

# The Purity of Love<sup>1</sup>

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament,  
Nemours, Saturday, November 10, 1866

**God loves you with an infinite, perpetual, and eternal love, that is my hope, since he has given you sufficient signs of that love.** Now, you should want to love him as much as you can. In order to love the Good Lord well, my Sisters, you must be pure and not offend him. You must avoid everything that displeases him, that's the one and only proof that you love the Good Lord. To love him perfectly, you must give yourself in religious life. Try to be good religious. If you want to strive even further, give your personality, renounce all personal privileges, have nothing for yourself, **give yourself to God for God. Have no other honor than to serve him, no other consolation than to love him.** Renounce whatever people want to give you, saying, I can no longer receive anything. Refer everything to your master. You will have to practice this constantly and give glory to God by your whole being. How should you preserve this gift of your personality to our Lord? Take on the personality of Jesus. Make an exchange with him, that's all. Jesus takes charge of me; he receives honor and affection. I am merely his human nature, no longer a person, since I have given myself away. A servant doesn't belong to herself; she belongs to the master.

My good Daughters, no one can give you anything, you can no longer receive anything, because your personality belongs to our Lord. Should anyone seek to love you as a person, do not steal anything from the Lord! To be faithful, you need special graces of humility and self-annihilation. **And what is humility?** It is a participation in the state of our Lord, a state of humility and self-emptying. Anything humiliation that requires me to go beyond self is still less than what our Lord suffered, and I deserve much more than that. But the heavenly Father intervenes. My God, what a privilege you are giving me by treating me like your divine Son! You treat me with heavenly strictness, to see if I love you, for humility is the life of your love. Be humble of heart, of mind, of will, of body, and of life – that is the only way to give witness of your love for our Lord. A spouse follows the life of her husband, nothing else!

**Now something else is needed.** If the soul limited itself to humility, it would be true, but it would lack strength. It would be pure, and our Lord would love it because of its humility, but something would be missing; namely, virility. That which differentiates an adult from a child is strength, the virility of love. *Love is strong as death* (cf. Sg 8:6). Love makes work possible. Calling us to work, our Lord appeals to humility, because humility is your life and gives you a likeness to our Lord. To resemble our Lord, you must work like him. Listen to the truth. The love of God demands that you take no pleasure without him. That's the final word of love. If we love God as he requires, we must take no pleasure outside of God. That sounds easy, and yet it is most difficult because it is love in action, the highest degree of love.

**If you want to enjoy nothing besides the Lord, your master,** keep no secret treasure for yourself. Beware of any infidelity or indelicacy! You can grasp this as much as I do. In the natural order a friend cannot invite someone else without also inviting his friend, otherwise there will be trouble. That's the custom. The ignored friend might say, Why didn't you invite me, your close friend? That must not happen, because it is the law of love. Your friend must share in all your joys. Worldly people are very attentive to these things, which can lead to frequent misunderstandings. People are like that! A child is no different. If it has a party and receives something, immediately it will bring it to its mother, saying: I will give it to mama. That is the normal love of a child. Beyond this, see a wife with her husband, [...]

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<sup>1</sup> Number 619. *La pureté de l'amour.*

she cannot accept an invitation without her husband. She cannot accept a gift or present, unless he tells her to take it; she accepts no praise without her husband, or independent from him.<sup>2</sup> [...] This would be an insult to her husband.

**And so, what is the first thing that comes to your mind when you love someone?** I will invite him; I cannot live without the one I love. I cannot do it. If you love our Lord perfectly, as the law of your heart and your life, can you accept a flower of praise without offering it to him? Impossible! How can you enjoy any pleasure without our Lord? Again, impossible. Understand this clearly. If you want to love our Lord, never accept praise and pleasure without our Lord. Renounce all pleasure without our Lord. Is that clear? This seems only right and proper. I consider this as the highest perfection. If you do this, you will be very pure.

If you understand this principle, put it into practice. Our Lord says to one he loves, *Give me your heart* (cf. Prv 23:26). These words are asking more than just the heart; he wants all affection. Clearly, the spouse in the Song of Songs says: *My lover belongs to me, and I to him* (cf. Sg 2:16). I too belong completely to him, not just body and soul, but every thought and affection... in a word, everything.

