

We Must Not Dwell in Sacrifices, Nor Place Our Holiness There, Nor Seek Them¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
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[...]

We have spoken about sacrifice – now we must complete this idea. You will have sacrifices to offer every day, because this is the nourishment of love.

There are three big dangers here.

The first is to live in the sacrifice itself. You see, my poor Daughters, even if you try to be very holy, very perfect in everything, even if you want to concentrate on sacrifices, you will not last long – your head will start spinning. We cannot constantly look at the gallows, see people suffer – it is not part of our human nature nor of our grace. **What does it mean to dwell in sacrifice?** It means to dwell in death. Our Lord never said: Remain in your penance, in humility, in mortification. Never. You will not find that in the gospel – it's not there. We cannot remain in death.

This is a big mistake. Many people do not understand clearly the road to heaven and to perfection – their understanding of its principles is all confused. Knowing that sacrifices are the way of great souls who love the Good Lord completely, they throw themselves into sacrifices. What happens? This will go well for a while; then they abandon everything, they leave everything. Why? They put themselves in a prison: they nail themselves to a cross with their own hands. Our Lord said: ***Remain in my love*** (Jn 15:9); he did not say: Remain in my cross. He said: ***If anyone wishes to come after me, he must take up his cross daily*** (cf. Lk 9:23). The follower looks at the one who is leading – he does not look at what he is carrying: he ***must follow after me, and walk in my steps***. Since we cannot live without love, it is love that will carry the cross. How many persons have cracked their brains, and broken their hearts and wills, in order to remain in their sacrifices. They managed to remain there for a few days, as long as they were under the influence of grace. When they had to go forward, they could not. This is the first thing: you must not concentrate on your sacrifices nor make them your life.

The second danger is that we must not gage our progress by our sacrifices. Do you understand? Not only must you not dwell in them, but you must not measure your spiritual progress, your perfection, and your holiness by your sacrifices. The great danger here is self-love. If you place your virtue in your sacrifices, if you seek and desire only sacrifices; what will happen? They will become your rule of holiness and perfection. Do you not see that you will then become the judge of your own spiritual progress?

Our Lord did not say: Go ahead of me, but follow after me. We must carry our cross after him, not ahead. What will happen when we want to live always in sacrifices? Self-love finds its food therein. We see what we do, in a sense we measure what we give to God, and we will always be either in joy or in sadness. If we had the joy of making a good sacrifice, we are happy over having done something for the Good Lord; but, the devil is often there to say: Look, you still have not done this... your self-love suffers. When you feel your sacrifices, you will almost always have thoughts of being unfaithful. You may say:

¹ Number 363. *Il ne faut pas vivre dans les sacrifices, y mettre sa vertu, les choisir. Explication de la règle.* (We must not dwell in our sacrifices, nor place our virtues there, nor choose them. Explanation of the rule.)

Isn't that necessary, in order that I will make more sacrifices? Yes, we must make them, but not in this way.

My poor Daughters, perfection is in humility. Where is humility? At the feet of our Lord, it shows us our faults and weaknesses – what we are doing compared to what we should be doing. Humility gives us peace, while self-love leaves us sad. After sacrifice we are sad if we are looking to be complacent, but self-love has suffered a blow and we become discouraged. You must not proceed in this way, placing yourselves in sacrifice and in the virtue that you acquired. You must place yourselves in humility and trust in God, not in yourselves.

Some persons put themselves in such a state of tension that they become stupid, or abandon everything: don't act like that. Our Lord told us: *Unless you become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven* (Mt 18:3). Children are always happy and joyful; they are not thinking of their sacrifice – they don't dwell on it, but on the simplicity and affection of their heart. Certain temperaments are noticeably stubborn, obstinate, and dogmatic, like those who are temperamental. They don't want to put their salvation in the will of God. They want to work out their own salvation by imprudent actions; they are always struggling; they are always doing violence to themselves. Our Lord never did this; he lived in the tranquility of love, not in violence, and his battles were even much greater than ours.

The third danger of sacrifice, my poor Daughters, is that we make our own choice of sacrifice – usually a bad choice, because self-love manipulates the choice – and we are mistaken. Our dominant passion is very clever, self-love is skillful enough not to get caught in its center, in the idol that it secretly adores. Everything deviously becomes spoiled. Sometimes we think we are making a big sacrifice; in fact, we are seeking ourselves. Poor human nature always finds a way to satisfy itself – it is active, and will look for active sacrifices. A fervent young priest will not work on the sacrifices of silence and humility, but in sacrifices of zeal; he will embrace the universe without hesitation. Another is lazy, phlegmatic, and soft – he will seek some sacrifices that will make him calm and untroubled. Human nature is seeking attention. Still another wants to be perfect. He has a few obstacles, and for a few days he will make some heroic acts. Deep down this is self-love: I will generously devote a few days to get rid of this defect. This is laziness – it is so true that we spoil everything.

