

Liturgy. Union with God through Graces of Feeling and Light, and through Mystery¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Paris, Tuesday, August 7, 1860

There will be some slight changes in your schedule. This is necessary. You should be more like us, since you follow the same rule, and one day you will be like us. There will be a few modifications in the Office. You will rise at the same time as we do. You have personal prayer and we recite Lauds and Prime. That's the best prayer. I will teach you.

Remember that the value of your personal prayers lies in your fervor; personal prayers have a personal value. **When you use the prayers of the Church, they have the value of the Church's prayer.** They were inspired by the Holy Spirit; they are the prayers of the entire Church. These are liturgical prayers. You can see why we are so strict in the choice of our prayers. It is not a question of personal prayer; but in choosing public prayers or those of the community, we accept only liturgical prayers.

It is a great consolation for me to say, as I pray before God: Mine is the prayer of the entire Church since its beginning. I go back even to David and Moses. Although I may not understand everything, this is my prayer. Do you think we understand all the Psalms? We don't understand half of them. We understand a little; our intention suffices. When we don't understand a word, we take the intention of the entire Church. In the liturgy, there are some Hebrew words that we don't understand – we can even say that the spirit of faith is more valuable.

For Morning Prayer, we recite Lauds and Prime, the prayer of the Church. We don't use other prayers. For night prayer, we recite Compline. We don't make any meditation in the morning; we did when we first started. You make an hour of adoration in the evening for the meantime²; we do so at night. You have Mass, Communion, and thanksgiving, an excellent meditation worth many others. You stay there for more than an hour. Then you have your three hours of adoration. Do not add to that. You must not be more perfect than we are; it is important that you be like us. At first, we tend to add a little more; later on, we follow the rule. When the day comes, you will need only to receive our Lord; you will be within the rule. Simplify your life, that's the condition for true piety. Simplicity goes directly to duty and obedience. When God speaks, we follow.

Now, we will talk about a subject which is current and practical. **God has three ways of uniting himself to us, of working out our perfection and his glory on earth.**

The first is a grace of feeling, an endowment of his grace and of his love. The grace of feeling varies according to the gifts of God, but without any effort of our mind or reasoning. God does all the work; he gives it to us through his grace. We experience this often, for example, in extraordinary sacrifices. The Lord, who asked them of us, gives us a grace of consolation. We are immediately aware of it. Temptations, no doubt, will incline us towards evil, but God is there. At other times, the grace of consolation will carry us delightfully to God. Meditation becomes easy, time goes quickly, and the soul is very happy. God made this possible; it is union of feelings. When you experience it, you will be very

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² Until the Sisters would have their own chapel.

happy. Do not be attached to it; it is a state that passes like the wind. What should you do? Use it in the manner of a consolation. The *Imitation* says: In joy, think of the day of battle.

After Tabor comes the Garden of Olives. Never rest in a grace of feeling; it is like a little flower on the side of the road. We are inclined to rest in this grace, but that's a mistake. When the Good Lord wants us to enjoy it for a while we tend to say, the Good Lord is pleased. Now, I must rest, there's absolutely nothing else for me to do. What will happen? The night will come and we will be cold; then we will have to work. That is where we often fail, that is the reason for the lessening of our graces. God is very good, he gives us his fatherly grace, and we force him to hide his face, for we would no longer do anything.

The other grace is a grace of light. The first is a grace of feeling; the second is a grace of light. It consists in God showing us his light. This grace is worth more than a grace of consolation and goodness, because it lasts longer, is more stable. We can revive a truth in our minds, make it come back. The other grace is a passing delight, followed by aridity. The grace of light is sometimes also delightful; it comes by infusion, but it is similar to a conviction. This is more than when our heart is simply touched. It's as though we are in the truth, like someone totally exposed to the sun, this is worth more than understanding something through an obscure light. What must we do in this state? Be filled with it. God is showing us his truth, and he wants to give us one of the great signs of his love. This is similar to what happened to St. Ignatius at Manresa: God showed him his truth with such clarity that, he said, even if he did not have the gospels and the writings of the Apostles, what he saw would have convinced him.

When you receive this grace, what should you do? Remain in it as long as you can, and even recall that light. In a grace of consolation, keep going and do not just wait lazily. But in a grace of light, remain there as long as you can. God has pointed out a truth to you, he has come to enlighten you with his divine light, he has given an awareness of this truth, and he is more deeply within you than if he were present by reason. The apostles left us many written works, but we can sense that what they share is what they witnessed, what they saw and heard, especially the insights that bring out the truth of our Lord. St. Paul takes pains to describe the light he saw in Damascus. Regarding the feelings he experienced, he says nothing. They were merely transitory.

