

What Is the Society and What We Owe It ¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament,
Paris, Monday, October 1, 1860

There will be no spiritual direction on the day of the retreat; it is too short and wrong timing. You cannot talk about your retreat in direction, since it is not finished. On that day, the professed should meet their superior, and the novices, their novice mistress, for guidance. I will see you the following day. Then you can report on all that was said to you, and what we dealt with. Then I will give you direction. Come in the morning, the best time, but don't come all together as you would be wasting time. Take turns in coming.

Everyone asks what is the purpose of a monthly retreat. There are two. The first is to renew the spirit and fervor of your vocation. The second is to prepare for death. You should not think that it is only to prepare for death, since you should do that daily and at every instant. For a saint, death is the best news. The other goal, to renew the spirit, fervor and holiness of your vocation, is the main purpose. Every good business has a monthly accounting to see if it is gaining or losing. To take note of anything extraordinary was the custom of the saints, therefore it must be good.

[...]

We will meditate upon your own vocation. **What² is the aim of the Society?** The Blessed Sacrament and only the Blessed Sacrament. You did not come here for me, for Mother, for your sisters; that would be absurd, a folly! Every time this question comes up, I say: You must come for the Blessed Sacrament. He is always good and beautiful, and he is always my goal. What else can I want? Even behind a cloud, the sun is always present and will eventually come out, the breeze passes by. The Society of the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament is not your goal. The Society is for you, and you compose it; but you are not here for the sake of the Society. When there is distress, a cloud is passing in front of the sun. Wait, and it will come back. Do not sacrifice the principal for the accessory.

What else can I say? **Your goal will never fail you.** Only the total destruction of the world could deprive you of this goal. It will always be available as your own. There is nothing to fear because you are with our Lord. Let this thought take root in your life. You will be tempted by persons and things. The devil will try to invert causes and effects. If anything becomes a bit hard, don't worry³. If you came to satisfy bodily needs, stay in the world. If you came for this or that person, you will not reach your goal. This is impossible. Behave as human shadows among yourselves, shadows that have no reality. Trials may arise either through persons or through charity. Why should you pause before shadows, before persons? God forbid! Don't be like the Jews, who had nothing else but shadows and analogies. (cf. Heb 9:9s; 10:1) Since you possess the Lord in person, bind yourselves to your goal. A merchant centers entirely on his goal; a soldier aims solely at victory; a friend seeks above all to preserve the friendship. Jesus Christ must then possess the entire person. **Jesus Christ is my goal.**

By what means will I reach my goal? Some means are necessary. It is important for you to understand, my good Sisters, that the Society of the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament is not the means for attaining your goal. Other communities generally provide the means to reach specific goals such as zeal or virtues. Each society offers means to reach these goals. For zeal, there will be science and study. Teachers will provide ways to become eloquent. Virtues will develop in the same way. Everything is so closely

¹ Number 264. *Ce qu'est la Société et ce que nous lui devons.*

² In the Guillot copy, the instruction starts here.

³ Here Father is trying to purify the intentions and motives of his listeners to a life of sacrifice.

organized that a person must be like a piece of wax in the hands of a superior or novice mistress. All this may suffice in other communities, but this is not our way. Obviously we need some means⁴, but these will serve as education rather than as a way to the goal. This education consists in forming a person to a state. Once the person grasps this state, she needs nothings else.

The Society becomes the teacher of your souls. The Society clothes you and prepares you for a feast. You are ennobled and accepted into the service of the Lord. Then you go beyond the Society. You now relate directly to Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ to you and you to Jesus Christ. You become the end of his graces. He works quietly within you. Although you may not speak about it, this is the mystery of the relationship between Jesus Christ and you. **Jesus Christ is at once your means and your goal.** Pay attention now. At all times, the means must be at least as great as the goal, even greater. You realize that if I am to soar to a high altitude, I need wings powerful enough to reach that height. If I am given a burden to carry, I must have enough strength, even more than necessary, because my strength tends to diminish.

How could the Society be your means? Your Society would have to be as perfect as Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament; this is absurd. Its grace of sanctification would have to be as great as Jesus Christ. In spite of the charity and experience of your superiors it is not possible, since the finite is not the infinite and a human person is not God. Yet, you are very fortunate, because Jesus Christ himself will be its means and its goal.

