

The Spirit. Serving With Devotion and Abnegation. Lose Yourself in God¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Paris, Tuesday, August 13, 1861

[...]

My Sisters, I want to talk to you about the spirit. It's important to continue on this topic of the spirit of love and sacrifice. The question is, **When will I know that I have the spirit of the Society, the spirit of love and sacrifice?** This is very important; can you know it by yourself? Of course, it's easy to know if one is dead or alive. Life manifests itself. We give proof by acts of virtue, and by the spirit of love within us.

The first proof is to fulfill our vocational duties with devotion. When we do them devoutly, this devotion is more than piety, truly the aura of piety. This spirit moves us to do promptly and with joy whatever is requested, because we want it, we are happy to do it out of love, because love always works with joy. The first proof, then, is this: fulfill our duty promptly, devotedly, and joyfully. One who does not act that way does not have the spirit of the Society. Such a one may have only a virtue, or maybe only the first degree of that virtue, good will. When a child loves its parents and does all that can please them, he has the spirit of love. Let us behave accordingly, when requested to do something that is fitting, and according to our character.

If you have the spirit of love, everything will be done in that spirit, not only promptly but also with joy. I'm not talking about the feeling of joy, which depends on temperament, being only a sensible grace of feeling. I'm not talking about a tearful joy, but an experience of joy simply because we love. I'm not talking only about adoration, but all your work. Love your work and whatever it involves. Even when you find things hard, you can remain at peace since, at least, you are doing them, but you are not yet in the state of habitual dedication. That will come with practice. Don't imagine that God will give you this spirit without your paying the price. You have the grace, the inspiration, and I might add the virtue, but in order to catch the spirit, you must work on it every day.

The second characteristic of the spirit of the Servants of the Most Blessed Sacrament is to serve our Lord with self-abnegation. This second characteristic is more perfect than the first one. It's possible to serve our Lord because he is good and loves us. While this has value, basically it is a mercenary love. We are to some extent the goal of our service, measuring what is yours and mine. No one will ever attain perfection with so imperfect a love. To love our Lord because he is good to us and makes us happy is a legalistic love, the love of someone who merely keeps commandments. We must love by the sacrifice of self, our way of being, of seeing, by sacrificing ourselves, by doing things which are even contrary to our natural and spiritual tastes, our personal piety. All this must be sacrificed to enter into the service of our Lord. Abnegation takes us beyond what we think. We place ourselves at the service of our Lord unconditionally, without saying, Lord, what are you going to give me in return? Once the apostles had received the Holy Spirit they acted in this way and were confirmed in grace. When they had (previously) been serving our Lord selfishly, they thought it was perfect, but after they received the Holy Spirit they said: We will never act that way again.

One who belongs to our Lord gives everything, without exception, forever. Love knows very well that it tends to union. It doesn't give itself like a mercenary but says, I give myself to you for your own

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pleasure, that you may be happy, that I may please you. I don't need to hear you say it. Your happiness is sufficient for me. A child needs words of praise and encouragement because it is a mere child. We are no longer children. We must learn to act out of love. One who needs to hear words of praise from our Lord has not yet attained the spirit of love.

My good Daughters, you should not give yourself in service to our Lord for so much per day or per hour. When someone gives herself in order to have a daughter's right through self-denial, she will be known as a well-paid mercenary. Will she stay with us very long? – It may be a contract for one year. (But) a child will always stay home, not bound by chains. This is a service of the heart, a love that is always eager. Abnegation is the only characteristic of pure love. – What about me? – If you ask that, then you are still working at so much per hour. – How about my salvation, my virtues? – If you are merely looking for your own salvation, your crown, then our Lord is no longer your focus of attention. Then what are you? A mixture of Jew and Christian. Our Lord doesn't need [our gift]. He wants everything from us, in order to return it to us, as a father does return all that we gave him. He merely wants us to love him enough so that his love for us will be our greatest pleasure. Therefore, my poor Daughters, you must now free yourselves from all that is of personal interest.

[...] **There is one more step to reach that spirit of perfect love; a soul forgets herself and loses herself in our Lord.** Why? She no longer lives in herself, but in our Lord, loving, thinking and working in him. Our human person no longer counts as final goal of our deeds. Speaking of self becomes like talking about a stranger.

[...] Such a one desires nothing other than the glory of our Lord through the sacrifice of herself. Our Lord wants the service of a spouse, not that of a housemaid. There is nothing so sensitive as love. It knows well how to make one suffer, and feel humiliated. This soul treats herself as the offerer treats the victim; she becomes both priest and victim. She forgets herself, and loses herself in God; she's changing. Don't think that this is ecstasy; it's love, losing itself in our Lord.

To sum up, one who grows in the spirit of love works in our Lord and for him, through abnegation. Finally what is she doing? She is losing herself in him, living only in our Lord, and only of him. Now it is clear that this soul has nothing else but the spirit of love. This is her starting point.

What is required? Work at it every day, but you will never finish. You can never say: Enough. There will always be something new. If the Good Lord leaves you on earth, it means that the fruit is not yet ripe, otherwise he would pick it. There is still an ornament to add to your crown. Ask our Lord to give you the spirit of love, the spirit of your vocation. Practice abnegation. – The spirit of love is self-forgetfulness. Understand that when you lose yourself before the Blessed Sacrament, you are giving yourself to our Lord. [...] It is a matter of giving oneself a thousand times, imitating the melting candle. If it could revive itself to burn constantly, it would do so.

Our Lord said to his apostles: *I will send you the spirit of love and truth who will teach you everything* (cf. Jn 14:26). If we had that Spirit, he would teach us everything, with a continual and varying food. We are not infinite like our Lord, but we do have an infinite grace. The Good Lord knows how to vary his gifts and graces. My good Daughters, let us ask the Good Lord for this spirit of love, and he will tell you so much more than I ever could.



Point for reflection:

At the end of this conference, Father Eymard sums up his objective in a few lines, giving also the means to obtain it. How will the Eucharist become the source and summit of this spirituality?