

Renouncing the Mind, the Heart¹, and the Will

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Paris, Friday, July 22, 1859

My Sisters, in our last meeting, we told you that you had to be free [...] and you certainly understand why this is important. In order to be always with God, you must not be occupied with extraneous thoughts and affections – let us add: we must be free from the evil ones in order to have peace: *Deny yourselves* (cf. Mt 16:24), says our Lord.

What is this self-denial? It means to crucify oneself by dying to the old self. To better understand this, let's go into some details. When my mind wants something that is not according to my vocation, grace will say: You must make a sacrifice; it's useless. There is a conflict: the interior self who wants to please our Lord renounces what the mind wants. It costs – it always does, but grace will be victorious over self-love. I could propose something – a good action – but the others don't agree. Surely, they can see things more clearly than I can: I must renounce it, and renounce my way of thinking that I thought was good. Of course, in this there is no question of sin, or something that is bad. This involves doing something more perfect than holding on to my own preference.

It's very difficult to renounce oneself. Many leave religious life because they don't want to make **the sacrifice of their mind**, especially men – this does not happen as often with women. Someone who is studying will hold on to his opinion, he will argue – self-love is involved. This happens every day in communities of learned men, like the Jesuits and the Dominicans – they don't want to renounce their mind. They have adopted a system of thinking, and they end up by sacrificing their vocation. Oftentimes, there are scandals. I saw some questions of philosophy become the cause of many departures. This is what we call adoring our mind. You will receive candidates who will have studied, who will have gone to several communities, and who will be familiar with religious life. Human nature will make its voice heard. We must not attach ourselves to any system of thought, or to colors – keep your souls at peace: be very humble. So much for the mind.

For the heart: we must renounce our will, our own heart, because our heart creates our chains. We must renounce our affections when they are out of line, and even sometimes when they are good. We must renounce our affections when they are against the love of God, to seek only the good pleasure of God. Peace does not consist in enjoyment. Our Lord always did what pleased his Father (cf. Jn 8:29); he did not seek himself. Sometimes, people are very troubled: everything seems lost for them. Go back to the cause – some very small thing that they had to sacrifice, a little speck of dust. How the heart makes us suffer! We begin to love a thing before sacrificing it – we are always on a cross, and say: it's very difficult, it's very hard. We must place our peace in renunciation – at first we are sad, but then we act joyfully.

The *Imitation* gives us four means to obtain **peace**. It tells us that peace consists of having less than more, of doing the will of others rather than your own. **The first thing** is to renounce our affections, and to do this every day. **The second** is to renounce our will, what we like, and what we like today will not be what we will like tomorrow. We must not be sad, since tomorrow we will still have a cross – if it is not internal, it will be external. God does not allow us to be so attached to his love that there will not be any more suffering, so that we can have a little merit.

¹ Number 138. *Renoncement de l'esprit et du cœur*.

Our Lord goes further: we must hate ourselves (cf. Lk 14:26). It is better to consider my thoughts and feelings in relation to obedience. To hate one's soul is wrong and would cause grievous faults. However, our Lord requires it if our life or our will are opposed to the law and will of God. Then we must make that sacrifice and "hate" ourselves. The martyrs gave up relatives and their lives out of love;. When they were offered great honors, they despised them: I would lose too much – heaven in exchange for a created thing, my soul in exchange for my body which will disintegrate into dust: there's too much to lose. Then, the love of our Lord was victorious. We have daily proof of the contrary: a little sleep revives the old self in us. Then, let us take up the cross of our Lord again.; We do not aim for perfect rest, but to die. If your mind has no bad thoughts, it will have natural ones: persons most advanced in prayer are always struggling with the basic things, and a greater gift introduces us to a new grace.

There are three stages of grace: the inspiration, the conception, and the birth – then we move on, until the work is finished. Another grace arrives: another sun rises; it has its midday and its setting – we never reserve the same grace; it is constantly changing: there is manna today, but tomorrow there will be none – the Good Lord changes his graces. The Good Lord has so ordered things that the more we love, the more we will suffer to detach ourselves [from created things] – the greater our union with God, the more are we detached from creatures and created things. [...] St. Paul wanted to die (cf. 2 Cor 5:1-8), and Elijah said: *This is enough, O Lord! Take my life, for I am no better than my fathers* (cf. 1 Kgs 19:4).

