

Method for Examination and Communion¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Nemours, Friday, November 9, 1866

My Sisters, you must have method in your service of God. Method is very helpful and often necessary. It is to the Christian soul what military regulations are for an army. Strategic regulations certainly double the strength of soldiers; the weak ones are sustained by the strong; the ignorant guided by the wise. If an army in combat allowed each soldier to fight in his own way, it would become a combat of individuals that would come to nothing. However, when a ruling command gives an order, there is concerted movement that becomes very forceful (cf. Jos 6:5,20). In your service of the Lord, if you were told: Do as you please, the result would be poor. Sometimes we want something good, but most of the time we are very weak. The fact is that man is more darkness than light, weak, rather than strong. Most often he follows the impulse to evil.

Besides, do not rely on your will and say: I succeeded yesterday, and I will succeed today. You might succeed, but you might not. Do not rely on yourselves; be watchful and follow a method in the service of God. These rules of preparation are necessary; they dispose the soul and the will in one direction. In doing this, we avoid false starts and go directly, knowing where we are going. **Methods, therefore, are very useful to keep us in the right way.** And again, these methods are useful because they were created by saints. First of all, it is an act of humility to follow the ideas of saints. Besides, these methods are sure to work, because they have been approved and tested. Follow these methods. I know very well that weak spirits will stray, yet they need these helps more than the others.

Some wear themselves out quickly because they have no method. They go immediately to the end, when they should have developed an idea through different acts to perfect it; and they run dry. When you have an hour of adoration, don't burn all your wood at once; keep some to feed the fire for the whole hour. Make acts that coordinate your thoughts: Some say: I feel dry. Why? Because you have no method, and the devil and human nature attack the heart. But go first through the spirit, using a bit of external help, and say: My God, how I love you; my God, prepare me. That's a good preparation for a meditation. Put your thoughts in order. Beware of feelings that have no method. You who love God, often abuse this ancient saying: Love does not follow any method. O yes it does! If love does not follow a method, it will do nothing. God himself always acts in a measured way (cf. Wis 11:20). He follows a method, an order, and a given place in all that he does. We need the wisdom of a method to sustain us in our exercises.

What are these methods? They are nothing other than a practice, a study, since we want to analyze and dissect its various parts. Every science calls for analysis; if you want to analyze a plant, open it and study it. And so, I open it, I inspect it, and to understand it thoroughly I will take all its leaves, one by one, and place them on a table: I take note of their shape and color, and I look at the calyx. Now, if someone tells me: Put this flower back together, restore it. Then I take all the parts and restore them to the same place and in the same state. Those who create methods have examined the nature of adoration and prayer, they experienced it, they applied this method to themselves, and they noticed that when a part was missing, the adoration was imperfect, and when all were present, it went well. Therefore, they concluded that the

¹ Number 617. *Méthode pour l'examen et la communion.*

gathering of all these acts was necessary. **My Sisters, you need a method for your examination [of conscience], your adoration, your Communion, your Office, and for all your exercises.**

First, the examination. St. Ignatius² retained this from the Benedictines. He includes five acts that are summarized in these words: [] Therefore, **every examination is composed of five acts:**

1. [] **Adore God** in order to recollect oneself. It is an accounting of something owed to God: My God, I adore you; I will make my examination.

2. *Gratias age.* **Act of thanksgiving.** Give thanks to God for his goodness, for he gives us the grace to act well.

3. *Pete lumen.* **Ask light from the Holy Spirit:** I can do nothing: help me to know my sins.

4. [] **Reflect on your acts.** Examine your conscience on your duties towards God, your neighbor, and yourselves. Make your examen on deeds and rules, not on passing thoughts. Examine yourselves on your duties, nothing else – your duties towards God, your exercises, your adorations above all, then your Office, your Communion, your Mass, and the rest, the rosary, etc. After one’s duties, consider the opposite: did you have any temptations against faith, against hope, against charity? – If you don’t know, let it go. Examine your thoughts: see what your thoughts have been – if you’re not aware of any, then move on; don’t become scrupulous. After looking at God, then look at your rule, your vocation, the schedule. This should be positive: the schedule of work and community regulations. Did you commit any fault, or receive some correction during the day? – Oh yes, I had some: I spoke and lacked charity. – See if you offended God, if you were tempted, if you felt some evil. – But I feel nothing. – Then you did not consent, let it go. – What if I had consented...! – With “if’s” and “but’s” we can examine ourselves for an hour, and achieve nothing.