Our Lord praised his apostles highly in his last sermon during the Last Supper by saying: *You have always remained faithful to me in my trials and temptations. And so, now I give you my heavenly kingdom given to me by my Father, because you remained faithful to me in my trials.* What does this mean? Why did our Lord mention temptations and sufferings? This means that the apostles did not want any other satisfaction than those of our Lord, they wanted no joy outside of him. When our Lord was persecuted and tempted, they were there with him. When our Lord was insulted, his apostles were also insulted, because he was their master. They lived with him and for him. He then told them: *Because you always remained faithful to me in my temptations and trials, I give you, from this moment, the kingdom that my Father gave me* (cf. Jn 15:27; 17:22). And he foretold, *Amen, amen, I say to you, you will weep and mourn, while the world rejoices; you will grieve, but your grief will become joy* (cf. Jn 16:20). This is what he promises his disciples.

[...]

**Now, you must avoid all pleasures, all satisfactions that, in themselves, are imperfect or bad or can become a temptation.** Free yourselves of all that and guard against all sensual temptations [...]. Besides, avoid all greediness that takes more than is needed. Keep a balanced sobriety. If you go too far, there will be a venial sin of sensuality. For the body, there are so many sins of sensuality of life. However, don't be afraid. Nothing obstructs the soul more than constant fear. No, don't be afraid; rather be vigilant in duty and prudently delicate. When fear comes, simply reject it.

**Furthermore, don't be afraid of future pleasures that you don't have yet,** because the devil will entrap you. Just be vigilant (watchful). If you like something that is tempting you, and you feel your sensuality being affected, note that there's something underneath all this – a sensuality of mind, of body, or whatever. Many temptations can be rejected right away. My God, I don't want any pleasure outside of you. If you notice it too late, you will have more difficulty. Some are too lazy, too slow, allowing temptation to enter their heart. To them I say, You were not prudent, not vigilant, since you did not notice this immediately. Why didn't you reject it? – Because it was just a little thing. – You are very imprudent: you allowed the spark to remain too long on your hand, and you got burned. You fool! You should have shaken it off your hand. – But I wasn't paying attention. – You are very negligent. There was no sin, but you were negligent. You certainly were not on guard.

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<sup>2</sup> Images taken from a past culture to illustrate the nature of our relationship with Our Lord.

That's the true rule for you to follow, your virtue; after that there is nothing else to do. But sensuality – the old Adam – can always bother us. Sensuality has little concern for faith, and for love of God. Our body and senses have no faith. The old Adam is concerned only with enjoying himself. He is always looking for ways to take something for self in connivance with the devil, to cause you worries, to make you review your temptations saying, I felt a temptation, and I want to see how serious it was. You fool! You have already allowed the spark to burn one hole, and now you want to make another by allowing it to return. The devil wants to trick you, under the pretext of examination. Ah! You are really the poor daughters of your mother Eve.

That is how we get soiled and grow anxious. There is some satisfaction in reviewing sins of sensuality and the satisfaction of the senses. Even if we humble ourselves, returning to a sensual temptation will make it troublesome. As soon as it comes, reject it without examining it, it is either pride or sensuality. As soon as you notice, cut it out, and never return to it. Then you'll remain whole, and not waste time by getting lost in the clouds under the pretext of humility. This is a diabolical humility. Later on in your confessions, you may be troubled again. This is useless, just be prudent. This is a good and safe rule. Stay too busy to battle against the devil, don't take the time. Do not stay in the marshes; climb the mountain. If he comes, just tell him: Wait a minute, I have something to do. Then slam the door shut, and let him shout outside. Have you understood this?

**First, it's important to avoid seeking any sensual satisfaction. Secondly, even good and proper pleasures that are without our Lord should be avoided.** Some pleasures that are somewhat natural are permissible and can be enjoyed in peace. When God gives us sunshine, it can be enjoyed. There is no sin in enjoying anything that is good in itself. This is a pleasure that has no evil in it. However, while enjoying the sun, lovely flowers and their aroma, one can exclaim, God is surely a great artist, creating all these beautiful things! I can acknowledge that the Good Lord did all this for my sake, all beautiful things, fruits, harvests. All that is beautiful causes me to rejoice, and there is definitely no sin in that.