The grace of light ignites a fire that puts us in the truth. God gives the other grace once in a while, but he guides us through a grace of light. It's up to us to study, to search for the truth, to reflect on it, and to discover its beauty. That's prayer. Every grace begins by being a light, and we feel its warmth. Women tend not to persevere in their graces of light: this may be a failure of formation, of timidity, of fear of being deceived. You don't have speculative minds; fortunately, because that destroys the heart. God gave you the feelings of the heart, but you have a weaker nature. The women who wrote about God wrote better than men. Look at St. Catherine, the philosopher, who converted so many pagan philosophers. Look at Catherine of Sienna, St. Bridget who wrote with extraordinary depth, and St. Theresa... I don't need to mention her, because everybody knows her.

We must not be afraid to enter into God's light. How will you learn if you don't discover what is good and beautiful? Study his light, his inner activity. That is your particular science. Many people study only superficially and soon forget: such a science does not bear fruit in due time. This is also our fault as priests. We do not force ourselves to go deeper. You must go to the core, to the roots of the tree. It is a knowledge that does a lot of good; God is so good in himself. Here is the principle: rely only on him – the goodness of God.

The third kind or the third means of union with God is through mystery. These are the degrees: feelings, light, and mystery. The mystery of God in the world is grace. Why do we speak that way? In this state, God does not proceed with the same means, in the same way. No. The mystery itself cuts all the work short. God seems to paralyze all natural insights, in such a way that the soul needs only to

sacrifice itself. It need not see the reasons; it merely sees a sacrifice. It does not see its length, or its depth, or how long it will last. It knows only one thing: God wants it. Then it no longer looks for the reasons why: **God wants it, and so do I, and it dives into the will of God.** The more it makes this sacrifice of itself, the greater its perfection. How great this state is! You experience this occasionally; the Good Lord loves you too much not to give it to you. And when you are in it, you must beware of the devil who will say: Why do that? It's too demanding. Reason adds: It's too difficult; God does not want it. So, that's the danger.

Keep in mind that when the time of sacrifice comes, you have the first flower of love, the ease of Christian childhood. The longer you delay making the sacrifice, the more difficult it becomes. Eventually you may imagine that God does not want it, and remain passive. However, when the Good Lord shows it to us, it's better to act immediately, with the initial grace. It will be a hundred times easier than with a second grace. When we give in to ourselves, the Good Lord leaves us to ourselves. By responding immediately to the sacrifice, our nature will not have time to react; later on we would tremble and be paralyzed. Whenever you delay, remorse sets in, and the sacrifice becomes a temptation, something we need to talk about. We know that love should offer this beautiful flower to God. We say: The love of God always requires that we give something; that's true, but the world requires even more difficult things – so many troubles! If we were more generous, all would be over. But this state drags you into many faults. You would not have so much to confess if you did not delay in making the sacrifice: I will do it later, when I have time; I'll do it tonight; you drag this ball and chain all day long. Get rid of it immediately, if the Lord wants you to drag it, he will see to it.

Let's talk about Abraham. Here was a real sacrifice! My goodness, when we think about it! God had told him that he would have many descendants through his son; not Ishmael who was not important since he was the son of the slave girl. He told him: *Take your son, and offer him up as a holocaust to me on a height that I will point out to you* (cf. Gn 22:2). Someone else would have said: But you are forgetting something: I am the father – you are not thinking – it is against nature, I cannot force him, my son is grown, we must ask if he is willing, he is free, he has his own mind. And we must tell his mother: she lives only for him... Or... I will have it done by a faithful servant. Abraham says nothing – God had spoken. It was during the night. He got up, took a sword, some wood, two servants, some fire, and Isaac, and began to climb. Once on the mountain, he put the wood on the shoulders of Isaac, took the sword and acted.

Do you think this was easy for Abraham? His son...! God had spoken; he did not understand, but that was enough – God has a thousand ways to return him to me if he wants: I will give him. And poor little Isaac: *I see the sword and the wood, but where is the victim? – God himself will provide it* (cf. Gn 22:7-8). You know the rest of the story: when he arrived, he arranged the wood, he took Isaac who looked at him and understood. (Abraham) told him nothing... Isaac said nothing – he understood that God wanted this. He did not shout, not a word – he was as faithful as Abraham. Then Abraham lit the fire and took the sword. What happened...? Did God allow him to proceed? Did he cry out? No, he wanted the will of God. The angel then said: *Do not lay your hand on the boy, God is satisfied, since you did not spare your only beloved son* (cf. Gn 22:12). God promised him many things, as you know, and made him great. A ram was there, and Abraham sacrificed it.

You know that this mountain was the mountain of Calvary, and that our Lord was crucified in the same area. What a beautiful soul! Although Abraham had not seen our Lord, he was worthy of him. **Here is the mystery of faith: we understand that we are surrendering ourselves to the love of God who has loved us so much, who gave us everything.** We must give him the little sacrifices that he requests. At the point of death, what will make you happy? You will not find consolation in your prayers, good works and little virtues. What then? If you have sacrificed something to God, that will be your joy. You will

never say, I was very humble and performed many acts of penance. But you will see your little sacrifices, and you will again place them in the mercy of God. Then you will be happy.



Points for reflection:

The value of liturgical prayer, the graces of feeling, of light, and of union with God.
Reflect on each of these points and examine your own experience for times that correspond to these.
What do you find new in this conference?