There's only one spirit; find it where it is to be found. The Society forms you. This is the fountain, go drink⁵ and eat. She feeds you as a nurse, while leaving you your rights. Once you are formed, she gives you time for adoration; then she is finished. She does not need us, but she a mother giving us her spirit. Our Lord is the fountain, go to drink; he is the bread of life, go to eat.

There is the spirit and the virtues, the religious virtues of our Lord. Other communities take on the spirit and the virtues of the saints.

The Carmelites claim great saints. The Jesuits also have great saints, there to be imitated. The Capuchins and the Franciscans claim an army of saints. We don't need to look around. For us, the saints are like stars that disappear before the rising sun. We cannot boast of having saints, as we just started. Even if we had fifty thousand canonised saints, we don't place them on the altar. When the Blessed Sacrament is exposed, there are no relics present.

Let us look directly to our Lord for our virtues. His love urges us to make sacrifices. Let us then take inspiration from his love and his virtues, and benefit from the rays of the sun. His virtues give witness to his love. He is humble and merciful because he loves us. As for me, I go directly to the rays, to the source of love., that is where we will send you and form you. All we can say is, go directly to love; beware of such or such a temptation. We will protect you from the devil and the world, so that you may remain loyal to your goal. There are external virtues to be practiced; such as, obedience, penance, chores. Interior virtues are not our concern, our Lord himself will give you the spirit. However we will give some external virtues to embellish your crown. Besides, my Sisters, you have the love of the entire religious body to enable you to glorify our Lord externally. This is not a means, but an opportunity to benefit from all means.

What is the purpose of the Society? Everything and nothing! The Society provides the necessary conditions for you to become Servants of the Most Blessed Sacrament. The Society places you in

⁴ Guillot: *obviously we need some means.*

⁵ Guillot: *this is the fountain, go drink.*

relationship with your goal, in ideal conditions to attain that goal. This is impossible outside of a community. The vows and the religious atmosphere are needed. You become the end of this community. Its purpose is to form adorers. What is your debt to the Society? You owe the Society what a child owes to its nanny who nourishes life and education. What the child owes is a return of love. With regard to father and mother, the child owes them also honor and respect. The commandment says, Honor your father and mother in order to have a long life. The child loves above all else its father and mother, then its nanny. A Christian loves the catholic Church above all else, since it nourishes us for the sake of Jesus Christ. A religious will deem most loveable the religious society that the Church provides as a mother. The Church belongs to everyone. However, since a religious needs a special education, the Church provides a particular father and mother for the formation of that soul.

What do you owe to your Society? Love. The Society gave you birth, and fed you. Without her, your education would be lacking. She forms you and perfects you every day. You acquire your wealth through her. You should be grateful. If you become great because of her, noble in the eyes of our Lord, if she spends everything for you, you should be grateful. If not, you would be like a child that leaves its parents and nurse to die of hunger, totally ungrateful. How could that be?

Remember that gratefulness should be one, because there are not two loves. A child cannot love a thing on the same level as it loves its father and mother; that would be unnatural. A religious cannot love another society equally as her own; love has only one life. Therefore she cannot appreciate her society if she likes another one; there are no two ways of life. God wants love, devotedness. That is why you should have a greater love for your Society of the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament than for all the other congregations and persons. You should devote yourself to her, since she is your mother. If a mother is perfect by reason of the excellence of her state, your Society is superior to a natural mother. Since you left your parents to be united with our Lord, your spiritual mother that nursed you is worth more than all the rest.

The proof that someone is a daughter of her society lies in the grace of that society, a compassionate love. Whenever somebody comes here because she loves to make sacrifices, close all the doors on her. I want to offer some great penances. She is not for you, close the door; she is not coming for Jesus Christ, but for herself, her own perfection; close the door. I like your order. – Why, madam? – There is charity among you; there is solitude. Close all the doors and the windows: she is not for you; she wants solitude and an abstract kind of perfection.