Why does God give so many graces on the one hand, and, on the other, leave such a great weight of misery? Sometimes we say: I would like to be a martyr. It's very beautiful to get rid of this life with one stroke of a sword, but St. Bernard tells us that religious life is a daily martyrdom, and that it is worth more, because the soul has as many rewards as it has occasions to immolate itself. We need great courage and a pure love, because our enemy is very wise, very shrewd, and so subtle that we look for our own advantages even in the things of God – we begin a work for God, and we end [up doing it] for the devil. Our Lord says: ***Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test*** (cf. Mt 26:41) – our Lord is bringing our crown: we will make it ourselves with the grace of God.

People say: I will work for eight, ten years, and then I will live from my pension (income). But that doesn't happen, because sickness comes when we want to retire: our sufferings are worse now, than all that we did to arrive at this state of rest. It is not like that in religious life: we are never finished; there is no retirement to anticipate. We say: I finished my novitiate, my profession; what else must I do? I'm finished – I will rest. Not at all! We are always aspirants, always novices – you will never reach the time for rest. Our Lord said: ***Be perfect. There are no limits, except the perfection of God himself*** (cf. Mt 5:48).

Do not become attached to the gifts of God: always desire the more perfect things. When you will have made great sacrifices, you will enjoy great peace, a great reward. Sometimes, everything seemed lost: we kept the purity of our suffering, but it was isolated. We did not really accept the weight of this cross when the nature of the suffering changed. What soul has not experienced this? God sends consolations, because God knows our weakness. He arranges his grace with great care, but he does not want us to demand it like a mercenary, to love him only for his gifts. **Look for strength**, with Samson (cf. Jgs 16:28); look for the cross, and you will find the kindness of God, since love knows how to find our Lord. You will find him on Calvary by crucifying yourself, in order to arrive at the resurrection in joy and happiness. **Oh! If only you knew how to detach yourself from all things, as the *Imitation* says, what peace you would enjoy!**

The things of this world begin with a flower, and we allow ourselves to be lured by it, and we give ourselves to it. All appears to be beautiful and magnificent – the dangers are hidden. People are fooled even in marriage contracts – when all is signed, it's too late. There is no wealth; characters are difficult; there are thorns behind the roses. Our Lord, on the contrary, speaks about crucifixion, Calvary, total

renunciation – and when this is done, there is contented love. Our Lord requires a sacrifice – often, he goes no further: we take the knife, but he stops our hand. How often is he satisfied with merely accepting the sacrifice (cf. Gn 22:1-18)? After a continual crucifixion comes a new life – oh happy death, that gives such a beautiful life!

We often hear: Cut and remove. But this is not what our Lord wants. Although he wants us to take the initiative, we must ask his assistance: I will do it, but please help me. Judith, when confronting the enemy of her people, could have said: Kill him by an angel – but no, she holds his head by the hair and she prays for strength (cf. Jdt 13:7). We must say: Lord, here I am; give me the strength – I come to you; then, cut and remove. Then we will enjoy a great peace. Since we are holding on to nothing – neither to our will, nor to our life – what can we worry about? My Sisters, the only remaining thing would be your vacillating will. If you give your will, if you place it into the hands of God, you will be more powerful than your enemies. Take courage. Do not say: Make me die. Rather, may you die to yourself. The Apostle has this to say: *You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God* (cf. Col 3:3).

When a person is not in a bad mood, he feels fine; when a soul does not have any bad affections, it is free like an eagle – it can climb the heights of the sky very quickly; it is strong, like the angels. The body is the victim of the sacrifice, but the pure soul lives the life of the angels. What a beautiful life is the life of our Lord in the Blessed Eucharist who tells us what we must do to become perfect!

The time for your retreat is coming next week. Prepare yourselves well, so that I may give you a good basic retreat. It will be what you make it. My part is to give you ideas, but you must sow them. Die, since it is through you that death will take place. **What a joy to place yourselves in the grace and spirit of your vocation!** Desire it. It is the goal of your perfection. Pray to the Good Lord that there will be no obstacles, and that all will go well.



Points for reflection:

Pick out the Scriptural texts found in this instruction. What is the positive purpose of renunciation? What points are useful to you at this time of your life?