

Sins Against Charity ¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament,
Paris, Monday, July 9, 1860

This conference will complete this morning's meditation. **Above all, we must be very careful and strict in avoiding all sins against charity.** These offend our Lord much more than other sins, because our Lord is love and the command of charity is closer to his heart than all others. This precept contains the entire law. Our Lord said: *If you are merciful, I will show mercy to you* (cf. Mt 5:7). His rule of conduct towards us will be taken from the way we treat others.

You know that you can hurt a friend by insulting a friend of his. A friend is more important to a person than his own life. God seems to be more affected by sins against our neighbor than those against himself. This is a fact of experience. St. Vincent Ferrer tells us, God is so angry over sins against our neighbor that he does not wait until the next life to punish them. He punishes them in this life, either by allowing us to fall into the same fault, or by punishing us with the same suffering. St. James said: *If a person is without fault in speech he is a man in the fullest sense, because he can control his entire body* (Jms 3:2). This proves that charity is in the heart and that one has self-control. When you want to judge a saint, judge him by his charity.

The faithful in apostolic times were of one heart and one mind, said St. Luke in the Acts of the apostles; *none of them ever claimed anything as his own; rather everything was held in common* (cf. Acts 4:32). The charity of the first Christians was so evident that the pagans were saying, See how they love one another! St. Pacôme, a pagan, upon arriving in a certain place was received with such charity that he and his companions were converted. He said: This religion is better than mine. Charity is a royal virtue; let it guide your conduct.

Avoid all sins against charity and make this the subject of your examen. You know that sins against charity, as against other virtues are committed in thoughts, words, actions, and omission. Let us now look closely at these four areas.

Sins in thought. First, rash judgments. Any judgment is forbidden, for no one is appointed as judge of another in this life. Obviously superiors must answer for the souls under their care; but even in these cases charity sets certain limits. Secondly, hatred. There are degrees, beginning with lack of esteem and antipathy and proceeding to separation, then hatred enters the heart, and the person is detested.

We must then avoid all evil thoughts against the neighbor because this interior disposition is the cause of many sins, such as unfounded suspicions. All judgments of a person's interior motives are expressly forbidden. At most, a person's actions may be the object of judgment. Any act of stealing or impurity is indeed bad and undoubtedly sinful. However, let us not go further in our judgment. No one can judge a person's intention. This fault may have been committed in a moment of frailty or as the result of temptation. While this may not entirely excuse a person's guilt, it is better to go no further. St. Bernard writes: If you can, excuse the action; if not, then excuse the intention or think of it as lightheaded. If you cannot find excuse for the intention, then humbly admit that had I been in her place I'd have done even worse because I am much weaker. In this way, charity triumphs. As a general rule, do not consider your

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neighbor's interior. It is best to avoid the dangerous and burning territory of sympathy or antipathy. The *Imitation* invites us to keep the heart free of all persons in order to be happy.

Sins of speech. St. James says that *the tongue exists among our members as a whole universe of malice* (cf. Jms 3:6). A single word can start a huge fire of scandals that will lead to thousands of sins. What are these sins? My God, all sins stem from speech, but especially those concerned with the sins of our neighbor. Do not act that way; look for the good in others. When we concern ourselves with evil and culpability, this is not our responsibility. Why risk setting ourselves up as judges?

Slander implies revealing hidden faults that may be real to some extent, but why bring them into the open? This is the fruit of great pride, undue eagerness to speak of the secret frailties of others. God will ordinarily punish such behavior. Imagine a cesspool. Left untouched, the water loses its fetid odor under a surface crust. Anyone who disturbs the surface will affect the entire region with a foul smell. An evil tongue will likewise become a source of scandal, even in a moment of thoughtlessness. A slanderer is like a serpent slinking into a group, spreading an evil poison among the naive. Let us avoid all this. There is a theological principle that one must take responsibility for any sin of which one is the cause. If a word I say becomes a cause of sin for an entire region I will be responsible for the fire I have ignited. Slander is like a flood.

Calumny means a false accusation against a person. In matters of lesser importance, it is easy to mention suspicions, impressions, attributing bad motives, or even some evil that did not actually happen. Be very careful in this area.

Besides these sins in thoughts and words, **there are also sins of actions**, as many as there are types of acts. The ordinary sins against our neighbor are impatience, malicious jokes, antipathy in relationships, a kind of sadness. All these sins are mentioned in the theology of St. Thomas. There are also sins against humility. To despise our neighbor, to fail to show him the respect he deserves, to have him despised by others, to consider ourselves better than he is, all these sins are absolutely against charity. A clever person easily becomes impatient and quick to explode. When we are a bit proud, it's so natural to look down on our neighbor, especially when there is antipathy.

Sins of omission. This means failing to give our neighbor his due either in external relationships, or those of politeness and esteem. These refer to his spiritual needs in the form of corrections and spiritual admonitions, either from the rule or from charity. A charitable person will warn another with charity and gentleness, because she loves that other person: There are thieves over there, ready to attack you. If she knows this, but says nothing, what do you call that? It's homicide. Do not do that. You might see another person with a defect that would be laughed at in the world... We avoid these sins. One might say: It is not my concern that she looks bad, and is poorly dressed. That's being egoistic. A person in trouble happens to need my help, but I leave her alone, saying, Someone else will help her. Let charity towards to our neighbor be like that of God towards us. Then charity will reign in us.

All this pertains to external charity. There is also an interior charity, which replaces many actions. There are those who claim to be oblivious of others, living in solitude and unaware of the needs of the people around them. God has need of human arms and of prayers. If you don't do this, another will. Prayer can replace acts of charity; how many saints did nothing else. Let us hope that you will be daughters of charity, not only in name, but in fact. Let charity be the center of your life. This community above all calls for charity. Love of neighbor must go together with your love of God. Without charity, one will not persevere. At present, you are but a tiny family. When others come, may they notice that this is a good place because genuine charity reigns among you.

Do not have a false, artificial charity. Charity is as simple as the heart of our Lord. Like goodness, it is simple in words and actions. Simplicity is truth; virtue is practiced without any fanfare and noise. Remarkable things are done as though they are the most common. Charity makes us forget ourselves for the love of God. Nothing is so detestable as something false and artificial in the service of God. You must have nothing like that. If someone has such a defect, try to make it go away.

Charity is gentle, friendly, and gracious, not stern. It has the charm of our Lord, it is pleasant. When charity that expresses the grace of God in us is missing, it is noticeable. People will then see us as strict and harsh, like a flower without fragrance, a service rendered with bad blood.

Take care to give these two characteristics to your charity, simplicity and pleasantness. This is more difficult when living in community. Familiarity creeps in, and we treat each other as hired workers or as school-children. Charity is constantly tested. You must always consider your sisters as queens belonging to the court of the King of kings.

Your charity must be, not only simple and pleasant, but also be steady. If it is not steady – today, like this; tomorrow, like that – it will be like you who are changing at every moment. It must be the same at all times, the expression of your soul. God is charity, and whoever abides in charity abides in him (cf. 1 Jn 4:16). You must always love the purity of our Lord, and in order to keep your charity steady, feed it as you do a lamp; otherwise it will go out. If only you could come to that point of perfect charity, how good it will be!

We call the Blessed Virgin, Mother of Beautiful Love, and you are her daughters. What will happen if you imitate her? Our Lord will be very pleased. He will no longer find war, thorns that tear his heart. Yours will then be a little paradise!



Points for reflection:

What are the principal sins against charity?

What are the main qualities of true charity expressed here?