Then, my good Daughters, after the rules, look at your charity towards your neighbor. If you caused her some sorrow, if you were impatient. If you have no remorse, if you recall nothing, pass on – sin makes a wound on the soul, and you would feel it if you had it. Don’t waste time on what is not real. I beg you examine your conscience on your acts and not on your thoughts and your feelings. You have been told that you commit sin only if the law is definite, if the deed is real – if you go into the negative, you’ll never get out. When you commit a sin, you’ll know it. – Perhaps my conscience is not delicate enough. – I don’t know, but you have faith. And you cannot always be near the Good Lord without feeling something, the moment you have offended him. You know very well the promises that you made to the Good Lord.

After reflection comes *Propone*. Stir up genuine contrition in your heart. If it does not come, ask for it. Before confession and Communion, say: My God, give me sorrow for my sins; I don’t want to go to hell, I don’t want to be separated from you, I detest sin. That’s contrition, and a good one. – But, I feel nothing. – True contrition is not felt. Everyone complains that they don’t have contrition, that they don’t

² “The Ignatian method comprises the following points: The first point (*gratias age*) is an act of gratitude for the general and particular benefits received. The second (*pete lumen*) is a prayer to obtain the grace to recognize our faults and to correct them. The third (*discute*) is an exact review of the sins that we committed during the day. We require from our soul a strict account of all that we thought, said, and did hour by hour, or from one work to another, since we woke up. We will follow the same order and method already explained in regard to the particular examen. The fourth (*dole*) consists in asking pardon from God for the sins that we committed. In the fifth (*propone*), we propose to correct ourselves with the grace of God” *Manrèse. Les Exercices spirituels de saint Ignace mis à la portée de tous les fidèles, (Manresa: The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius made accessible to all the faithful)* H. Pinard de la Boullaye, S.J. Beauchesne, 46th edition, 1948, p. 349-350.

feel the love of God. You are not different from the rest of the world. [...] I assure you that as we make progress in life, we lose our spiritual feelings. That is your examen: do it like that at night. So now, I repeat: the examen is composed of five acts: []

What about the morning? – Do the same thing, except the final act is different. Turn to adoration, thanksgiving, calling for the light of the Holy Spirit, then the act of foresight: this is what's different. Look at your sins of yesterday, your monthly resolution, what you fail to do most of the time, and then say: I have this sacrifice to do today; I must get ready, I must give my self, and then ask for strength. Where are your failures against the rule? At noontime, look back. This is a review, a renewal, a pause when we ask ourselves: Did I carry out what I promised this morning. Did I practice my monthly resolution? Did I do it? Oh! I will try harder. This noon examen is very wise: if we forget ourselves in the morning, at noon we reproach ourselves, and we quickly come back.

Military discipline does not rely only on commands and repeated corrections. An inspector checks to see if a given order has been followed, but that's not enough. A second one will check if the first one came. This assures the order is carried out; if the first one misses, the second one supplies. In religious life, the morning plans the day, the noontime inspects, and the evening renders an account. My good Daughters, notice that your meditations are not the same as those of people in the world: adoration is an excellent meditation, but you need some corrective means. You are given these three examens with that in mind. Use them well. Five minutes in the morning and evening, with only a few minutes at noon. You need a method for self-examination. To claim otherwise is laziness. Without a method you will not succeed.

Next, comes Holy Communion. You must prepare yourselves carefully for Communion and make a thanksgiving methodically. Why? You do receive every day for no merit of yours – you no more than I and even less, since I am a priest only to take our Lord, and give him in Communion every day. You do this every day, and you don't have any right to this. Daily Communion is granted you out of kindness and charity, so that the heavenly Father may see his Son in you. You must prepare yourselves for Holy Communion; on one day you will succeed, while on another you will do badly. You must make acts. You have them in books; learn them. If you were closely united to God by an interior unction, I would tell you: Follow your grace; remain in it. But if you are in a state that requires effort to recollect yourselves, then take this method. I tell you that methods are excellent in times of dryness, aridity, and discouragement; use these methods and you will make an organized prayer; without it, you will become discouraged.

How make this preparation? Take your catechism if you want; this is a question of order. What are these acts? Here are the recommended ones: **We always begin with adoration.** This is how you adore: My God, I adore you in this sacrament. Then, add whatever you want: I believe that you are in this adorable sacrament ready to give your blood and life for me. – But I don't feel anything. – It's not necessary. **After faith comes humility.** Humble yourself. In the seminary we were given a book that asked: Whom are you about to receive? And the answer was: our Lord. This book was very good and well made. Therefore: My God, I am going to receive you in your adorable sacrament; I believe that it is you. Then turn to heaven, to the Eucharist. Pray, more than think: It is really you, yes; I believe it, although you are veiled. You who are so great and so good – it is really you.

