

Christmas. The Contemplation of Love ¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Paris, Friday, December 27, 1861

My dear Sisters, the feast of Christmas should be one that is close to your hearts, because as Servants of our Lord, your role begins at the stable, since it is the place of his birth. When kings have an heir, the first preoccupation of the king and queen is to choose the most distinguished person in the kingdom to be the governess and tutor of this child. The heavenly Father gave us his Son, and the Blessed Virgin, his Mother, also gave him to us. The Blessed Virgin is noble enough to be deserve a servant. You are servants of Jesus Christ, servants of God. Surely, all the saints are servants of God. But Servants of the Most Blessed Sacrament, that's different. I do not know of any community that exists with that name, Servants of the Most Blessed Sacrament. We certainly see some who serve Jesus and Mary. However, we have not seen any Servants of the Most Blessed Sacrament, because this will be your role.

Go to the crib, not to see the infant Jesus, since he is no longer there, but **to see how Mary served the infant Jesus.** The most Blessed Virgin was his servant. She calls herself the servant of the Lord. There is no mention of our Lord having any other servants except the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph. He did not allow any others, since these were sufficient for his love. It was necessary that the Blessed Virgin be the first, so that she could form the others. She had to fulfill this role as no one else ever would. She nourished her divine Son with her virginal milk. She cared for him. Her pure and immaculate hands carried him, she carried him as a servant carries an easy and light burden. Besides, she never left him alone, except during the three days that he left her (cf. Lk. 2:41-50). The Blessed Virgin followed him everywhere, even to Calvary (cf. Jn. 19:25-27). A good servant must never be separated from her master.

Study the Blessed Virgin carefully so as to continue her work, not in the same way, since circumstances change; basically it doesn't matter; it is the same simple exercise of love. In a sense, we can even say that the service of our Lord is better here than at Bethlehem when he was a little child; not better in the perfection of the service, since the Blessed Virgin was a perfect servant, but in the witness of love. There are two veils in the Blessed Sacrament; in Bethlehem, his humanity was visible, but here both his divinity and his humanity are veiled, annihilated out of love. Go to Bethlehem and dwell there.

Learn then, my very poor Sisters, how to exercise the contemplation of love. This is your profession. You were not made for intellectual contemplation. If you had that gift, you should put it aside. The contemplation of love is entirely different. It does not search for its object; it contemplates and enjoys it. For example, contemplate the Blessed Virgin at Bethlehem. See who she is, to have a simple idea of it, something very focused. Use your senses; use your eyes to look at the child Jesus, to see who is with him, the Blessed Virgin his mother, and St. Joseph his foster father, the saint "par excellence". As you look at them, you will consider their thoughts and actions. You will soon come to an understanding of their thoughts and love.

Look at the child Jesus, at his size, at his face, where he is, notice his scanty covers. The Blessed Virgin had only some poor clothes that she had picked up in passing. St. Luke calls them « pannis eum » (Lk. 2: 7), which means coarse clothes. I already told you that I saw these cloths exposed in St. Mary Major, in a golden urn in a wooden manger. One immediately reflects: Is it possible that these touched our Lord, they are as rough as sack cloth? True, the cloth is white, but very rough. Could the Blessed Virgin

¹ Number 389. *Noël. La contemplation de l'amour.*

possibly have woven it, since it is so badly made? There is a heavy thread and others that are finer. She must have found it, since only the poor would own it. I was not surprised to see men and women shedding tears as they looked at it.

Ponder the love. We can ask, Why did he do this? While contemplating we ask why. We ask the Blessed Virgin, My dear Mother, why did you put him there? – He wanted it so. It was painful for me to put him directly on the straw. – Why did he do it? – Out of love for you. St. Joseph and I were sad at the sight of such poverty!

I cannot understand contemplation in any other way. So much for our eyes. We are also there, listening. Like a curious servant, we listen to all who come to the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph [...].

Sometimes contemplation is more external than internal. This is not the contemplation of love. The mind works and searches. When an idea is conceived and one enters into the mystery, the soul forgets itself, penetrating what it sees. This is what happens when one sees a beautiful painting, or something beautiful, the eyes become fixed and no longer see; the ears no longer hear. This is **the contemplation of love**. When the soul is fully attentive, it neither sees nor hears anything, because it has entered into our Lord. This is very easy, something you do without even realizing it. When you make a prayerful and fruitful adoration, you say, I ran out of time, it seemed like just a minute. That experience came from the fact that your soul was with God, enjoying him, totally immersed in God.

How can one reach this stage? One must work at it. In the contemplation of love, we must put our senses to sleep, as we do for children who are always crying. What do we do? We draw their senses and their attention to something else. Likewise, we keep our senses busy, while our soul goes with God. If our senses wander, we bring them back with another thought. This is very necessary in the ordinary state of the soul. When God recollects us, we are like fish at home in the water. The Good Lord does everything internally and externally in a very gentle way. He merely wants our cooperation.

My Sisters, to arrive at the contemplation of love, try to be calm, free of all anxiety and of all bondage. Otherwise, we separate ourselves from our Lord; one of our senses is present, the others are not. What's happening? Each sense contemplates in its own way. But, you might ask, when should we set aside this external contemplation? You will do so without realizing it. The door is open and you will enter. You will gradually make progress, as you apply yourself more completely. Do this for our Lord. Apply your contemplation to the Eucharist. Then you will see how he continues in the most Blessed Sacrament what he began in Bethlehem.

Even if very tiny then, he seems much smaller in the Blessed Sacrament. The host contains him, his adorable body and his divinity as well, smaller now than at the stable, where he lay on straw. The greater his love the more it shrinks to come all the way to us. While his swaddling clothes were little more than rag, he is even poorer now in the Blessed Sacrament where only the appearance of bread clothes him. The child Jesus did not speak, he grew normally, thinking and praying interiorly. This is even truer in the Blessed Sacrament, for our Lord is at the mercy of everyone, there is no movement here nor words spoken. Can you not see that there is more here than at Bethlehem?

There is a major difference, however. He suffered then, now he no longer can suffer. He came to die, now he comes to live. He can no longer die, but all the elements for suffering are still present. Were it possible, his suffering would be even greater. The source of suffering is far greater, leading to agony. Were it still possible, he would be in constant pain. It's important to contemplate our Lord at Bethlehem in connection with his presence in the Blessed Sacrament. This is what gives life to the Bethlehem scene.

It is pleasant to recall the birth and infancy of one who is dearly loved. This explains why the Church celebrates the birth of Jesus with great solemnity. **This is the time when the sun of justice (cf. Mal 3:20) came into the world.** Because a servant becomes childlike with the child confide to her in order to rear him. Be childlike with our Lord, childlike in simplicity and love. If Bethlehem were not so far away, if it were in France, I would give you permission to pay a visit.

The stable still exists, it was not destroyed, it is a cave against a cliff. When the Good Lord created the world, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit foresaw all that would exist on earth, the palaces of kings and the homes of saints. When the Father created this cave, he told his Son, this will be your home. The Son loved it, as well as the Holy Spirit. This cave was not the work of human hands; it was perfectly arranged by the Good Lord. The Good Lord was pleased to put together this home. He did not enrich it; his only gift was poverty. **Poverty is more precious than glory.**

[...]

When kings are born, everything shines and canons roar. They have no other way to manifest their splendor. When the Good Lord enters the world, he comes in poverty. [...]



Point for reflection:

This Christmas meditation is also a school for contemplation. What method of prayer does it teach you?