

Self-love¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Paris, Thursday, July 28, 1859

My Sisters, see how quickly time flies: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday – here we are already in the middle of the retreat. It's good, if you are faithful to grace.

We will reflect on the principal enemy to the love of our Lord, since this love must be your life, your perfection, and your crown some day. What is this enemy, my dear Sisters? For us it is not mortal sin or venial sin. What is it? It is self-love, two loves fighting each other – the reign of one necessarily destroys the reign of the other. God is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8), and man is love – God wants to be loved royally [above all]. Man wants to love royally, but the two loves are always in conflict. Man cannot live without love – if he loves himself, he is unhappy. In religious life, everything leads us to love God. Where does our love for money and creatures lead us? It is for self, for personal self-love. The love of God in man consists in referring everything to his glory.

[...]

Love of God refers everything to God, while self-love refers everything to self: it holds onto honor and glory. The soul that loves God will refer to him the honor of what is good. There is no thought of sacrifice – she does it humbly, purely, and simply with love; she is very happy to give pleasure to God. The other person, who has love of self, believes that she is someone important: she crowns herself with what she does – she wants to have the glory of being considered good and generous, and whatever you want. What happens? Such a one becomes an idolater, with nothing else than self-love. This is a direct confrontation to the reign of God in us; she is working only for herself.

Our Lord said to the Pharisees: *I seek the glory of my Father, but you seek your own glory: when you do a good action, do not blow a trumpet before you – you have received your reward: you are seeking glory and a crown; you will not be crowned in heaven* (Mt 6:1-2). May God preserve us! If love is motivated by God and purely for his glory, we will not become captives of our enemy. Why was the angel driven out of paradise? He wanted to steal God's glory, to exist by and for himself. He saw his beauty and did not refer it to God. He said: I am beautiful. He saw his learning, his strength, his intelligence, and his power, and he said: I am learned, strong, intelligent, and powerful. He took the honor; he stole it; he appropriated it to himself. What happened? God drove him out of paradise and created hell. We imitate him when we want to appropriate glory and our good qualities to ourselves, and not refer everything to God.

All good things come to us from our Lord: he gives them to us on condition that we give him the glory – it belongs to him. He gives us the capital and leaves us with the profit – what is impossible, he wants to make possible. You will have the booty, you will have heaven, and contentment, but the glory is mine. We would be foolish to refuse this to him. That's when pride wakes up, idolatry and war step in. All sins – from mortal sin to the least venial sin – have their source in self-love. There are different names, but, fundamentally, the source of vice is self-love. As the Holy Spirit says: *Pride is the beginning of all sin* (Eccl 10:13). By cutting the roots, there will no longer be bad fruits; by eliminating the source, there will no longer be any polluted streams.

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Charity consists in loving our neighbor out of love for God. Before Jesus Christ, we loved our neighbor as much as ourselves; but since Jesus Christ, we must love him, in some circumstances, even more than ourselves. We must place his spiritual welfare ahead of our temporal gain. Our Lord, who is worth more than us, did this for us. St. John says: *Love one another, as Jesus Christ has loved you* (cf. 1 Jn 4:11).

Charity consists in seeing our neighbor in the gifts, in the love, and in the mercy of God, as his creature, to see him, to support him, to work for his salvation, to pardon him as Jesus Christ does, and to treat him as Jesus treats him. We must see the graces, while the defects, the bad qualities are not our concern: leave that to [God's] justice. What we must have is compassion – self-love is the enemy of charity for our neighbor. The love of charity is very easy when we serve God perfectly; with love, we look to the conversion of our neighbor because we love God. We see poor people enticed by the devil and dragged as innocent [lambs] to be slaughtered. We want to save them, not to obtain esteem, but because they are God's creatures – to please him, since he asks for this.

Self-love, instead of drawing the neighbor to God, draws him to itself. Instead of telling him: Love God, it says: Love me. Instead of telling him: Refer everything to God, it says: Refer everything to me. It diverts him from his goal – this is stealing, and a kind of sacrilege: it is robbing from God the love of his family, like a ravenous wolf. Our Lord becomes jealous; his justice is stirred up. In nature wild beasts, even the most gentle ones, even the sweetest mother will be upset if we take away their young ones – they even become furious (cf. Hos 13:5-8).

To become a center for our neighbor is quite wrong. We do this without being aware of it – that's what worldly people do. In the same way, it often happens that self-love makes its center in our neighbor – he is noble and honored, and I say: I will attach myself to him, and I will share his prestige; he is rich, and I say: I will share his well-being; she is gracious, and I say: I will love her, so that she will love me. If you see yourselves clearly, these are two servitudes [you become the center for your neighbor / or the neighbor becomes your center] – instead of the consolation and joy of virtue, you have preferred what is human. You have spoiled everything – what an insult!

[...]

Think about it, and you will see that self-love is the enemy of God, and of your own spiritual growth. What do you want? That is the enemy you must fight.

Points for reflection:

What is the center of my life? God? My neighbor? Myself? Like a parasite that strangles a healthy plant, self-love strangles the good that we can do. What means can help us to avoid this?