I prefer this method to others because it is simpler. **Whom will I receive?** It is Jesus. After saying: I believe it, you naturally adore him. If asked: Who is this? It's the Pope. Immediately, you kneel. If I ask: **Whom will I receive?** Jesus: how good and beautiful he is. Then you immediately adore him, and naturally respect and homage to our Lord will follow. Then, who am I to receive him: he is there, waiting for me... **But who am I?** A miserable sinner, the trash of the world. **Who am I?** An ungrateful person who has offended you, who sense my extreme lack of devotion, and you are calling me to your banquet. My place is set, the feast is ready, and you are calling me. No, I don't deserve it and that's why I must

ask: **Who am I?** And our Lord calls me: Come anyway to my feet; come. And he comforts me. And so, my God, you want me to go to you. I will go with confidence and love.

After this answer to “Who are you?” and “who am I?” add: I know that you are my father. I come to you. I know who I am, and yet you are calling me. I come with confidence and gratitude, with joy and love to get my bread of life, to get my salvation. What shall I do? I shall receive Jesus in my body, in my soul because I am hungry and I am sick. This is where our needs come in, and we have plenty to say. Then we say: What shall I give you in return? I have nothing to bring to you except my heart, my desire, and my hope to love you and to make you happy. And our Lord says: O yes, come. And then I plead: Only say the word and my soul will be healed (cf. Mt 8:8), say the word and I will find joy. Whom will I receive? Jesus Christ. – Who am I? An act of humility: As poor and miserable sinner, how shall I dare come to you? The Good Lord tells me: Come with confidence. Do I dare go there? And what shall I do? Because I am poor and weak, I will bring him my heart, my life, and my desire to love. Then it’s finished. These are the five acts.

Let’s turn to thanksgiving. This is easy, since we already possess him. In Communion, we start by recognizing our self in relation to God; while in thanksgiving we start with Jesus Christ in relation to our self. That is the story of Zacchaeus who throws himself at the feet of our Lord and gives him his goods to give to the poor, and then receives Jesus at a feast (cf. Lk 19:1-10). You possess our Lord; what will you do? The first thing is to recollect yourself in God: My God, I adore you in my body and in my soul, as my Savior and my God. Then give him the homage of all that you have: You are my God; everything belongs to you. It’s time to welcome, to receive, and to rejoice. Then, reflect a bit on yourselves: How can you come to me, poor as I am – there is not even a chair for you to sit. That’s the humility of gratitude of St. Elizabeth: ***How does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*** (cf. Lk 1:43) – This is what she says after having embraced the Blessed Virgin.

Begin with God: My God, how could you come to me? You must be very good, since you know me. In humble gratitude, praise his goodness. Secondly, how can I return a little of your love, and your gifts? You want my entire being. Then give yourselves, consecrate yourselves: My God, what can I do for you? From this flows our apostolate and our zeal. Then we leave our Lord, and we invite the Blessed Virgin, the angels, and the entire heavenly court to come and help us to give thanks. The entire heavenly court arrives, and we step back. We adore, we prostrate ourselves, and we render homage. This is followed by our astonishment: Look at who I am! Who could have invited you to come to me, poor as I am? And we rejoice. What can I do for you? And we give ourselves, we sacrifice ourselves by saying: This sacrifice that I have been holding back for a long time, today I can no longer refuse you – I give it to you. That’s what thanksgiving is – remember it well. I’m giving you the path to follow. Add whatever you wish.

What are the other methods? This will be for tomorrow’s conference. However, keep in mind that every time you are struck by some thought, a grace of recollection or something like it, you must put aside all methods, because you are then in an extraordinary state of grace that the Good Lord is giving you. **Before expressing your gratitude, are you recollected? Take great care not to go out of this state.** Except for such a grace, use a method. All graces do not equal its value, except for one – the grace of rich and consoling recollection that absorbs your attention and so fills your mind that you no longer think of anything else. Every time that you are in a movement of grace, of virtue, remain there and leave everything else. **Our Lord himself becomes your method,** your way – if you leave it, you would be foolish and dishonest.

Imagine that you find yourself face to face with the Pope in his waiting room. Will you not stay there at his feet? Will you ask him to wait before speaking until we are in the parlor? Of course not! Why pass through the anti-chambers when the Pope is there. Take him where he is, and don’t ask to go to the last parlor. When our Lord wants to dispense you from making your preparation, why insist on doing it, since

he has dispensed you. He is telling you: My daughter, I am carrying you; that's better. You must allow this to happen to you. This also applies to adoration. Normally prepare your adoration according to the method. But if our Lord calls you, if he speaks to you, don't say: It's too early; wait in your tabernacle; it's not time yet; I must make my preparation. Remember that when your friend is in front of you, there is no longer a need for an intermediary to introduce you. **I'm giving you these methods for times when you are dry, because you must draw water from the well. But respond first to the Lord.**

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Points for reflection:

What value is there in a method? This instruction presents the basic method for our spiritual exercises. What do you think of it? Do you know some other method that answers your spiritual needs? What would you like to remember from this instruction?