**Surely the Good Lord created the sun, the stars and the planets to be looked at!** If a naturalist seeks pleasure in all these things as an ultimate goal, then he vitiates what is good in itself. There is nothing wrong in enjoying a flower and its scent along the way. Eating a delicious fruit may be the occasion of an act of praise of the Good Lord, who in his goodness created such wonderful things. This is true even if in my sinfulness I deserve only vinegar and bitter herbs. Since you created all this for me, I praise and thank you, my God, for your kindness. Just refer everything to God. To stop too long, however, to enjoy once, twice, and three times, may be a form of gluttony. It is important to center on God more than on God's gift. If God gives me a good bed, let me thank God while enjoying it. All these are innocent pleasures that the Good Lord sends us to comfort us in this time of exile. Merely accept them and cry out, My God, how good you are!

**Some saints have an excessive spirit of mortification, depriving themselves of all satisfactions. Others, like St. Francis de Sales, refer everything to God; he was ecstatic at the sight of a flower.** St. Francis of Assisi would thank God for consoling him: O my God, I thank you, because I was suffering so much! In this, he was greater than one who would have refused any consolation. This is marvelous. One day, when he was very sick, he longed to eat a certain fish, but he didn't have any. There was a spiritual daughter who was very dedicated to his order and to the spirit of poverty. He decided to write her. Almost immediately, the fish arrived. Then St. Francis had the initial idea not to eat it, because he reproached himself for wanting this little pleasure. Then he said, That would disappoint our dear sister; I must tell her that I enjoyed eating it. Isn't that good? And St. Francis of Assisi was no small saint.

This is how you must act. Enjoy things not for themselves, but **to thank our Lord for his goodness.** When he gives you good health, say: My God, I want to use this in your service; I will adore better. Thank you. That's how we should understand things. The Good Lord makes use of nature in order to

give us, not just natural satisfactions, but ever new signs of his goodness. Let us go even further. If God sends you an angel and you reject it saying, I want only to be crucified, this would be pride, pure and simple. After this angel left, you would regret it, because the devil would take its place. When the Good Lord sends me an angel to give me good advice, he is sending me some help. Then, if I am pure, I thank the Good Lord, but I don't cling to the creature that he sends me. No. I thank the Good Lord, but I don't miss that creature once his mission is completed; it's finished. Stay with God and in God, My God, I am with you. When on an errand, if anyone asks, Where is your father? – Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. [...] My master is waiting for me; I obey him.

St. Raphael told Tobit that he was one of the seven principal angels ever present before God; and he said: *Because you have set aside your rest in order to do an act of charity, and that you have taken all your goods to offer them to God, you are pleasing to him*. When the angel had finished speaking, Tobit said to him: *What can we offer to you?* But the angel told them: *I do not need anything; God sent me to you because he is pleased with your charity; and he added: I am Raphael, one of the seven angels of the heavenly court*. Looking at him, they are stricken with fear and fall to the ground. Then he told them: *It appeared to you that I was eating, but my food is entirely heavenly food; and he added: Praise God, and disappeared while repeating: Praise God* (cf. Tb 12). Then, they praised God for three hours and did not continue searching for the angel. My Sisters, I allow you to take everything that God sends you, but don't take merely natural pleasure in these gifts.

Is that all? Oh no! You must be even more perfect. One who loves the Good Lord and who gave him her personality no longer knows how to enjoy anything without our Lord. You must share all your joys with him if you want to be as sensitive as a spouse. Like a spouse, you cannot be happy without our Lord. When someone gives you a delicious fruit, will you hide in a corner to eat it by yourself? At least, share half of it with your divine spouse. And what must you share? It's wonderful when you share with him the joys that his heavenly Father gives you. Are you happy? Go tell your spouse that you are happy, that you don't want to enjoy anything without him. Oftentimes, we really want to share our crosses, that's not wrong; but let's share our joys also.

What happens is that we behave like animals. We've done this so often, that now we ought to be ashamed. Some animals behave like robbers. For example, the magpie collects items for the sheer pleasure of amassing a pile. Others hunt for food and hide it so that other animals will not find it. Shall we behave in the same way, to enrich ourselves like an unfaithful spouse? Let me add that we've surely done this, like animals enjoying things without thinking about God. In centering attention on material things, we become even worse than animals. The reason is that we want to enjoy things all by ourselves. **Do not remain by yourselves, share with our Lord**. Through these gifts, he wanted to know whether you love him alone and always. In practice, this is how you must act. When someone praises you, how will you accept it? You need to say, I don't want any natural satisfaction, since my spouse does not want that. I will supernaturalize any natural pleasure by giving it to him. If someone wants my heart, I don't even pause. No, my heart has been given away. I cannot accept any pleasure that would be injurious to God, my master. This is how you will become truly pure.