Therefore, what must you do? Avoid these three faults: do not dwell on your sacrifices, you will imprison yourself; do not place your virtue in sacrifices, you will become your own rule; do not choose your sacrifices, you will choose badly for your own advantage.

You might ask: What does all you have told us really mean? Pay attention. **First, there are two kinds of sacrifices:** those that the Good Lord imposes on us, and those that we choose ourselves. Those that the Good Lord demands from us are perfect: to do them well, we must place them in the will of God. Those sacrifices, seen in the will of God, are like the proof of it – they are like those bitter fruits that are not yet ripe, and that we place in honey: they take on the sweetness of honey. They are as sweet and gentle as the love that wants them. Let us not remain in the sacrifices, but in God who commands and asks us. When a simple child is asked to do something boring: he runs and does it very quickly, without remaining in the sacrifice – that would make him cry. The proof that a child has lost its simplicity, is when it begins to cry – it does not want to do what is commanded: it remains in its self-love.

When you are faced with sacrifices that the Good Lord wants, see them in his will, and they will be beautiful, loveable, and delightful – you have not chosen them: they come from his beautiful and good hand. And, when men test you, humiliate you, and make you suffer, you have not chosen this, not at all – the Good Lord placed it there. Everything that is independent of your will comes from God. We receive a letter from a friend with joy; likewise receive this letter of sacrifice from heaven, this child of God. You will not be disturbed, because you will not remain in it.

Secondly, you must not count your sacrifices, like taking your pulse. If you see them, you must minimize them. If a soul who really loves the Good Lord were in my place, wouldn't she be happy! It's only a word, a little sacrifice, a small thing – we see it as nothing at all. What will happen? You will lessen it and take away its name of sacrifice, and you will say: It's nothing. And you will tell your human nature: Keep quiet, you fool! When you tell someone who is shy: Be careful not to make a mistake, the superior is there: you will be punished if you make a mistake. She will be frightened and nervous: that's all she needs to fall short. Regarding sacrifices, if you imagine that they are big, the same thing will happen – they are really nothing at all. In this way, you will not place your perfection in a sacrifice. Avoid this carefully, otherwise you will be crowning your pride by placing your perfection in your sacrifice: Here is a big sacrifice – I am making progress, the Good Lord must be happy. What a cute crown you are placing on your head!

Can you not see that we must not calculate in this life: they are often become subtractions for the next life – and we do this often. We still find this in certain books, some specified gadgets: notes, time-keeping on sacrifices, to count and say: I made four sacrifices. That's good for children whom we control through rewards: That's good, my friend! What happens is this poor child who knows nothing, who barely knows the alphabet, starts strutting around thinking that it is already a genius.

My poor Daughters, we don't need people to tell us: That was good. In God's eyes, what we did was good – he loves us so much, but we are doing so little compared to what the Good Lord has given us. **I say that we must minimize our sacrifices, change their name, do them simply, place them in the humility of love**, not in humility itself; it is a sacrifice. You must remain in your goal, in the reason for your virtue: My God, you love me – that is humility – this is such a small thing for your love – that is your goal.

You might ask: But, what about my resolutions? You are not forbidden to make them. Notice that you say: I will give this to God. No doubt, you need sacrifices, just as you need wood to feed a fire, and bread to feed your life, but don't crown yourself with it. **Say therefore: For the love of God. Do everything for the love of God.** If he asks a small sacrifice: good, I will do it. And you keep it in proportion – you are not faced with a hangman's scaffolding. Your soul will be in a beautiful center; it will see the sky; it will be happy.

Although your heart will make the sacrifice and feel its bitterness, having already seen the Good Lord by an act of the will, it throws itself into God. It needs to do this. You will follow only the will of God, like a servant who does what is repugnant to others. That's the order; the chief has spoken. Since the will does the same as the heart, it also tells the imagination and the mind: As for me, I don't examine: I simply fulfill the order of the master – we don't give in to the complaints of the old Adam –; I am obliged to obey. Self-love is cornered and sent away. Do you realize what is happening? Sacrifice is blooming with all the flowers of the love of God; there are no more clouds and storms. The soul is lifted higher. Sacrifice produces fruits of peace and strength; you have the joy of a child who has given pleasure to its father and mother.

Let us summarize all this. Do not dwell in sacrifices, but remain in their source, in the will of God. Make them smaller by the humility of love; you will do one hundred times more without realizing it. Moreover, my poor Daughters, do not assess your perfection by your sacrifices: self-love will judge to its own advantage – leave that to the love of God. What has been done is done – always move on: the work of yesterday is finished. We must ever begin anew in God. Someone who is always in the fog, in the past, never belongs to himself. A sacrifice that has been made belongs to God, and from that moment, we have received our wages.



Points for reflection:

This instruction presumes that we understand the value of suffering in the spiritual life. But it gives some useful advice to avoid certain dangers in the way of looking at sacrifice. From this come great values for the spiritual life: humility, love for God. Are these new principles for you? What is your experience?