, because, deep down, there is a trace of self-love that fools even the best. In sadness, there is a certain feeling that can be mistaken for a religious feeling, namely, self-love: The Good Lord does not love me, no one loves me, and I am not happy. The “I” shows its horns on every side.

Let us differentiate several kinds of sadness.

Natural sadness is unimportant, harmless. It could become a temptation, but it’s practically nothing. This happens when sadness is vague, without specific cause; it’s a sort of mixed feeling that makes one sad. This sadness can come from some physical disposition, like fatigue; it can come from ageing that leads to sadness; or from being surrounded by persons whose sadness is contagious in spite of ourselves. While there is nothing dangerous here, we must not look upon this state as a reflection on our piety, or as an indication of our devotion towards God. See it merely as the weather, a nice or rainy day, or like some minor incident, and continue your journey towards God. Deal with it as one does with children who hurt themselves. We say: it’s nothing; and we distract them with something to play with. They no longer think about what happened and it passes. Worldly persons seek attention by acting melancholic, the meaning is clear. Here, it would be a waste of time. What’s the use crying when everybody is laughing?

A second kind of sadness comes from the devil. This is discouragement. This one is dangerous, and must be confronted with all our strength, because it becomes a temptation. A passing thought will be natural sadness, but this one from the devil comes from much higher. Everyone is subject to this

¹ Number 265. *La tristesse naturelle, diabolique, divine. La joie.* (Sadness that is natural, diabolic, and divine. Joy.)

temptation of sadness. I really believe this. The devil roams around us (cf. 1 Pt 5:8). He damns people in the world through joy, making them dizzy. And he tries to damn pious persons through sadness, by blinding them and tying them in knots.

There is yet another sadness that can come from God. This one has a special character, leading to recollection in God with gentle tears. It is a divine gift, which leads to a distaste for the vanities of the world. One who weeps seems to flourish in the presence of God. If you have such tears, I encourage you to take advantage of this dew from heaven. Our Lord wants to cry through you; your soul is at his feet like Magdalene.

In whatever state that God places you, strive for the joy of your state. If you feel a natural sadness, that's nothing; a diabolic sadness, fight it; that of God, if he gives it to you, accept it, but don't look for it. Why? The apostles were very happy, pleased to be with their Good Master. The Jews and their doctors of the law were jealous and complained: Why don't they fast? For the Jews, fasting was linked to sadness and mourning clothes. Our Lord answered: *This is not the time. The friends of the groom do not cry: they cannot, because it's time to celebrate* (cf. Lk 5:34). My poor Daughters, you are not only the friends of the groom, you are his spouses. Yours is a constant Feast of the Blessed Sacrament, a feast of love, a wedding banquet. This is your life.

Why do people weep? They weep over their losses. You possess everything with our Lord. Even if you lose your parents, your material possessions, your earthly freedom, you still possess Jesus Christ who is all goodness. You should always sing a hymn of thanksgiving. In the time of St. Dominic, it seems that there was a woman in Rome whose flesh was rotting away; yet she kept singing. She found joy in God. My riches, like a burden, have been taken away, and now I am free; I used to sing because I was rich, now I sing even more – who can take this joy away from me? St. Paul used to say: *Who can separate me from the love of Jesus Christ?* (cf. Rm 8:39) No one. A child is always happy with its father and mother; I am always happy with Jesus Christ.

Other reasons for weeping? The fear of separation in the face of death leads to weeping. We weep over the loss of parents and friends. We weep over some future evil. Personally, I cannot weep because I am with the Master. I am sure of one thing; his charity and goodness will continue increasing. His love will always grow; he is preparing graces for me, and he loves me more than all the riches of this world. Whom should I fear? The devil? I am stronger than he is. Human beings? They cannot take one hair from my head. They are only like little flies that can do nothing; therefore, I have nothing to fear. Why should I be sad, since I have been assured of always having the same happiness, the same grace, and the same love?

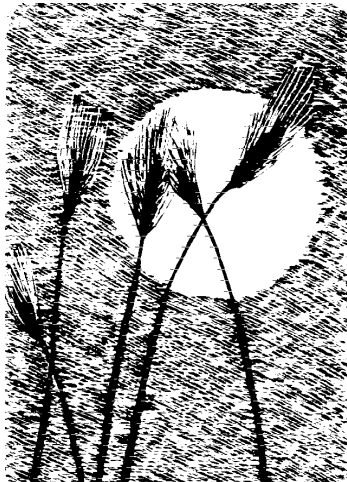
You say: That's not all; I'm afraid of offending the Good Lord. – That's good. – I'm afraid of being unfaithful to my vocation, and that the Good Lord will finally send me away if I am not loyal. – I understand that. – I'm afraid of abusing the grace of God; that's what makes me sad. – Wait a minute; not so fast! – I'm afraid; I'm like an animal. – We can offend God, but animals will never do so. A poet once said that the worst animal is the man of passions: when we know that there's a fire in the yard, we can avoid it. – I cannot do it. – Place your life, your body in our Lord Jesus Christ; it will no longer belong to you – it belongs to God.

We are dangerous only when we live for self, in self-love, an insane person can become wild. By following our passions we will fall into the abyss. Sadness belongs to the proud. The *Imitation* says: the proud and the greedy are always sad. Since we do not want to be proud, we should not be sad. Sadness will separate me from Jesus Christ, I don't want to lose my vocation by going away from the ark. Our Lord will always give me his grace. If I am a fool, that's different; then I no longer know what I am doing.

In our vocation, there is no reason for sadness, for you have the sovereign good, with the full assurance of loving him always. Just as our Lord told his apostles, you are loving in the time of celebration, at the great feast of poverty and humility. Our Lord invites you to holy Communion, his wedding feast; communion is the wedding of God with the soul. You may claim that all this requires sacrifice. Sacrifice always leads to our well-being, eliminating a burden and thus leading to freedom. Then also my poor Daughters, what are the angels and saints doing in paradise? They are absolutely happy. St. Augustine tells us that they adore, praise, and bless God and will do so for all eternity. Why? Because they are fulfilled. Will you not spend your life adoring, blessing, and loving? That presupposes joy. What kind of joy? The joy of love. What joy our Lord also experiences to discover one who loves him. I have often told you that the saints weep tears of joy, but they also weep over the sins of mankind. It must be so. A mother without tears would suffocate. Her love needs to find relief. From time to time one needs to weep, that does not take away one's peace.

How can I experience joy? Must I now teach you how to be happy! At the door of paradise, the Lord says: *Courage, good servant, come and share your master's joy* (cf. Mt 25:21,23). Since the Eucharist is the paradise of love, enter in with joy. You will find joy in loving our Lord. With joy, you will surely discover virtue, in fact, it will grow by itself, and this is why. When the sun shines, it brings with it its joyous rays. Since we have the Sun, we need not worry. God gives us joy, pours it into us. All we have to do is maintain and make it a state of blessing. Joy feeds on all that is good, while penance and mortification feed on what is evil, considering death and sin. Humility, too, is self-effacing. God is great, I am nothing. Rejoice in the graces of God, like a lamp that feeds on oil and cotton, burning constantly before you. **Graft your soul on the goodness of God, on the grace of every day, and you will always have joy. You will see him in all his goodness and always be at a feast. You will always be in the sun.**

[...]



Points for reflection:

Father Eymard presents four kinds of sadness, their causes, and how we should react. Describe these briefly. He also explains how we can nourish our joy. What link does he make between the Eucharist and joy?