

Recollection: Uncommon Today, Virtue and Grace of God in Us¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Paris, Friday, August 12, 1859

Please, may I ask you to pray for the poor little children who will make their First Communion on the Feast. They have a right intention and good will. God changes hearts, he makes saints out of ignorant men who understand nothing. Grace sanctifies them. This is really a great consolation. We are dealing with confused children who live in the midst of the world and its scandals. These are poor children who lack everything except their ability to beg.

I am very happy that our ministry has no glamour. We are instructing fifty children. Instead of our evening recreations, we try to make good Christians out of these children. The Good Lord sees what we are doing, and that's enough. He will reward us. If we were instructing twelve princes, people would praise us for our good work and exalt our community. How foolish the world is! For us these children are kings. They represent Jesus Christ who said: *Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me* (cf. Mt 25:40).

Tomorrow is a day of fasting, but you are all sick. Your mother will show you great charity, by replacing it with prayer. Accept humbly that you cannot do what the Church requires.

Let me return to my subject, recollection. Here, there are two things, or rather there are three: science, virtue, and grace.

First, science. What is the meaning of recollection? When a teacher wants to emphasize a point, he says: Pay attention, my children. Then they become attentive. This kind of attention is what we call recollection. In the same way, we focus on a subject. Recollection means to go from the outside to the inside, keeping the mind attentive. The more attention there is, the more perfect is the recollection. When one meditates on any topic without distraction, the mind is very attentive. Learning follows a similar procedure. One who studies and concentrates for several days will surely possess his subject and be totally engrossed in it. Without recollection, any interior work becomes mechanical and filled with distractions. It follows that recollection is nothing other than gathering oneself from the outside to the inside.

Secondly, virtue. Now, the objective changes. Recollection means to gather oneself around God, in God's presence. According to its spiritual meaning, recollection then consists in gathering oneself around God present within. The mind makes an act of faith in the presence of God in oneself; the heart, an act of love; the will, an act of giving; and the body, an act of respect. All this is done naturally and supernaturally. The natural task is to gather around God without any distraction. When we do this to please and honor God, it becomes supernatural. All this work becomes a virtue through the grace of God, which is never lacking. Everyone wants to be recollected, but not all have the power to do so. The proof is that in meditation the mind wanders like a leaf blown in the wind. The idea of adoring God does not capture the mind for long. All goes well when there is more consolation than virtue in the act. But when the consolation ends, all is lost since there is no habit of recollection; the mind flees and the effort becomes forced.

¹ Number 170. *Le recueillement rare de nos jours, vertu et grâce de Dieu en nous.*

To center on recollection, there must be an habitual awareness of God's presence within. I must see our Lord Jesus Christ in me, as my advisor, my strength, my love, my perfection, my all. When I need advice, strength, perfection, virtue, anything, I must not go looking for Jesus Christ outside of me, not even in heaven which is so vast that I could get lost on the way, that's not God's will. I must look for him in myself, since each one should be a tabernacle of God who delights in being with the soul who loves him. I must find him in me. Jesus Christ is in us to sanctify us; his grace works inside of us, not outside.

Sacred ministry, sacraments, external graces, all that the Church can do around us, will have grace, value, and reward only when we enter into ourselves. If grace does not find its completion within us, how can it work? To be convinced of this truth, look at the authorities who confirm this. St. Paul says: ***In God we live and move and have our being*** (cf. Acts 17:28) – we live in him like a fish in water, like a bird in the air: we live in him. There is no need to look for him at every moment, since our being lives entirely from him. St. Paul was talking to pagans when he said: ***The Lord does not dwell in sanctuaries – it is wrong for you to circumscribe God in a sanctuary*** (cf. Acts 17:24). He was talking about divine immensity; he was talking to strangers about God.

Jesus Christ goes further: ***Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him*** (Jn 14:23). God says: We will come, and we will make our dwelling. He says that he comes into the one who loves him, who keeps his word, and who wants to be his disciple and give himself totally to him. He does not say: Myself alone. Another text says: ***I will reveal myself to him*** (Jn 14:21) – that is for our Lord in person, but the union would not be complete enough. The entire Trinity comes into the soul that loves. Our Lord does not say: the Trinity is passing by; rather: ***We will come, and make our dwelling within this soul***. If one is in the state of grace, and you always are, it will form a society with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. What for? To carry on as in heaven: the Father, who engenders his Son from all eternity, continues to do so in me.

The Word is in me out of love, as in heaven. The begotten Word loves the Father as his source, and this love produces the Holy Spirit. My heart becomes an active paradise, where God the Father begets his Son, and where the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. This is all the work of God. Now, since the Word is Jesus Christ, and since he is my savior, and he says: ***Whoever loves me keeps my word, and I will reveal myself to him*** (cf. Jn 14:21), so he reveals himself to me and completes himself in me. The Word has become Jesus Christ only to unite me to himself in one being. He works in me, he continues his mission in me, just as on Calvary he gave himself totally for everyone. He does not stop there. He gives me new life. I am his child and he must feed me. He becomes both father and mother. This is the Lord Jesus in person sanctifying me. He does not entrust me to angels and saints, but to himself alone: *I will reveal myself to him*.

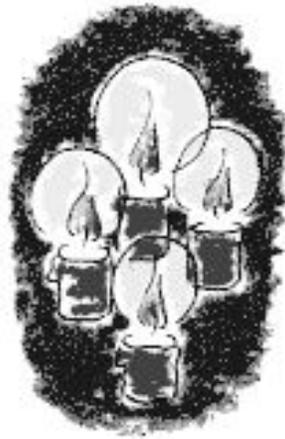
In another passage of Holy Scripture, we find ***Regnum Dei intra vos est — [The kingdom of God is among you]*** [Lk 17:21]. What is this kingdom? God reigns in a soul. He reigns in the soul of the just as on his throne, along with his treasures. The king reigns in his palace. Therefore, his palace is within me. His kingdom of truth and love is not outside me. I must not look outside of myself, this kingdom is nowhere else.

With regard to any faithful soul, above all the Blessed Virgin, the Holy Spirit says: ***God is in its midst; it shall not be disturbed*** (cf. Ps 45:6). The faithful soul possesses God in its midst, it should not be disturbed. God's inspiration must not be disturbed. This is divine inspiration. The prophets, the wise men, and the saints have much to say, but they are not in you. If you read them, you cannot understand, that must be done interiorly. When our Lord told the disciples of Emmaus about his sufferings and death, they understood nothing. After they had eaten, they said: ***It's true: were not our hearts burning within***

us (cf. Lk 24:32). Before that, they were too boorish to understand. Jesus Christ came to complete the inspiration and to open their bodily eyes.

You know very well that the Trinity abides in you, and that God is in your soul. The soul of the just is the throne of God, says St. Gregory. Jesus Christ is in you, not only by grace, but personally, to be your guide, your truth, and your life. Consult him within yourself, recollect yourself, as a living ciborium.

The martyr Christopher was asked: What is your name? – Christ-bearer. – I will drive him out of you by dirtying you; you carry in you the Spirit of God, I will drive him out; you will be led to death. **Christ-bearer – that’s the great answer: I must bear Jesus Christ within me.** If I am recollected, I will never be alone – I will be in the company of God, and the secret will be to prolong this recollection as long as I can. That is the exercise of the virtue of recollection.



Points for reflection:

In this conference notice the progression of thought: science, virtue, grace. Notice the Scripture texts used to describe recollection. Pray over them after communion. Notice the Trinitarian teaching.