

The Recollection of Study, of Contemplation, of Attention, Center. Expansion of Love¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Paris, Friday, September 2, 1859

[...]

Now, my Sisters, let us return to recollection. We said that **recollection** is a science, a virtue, and a gift or grace. We must return to it a little, so that I can complete my thoughts on it.

As a science, recollection comes through a learning process, and through practice. It is a natural act and is done like any natural act. It consists in giving attention which is more or less sustained, on a thought, a truth. One can work on recollection. When it has the characteristic of study, then it is a recollection of study, and the mind works. If it is a discovered truth that we contemplate, then it is the attention of contemplation; the soul remains in the silence of contemplation. If it is anticipation, if waiting for someone to speak, it is called the recollection of attention or of suspension. That's natural. Religious recollection is not different. One seeks for a truth, to study and deepen it. For example, concentrating on a mystery of our Lord, we put everything in order, withdraw our attention from anything irrelevant, and become attentive. If a distraction takes us away from this recollection, we bring ourselves back to our topic, withdraw from external objects, and quite naturally become recollected.

Secondly, the act of contemplation. Here, the soul does not need to search, or to work; it sees and is happy in the presence of God. This recollection of silence and of contemplation is the principal kind. The soul that is recollected in God knows that he is with her, and she in him, fully penetrated by his presence; she enjoys this presence by an internal gaze. This contemplation can include images of the Lord or perceptible representations of some mystery. To live in recollection is most pleasant and delightful. Here the soul is nourished, while in the recollection of study the soul has to work.

Thirdly, the recollection of attention. Here, the soul waits upon God, as a servant who waits for the orders of a master, and fears to be inattentive when the master speaks, so that he will not have to repeat. When the soul expects that God will ask her something, she gathers herself around the Master, waiting for his order. That is the natural act, the work of the mind. The difference is that in purely human recollection, the work is human; the matter for religious recollection is divine, in itself. The work is the same, paying attention.

Be aware that spiritual, religious, and divine recollection is easier. It may at first seem scary, but it occurs with an added grace and is always concerned with something good and nourishing. As the soul penetrates, she finds strength, a divine food, realizing that she is approaching God. God attracts her. This recollection becomes sweeter and stronger, as the soul surrenders and makes it a delightful center. In natural things, recollection calls for effort and the work of the mind, self-love comes in and there is unrest. Most men who concentrate on some particular study - or in a speculative study, like mathematics, end up by becoming unusual characters, unsociable; and many become disturbed or crazy. They live with constant mental tension. It's impossible to live constantly on a speculative level. Most emotionally disturbed people became that way from some fixed idea they have. Many become disturbed by science, or by their lack of wealth, or by unrequited love. They had placed the goal of their life in these things.

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Among prisoners, the system of individual cells, which we inherited from the English, can be cruel. The purpose was to prevent prisoners from sharing evil plots. However, they cannot bear this solitude. Many lose their minds or commit suicide. This is not true of religious life. Here greater solitude leads to deeper recollection. Heart and soul expand and light is produced. The more one approaches God the greater the joy at allowing him to become a gentle center of life. Self-sacrifice will now seem normal. Through attachment to God, who is truth, the heart is fed by this divine truth. The soul no longer feels the burden of solitude; rather this becomes a need. One becomes unhappy without solitude. If worldly affairs cause one to forget God, there ensues a long-lasting sadness. The life of recollection in God leads to genuine happiness; without such recollection, life becomes unbearable. [...]

A soul that begins to find joy in God and then goes away, who begins to see the truth and then abandons it, is like a person who merely tastes food, without ever being satisfied, like a lazy bee that flies from flower to flower without ever stopping. This is very common in the world, where people have insufficient recollection. Their superficiality leads to bitterness and sacrifice. It is easier to spend two hours with our Lord, in complete recollection, than only a half hour. It must be that way, because the soul is in its end, in its grace, in its place. It finds its well-being in God: peace is established, because peace is the accomplishment of God's will. This is where happiness lies.

You must have tasted this happiness at some time or other, when you were in silence, near our Lord. Even your body was at rest, as though flowing out into God. You don't experience the burden of work and of weariness because your heart is resting in God. Even if this lasted only a second, how good it is to be near our Lord! Once in a while he gives us this consolation, this repose of St. John, in order to attract us. On experiencing this, one may ask: What are directors doing? Why didn't they initiate me to this when I was young? Unfortunately, they don't know about it, they don't think about it. They cause much harm. This habitual way of thinking and centering is done more easily when we are young; the mind does not yet have the thought and experience of its poverty. Grace enters as though penetrating soft wax.

It is very unfortunate that people are not directed through the center of perfection, which is their spirit and their life. We should tell them: Love our Lord, live in his love, and from there you will take up sacrifices. **If I helped anyone it was only by placing them in this kind of recollection.** Then we can say: Take up the works of charity; you have within you a fountain of living water that will never run dry. You have enough to spend yourself and not lose sight of God. It is then easy to understand the regret of those who say they could have done better. All are not docile. But one will become joyful when taught recollection. With recollection comes the treasure, the secret. Tell someone: You have with you a very wise and learned adviser. – I don't know what you are saying! – To consult him, however, requires that you be recollected: you have perfection in you, our Lord. All you have to do is work with his grace, and be recollected.

How did hermits find wisdom and perfection? They found it in God who instructed them: the unction of his grace filled their entire heart with joy. Live with our Lord. The life of adoration is really good, especially when troubles and worries arise! There is much freedom – we respect your freedom completely: do what you want, providing that you are adorers. Even through sufferings and temptations, work it out.

Of its very nature, love is expansive. Whoever is in love needs to talk. They prattle at the same time and understand each other. Whenever we cannot speak, we choke – we get angry. The nature of love is to expand: the greater the love, the more it wants to spread. If a little flame chokes or burns me, what will happen if it is a blazing fire – it has to explode. The love of God is naturally expansive: it needs to pray, to cry, and to get angry; it needs to act. The Good Lord adjusts our interior states according to the needs of our heart. The expansion of our love becomes greater, in proportion to our greater love.

Adoration and gentle prayer flow from this need for expansion. Happy are those who allow for this expansion! When you go to adore, if your heart is empty and at ease, everything becomes joyful!

I can observe this very well in my position. Others only have flowers, and I don't disturb them. Adoration does me a lot of good; I say: the hour is already over. When I am recollected with the Good Lord, my knees feel no pain, but when my adoration is a bit distracted and boring, my knees hurt, and my body feels crushed – how does this happen? Recollection is good for the knees and for the rest of me – the body participates in the joy of the soul. When deeply recollected, time passes quickly: with recollection, adoration is good, expansion is great. We forget the needs of the body and its knees. **Recollection is the soul of love.** We will come back on this; I have not said everything, something is still lacking. Let us thank the Good Lord for giving us this joy, the time for the expansion of our love, the joy of seeing him, of adoring him, and of looking at him.

If I had to deal with people all day long, I would not last, even though people told me: It's good, and for God! I would leave it all, to spend an hour before the most Blessed Sacrament – otherwise I die. All the pleasures of this world are not worth one hour of adoration. That's the conclusion.



Points for reflection:

This is the 5th in the series of 7 conferences on recollection. Those of August 12 and 17, 1859, present recollection under three aspects: science, virtue, and grace. That of August 3rd teaches how to prolong the graces of prayer, that of August 17th sets the basis for the explanation of the Rule. All these instructions followed upon the first vows of the first group of Servants of the Blessed Sacrament on July 31, 1859. Allow these texts to touch you. How can you make them part of your life?