**Is that all? Oh no! My poor Daughters, let us go even higher. What about divine and heavenly satisfactions that come from God. We must not desire these divine consolations without our Lord.** Do not take the goodness, the fervor, and the sweetness of our Lord as your center. If you do, you will dry up the source of grace. We must not want to enjoy God's gifts without God. If so, our Lord will close his hand and go away, because we are not acting properly. Instead of looking at his heart and love, we simply look at the rays. And so, we pay too much attention to the consolations, which will not last long. What should one do? Grow in holiness, praise God, and don't pay attention only to the affective movements of grace.

**Now, is there anything else?** Ah yes! I hesitate to mention it, but of course, there's more. There are some who say: You are very good. I will accept both desolation and consolation in the same way. Because a trial or consolation comes from you it will be for me a consolation. I will accept it with gratitude. Ah! This is a second degree: **the state of total indifference, wanting as our Lord wants. I love only your will.** If this pleases you, it pleases me also; what does not please you, does not please me either. I will be indifferent to all states of body and soul. This is something to admire! Will you not reach this second degree? Here, then, is the disposition you must have: first, never enjoy anything without God; and secondly, be indifferent about everything – I will go where you send me, and I will be equally happy and satisfied with everything. This is necessary.

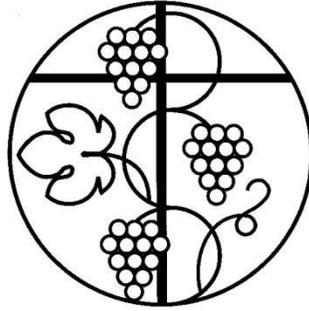
**There is yet a third degree, which says:** My God, I know that what pleases you most is renunciation, sacrifice, and immolation in the natural and supernatural order. I will go that far. You will not get angry, then, that when I am presented with satisfaction and sacrifice, I will prefer sacrifice, because it is more loving, and pleases you more. If I have a choice between two fruits, one better than the other, I want to please you more and give witness to my greater love. Freely, I take the lesser one. You will not complain, because I do it out of love for you. Some saints have reached that degree. The Good Lord admires these souls, since God is always open to more. The Good Lord does not require this, but he leaves us free. He remains hidden to see how one will choose.

Don't imagine that the Good Lord will guide<sup>3</sup> you. There are times that we don't know what the Good Lord wants. Then, consult your heart and say: our Lord showed his love to me by always opting for sacrifice and suffering of soul, there must be something good in that. I will do the same. I will force the Good Lord to notice that I love him more than he requires. Why should I be afraid: there is no pride here, because there is a greater humility. What is happening? You cannot love the Good Lord more than that.

**These are the three degrees of love, of purity of soul.** But to be prudent and wise, I must give you a rule to follow. When the Good Lord places you in one grace, don't go searching for another. Remain there. As soon as he makes his will known, what he wants is more perfect for you, even when something else seems more perfect in itself. Follow this carefully. If the Good Lord gives you a certain attraction of grace, follow that attraction rather than the thought of some saint. You are in the state that God manifests for you; that's your perfection. Now, the sublime height of love is to discern what is most pleasing to the Good Lord. As soon as you are not in grace and under a particular law, consult your love. In this way you will always walk in love. That's necessary. But don't enjoy pleasures outside of God; that's common sense. Secondly, all satisfactions that God sends me, I must return them to him out of gratitude; and when God sends me a trial, I will do what he did for me, I will accept it with love. That's the grace I wish for you.

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<sup>3</sup> This verb is missing in the manuscript – it is taken from the notebook of Ms. Thomas. Did she remember the word used by Father, or did she simply complete the phrase logically?



**Points for reflection:**

Religious life is presented here as a proof of love for God. In this instruction, St. Peter Julian seems to reveal how he lives interiorly his “gift of personality”. We find here not only the vocabulary for the gift of self, but also an affinity with St. John of the Cross. How do you feel about this teaching? According to you, does this instruction have any practical consequences?