The proof of a vocation is when someone says: **I come to devote myself to the Blessed Sacrament.** Such a one is called. I know very well that not everybody can verbalize it that way. If however, you do not find this [equivalently], you will only have religious running here and there looking for all kinds of masters, she is foreign to your grace. Every time a person says that her vocation depends on you, you are obliged, in all honesty, not to accept her. This would be only for an education, a religious boarding house; and it's not for you. I would be ashamed if somebody told me, I come because of you. I would take his arm and show him the door. I would be very ashamed. Even if a friend came for the same reason, I would do the same. God forbid! Oftentimes, I tell my poor people: If you come because of me or because of others, it is shameful, and even sacrilegious, since here we are all consecrated to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. If someone tells me, I come for the master; but since I need a community and the Blessed Sacrament is your goal, it will be my means. This is who you are. Ah! Very well, enter; if there is no door, make a new one.

What then? You are very indebted to the Society of the Blessed Sacrament for having accepted you. How will you show and express your gratitude? By all your services, your health, your affection. This sign of gratefulness presupposes that the first gratitude is toward God. This is filial piety. You will

always see yourself as unworthy of having been accepted, because from the beginning you were never worthy.

[...] **Notice how the Society helps you to grow**, but you alone benefit. She gives you a royal and divine education, you alone harvest the fruits. Her joy is to have one more Servant of the Blessed Sacrament. Her expenses and sacrifices increase, and she receives nothing. She is like a wet-nurse, a mother, always giving. Why not reflect on how the Society gives you everything, and you give only little in return? The temporal does not equal the spiritual; it is a mere grain of sand. You come here and are grafted on the branch. You should really acknowledge, I am receiving everything. Which queen has so many servants? This is the originality of the Society. Each one is a queen; can you not see it?

When you are before the Blessed Sacrament, does anyone tell you how to make your adoration? Is there ever anybody interfering in your office, in your Communion intentions? You are free. The word rule means a royal order. There is no queen who does not have her schedule for the day, like kings, princes and others. They say, this is a royal order. For you, it is the order of your exercises. Can't you see how organized you are? You are all servants of your sisters. One does the cooking, another the common rooms, another the sewing, so that you have free time. You serve one another; you are queens and servants; and the superior is the servant of the servants, and the novice mistress is the servant of the servants, as the Pope is the servant of the servants.

You might ask: Isn't it the same in other communities? It cannot be, and it's not the same in other communities. Since their aim is a virtue, they have their means; look at their means and the rest. If I would like to punish you, I have just to send you to another community for a month; you would shed many tears of regret. I would punish you, and you would remember it the rest of your life. See Madam...⁶ how many times other communities were offered to her, she does not want them; and she only vaguely grasped your happiness.

[...] If those in the world knew what food you were eating, I am sure that there would be an invasion. They would say, this is the kingdom of God. Jesus Christ is hidden there. We also want to be part of it.

Live your rule of life well. When you were in the world, you could have your own ideas, I'm not concerned about that, you had your ideas, [...] Now you are at the service of the Blessed Sacrament. You have to live according to your graces. You cannot start saying: I don't have the spirit and the virtues. You have to try to live them. You should not appear humble at the feet of our Lord. Elsewhere, you can do what you want, but **in the service of our Lord, there is only love** – humility in you is not worth anything – and, among yourselves, simply go to our Lord as a child goes to its mother. You don't realize how you hurt me when you inject humility in the service of our Lord. It is rather love giving and receiving; devotedness and love. That is what makes you great. When I celebrate Mass, I also find greatness; nothing is greater than Jesus Christ, and I am another Jesus Christ. When you are at adoration, you become great almost as his equal; you are in relation with him. Take courage, my Sisters, Jesus Christ has begun this work and he will finish it; it is his.

⁶ He may be referring to Mrs. Spazzier who stayed briefly in the small community. Father asked her to leave and did not readmit her in spite of her insistence. Cf. *Journal I*, p. 271, and Father's letters to her.



Points for reflection:

Here our Founder shows that the Society exists as a means to form us to live for Jesus Christ as our goal. He continues by emphasizing our duties towards the Society, our mother and nurse. What motivations does he dismiss in a vocation? Which ones does he accept? Can we purify our motivations? How?