

The Grace of Consolation¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Paris, Wednesday, April 24, 1861

My Sisters, concerning the gentleness of God there is an error that I would like to correct if you ever had the misfortune to fall into it. Briefly, it is this. Some pious persons really want to love God, but, in their love for the cross, suffering, and penance, they reject the consolations that God wants to give them. This must not be done.

Surely God knows what we need much better than we do. If he gives a grace of consolation, of sweetness in his service, a grace of devotion, it's because we need it, or we will need it. And so, in his mercy, he sends it to us. Why should we refuse it? It would be like saying that the Good Lord doesn't know what he's doing. It would also be acting like a beggar who has nothing, yet refuses to accept what is given to him. Perhaps one might object: that God is treating me like a child and I want to serve him as an adult. God is giving a grace of consolation, of piety, and of love; take it with joy. Why do you want to be an adult, when he wants you to be a child? This is not your grace and your virtue. Be a child, since that is what pleases him. You might say that it is more perfect to suffer. Let's get this straight: it is more perfect to suffer when the Good Lord wants it, yes; when he does not want, no. In this love for suffering and mortification, there can be a choice that is very faulty and imperfect. It may result in your crowning your cross with a crown of self-love. It is better not to suffer, than to take pride in your suffering.

But didn't St. Theresa say: To suffer or to die. She did not always say that; she said it during a grace of suffering. But I'm very sure that when God gave her a grace of union, when he came to unite himself to her in his love, she did not reject him; and when he came to unite himself to her in his love, with his heart burning with love, she did not tell him: Take up your spear and your crown of thorns, or else I will not look at you.

Take any saint that you want... St. John of the Cross used even stronger words: To suffer and be despised. The more a soul wants to love the Good Lord, the more it loves the cross, for the cross is the proof of love. While this is true, know very well that St. John of the Cross, with this beautiful maxim, also had moments of rapture. In those moments, he did not think of leaving. Why should we want to change our states? That is not only imprudent, but very dangerous. If we make almost absurd promises, what if the Good Lord would take us at our word? He accepts our good will and keeps the cross for himself. I tell you: love the cross, because it is the essence of Christian perfection; but that does not prevent you from enjoying the Good Lord. When he wants to give you a cross, take it. When this is not what he wants, be very happy, and don't shorten this time. Do not go away to work under pretense of following the saints.

Is it right to wish for consolations? This is not what I said. **Accept these gifts with gratitude;** enjoy them fully, let them last as long as possible. That is not contrary to even the strictest principles of religious perfection. Enjoy and remain in these graces of devotion that help you discover the goodness of the Good Lord. He gives you honey; take it. If our Lord wants you on Mt. Tabor, then stay there. [Mary] did not depart from the feet of our Lord (cf. Lk 10:39); she remained there, and accepted the sweetness.

¹ Number 316. *La grâce de consolation.*

How can one be nourished by a grace of devotion without spoiling it? Tell the Good Lord: How good you are; I don't merit this! Be full of confidence; let your soul be permeated by this goodness of God. Do not say: It seems that I am very good, and that the Good Lord is pleased with me. If you say this, the Good Lord will hide his sun and the manna will no longer fall. That is a big temptation. As soon as you look at yourself in the mirror, the Good Lord will no longer look at you, that's the big danger.

Concerning the scripture passage that speaks of the rock struck by Moses and from which flowed a beautiful stream (cf. Ex 17:6), tradition tells us that the water flowed afterwards for a long time. One day, curious people wanted to investigate whether there was a spring that fed this stream pouring from two big rocks that are still visible in the desert. When they had looked all around, the source was dried up. The spring flowed from the goodness of God. My poor Sisters, if you also try to discover the source, to find happiness in your good works, the spring will dry up. I think you may have had that experience. The devil wants us to look for merit in consolations because he knows that this will bring them to an end. **See them rather in the completely gratuitous goodness of God, and not as a personal good. Know that the reason is: My God, how good you are! To encourage me you have given me what you give to your saints. I don't deserve this. Since Tabor preceded Calvary, I love you now and forever.**

The *Imitation* says: **In times of consolation, think of the temptations that will come.** What was our Lord doing on Tabor? He was speaking about Calvary. My good Sisters, enjoy the consolations, enjoy them in the goodness of God, and prepare yourselves to do greater things. When a king grants a favor, the recipient replies: Sir, I am ready to serve you until death.

All the masters of the spiritual life tell us that when a grace of consolation begins to fade, it must be revived, as happens for a fire that begins to lose its light and heat. **Bring this sentiment back to life by thanksgiving and recollection**, through acts that lead to gratitude and recollection: My soul, see how the Good Lord is good to you; be enriched! God often returns two or three times, and he returns because he finds the soul well disposed: But I'm afraid. Let me be clear: if you seek consolations to experience a joy based on self-love, that is very ugly. Beware of such softness. If you see them as an effect of the goodness of God, don't be afraid of them, but desire them to exalt the goodness of God in you.

What is the sign that this is the right thing to do? Here it is, my good Sisters. **God's graces are of three kinds.** Pure grace describes the soul that is dedicated to God and gives herself to him. Amazed, such a one will no longer be thinking about herself, she loses sight of herself, like a person who has received such a great gift that she thinks only about her benefactor. She forgets about herself and looks only at the gift and says: How good you are! This first sentiment is the flower of gratitude and love. This is the most beautiful kind of grace. Gradually, this sentiment weakens, like a child taking milk while falling asleep. Here God is active, and the soul drinks in the sweetness of love. The second state is the work of nature itself to chew the food. The soul is active, but under divine influence. The third kind is mixed; our poor human nature finds its own role there. Grace is [now] on the decline.

Does the Good Lord always give graces of consolation? The *Imitation* literally teaches that we force the Good Lord to take them away from us. God is holy, but he is pre-eminently goodness itself. Although union involves sacrifice, it may happen in joy and gratitude. If we were very pure, free from material things, we would be united to God through joy. Since we are not, we force God to give us only a few small flowers, a few small rays, for we become rather sensual. We force the Lord to limit his gifts, lest we become proud, thinking ourselves to be saints.

My good Sisters, be aware that one grace of strength is worth a hundred graces of consolation. One leads to victory, the other gives rest. The Good Lord gives us strength, and he also gives us consolations once in a while. However, the *Imitation* says that it is our fault if we don't receive them more often,

because we spoil them by crowning ourselves with them. God acts like a mother who does not always give candy to her child, for candies produce too many worms. The Lord does not give us too many consolations, because they might produce those worms of self-love that would choke us. Should we serve the Good Lord only for these consolations? Of course not! This would be putting worms in this living bread. When God gives consolations, we must gather them carefully, as the saints did. The attitude of thanksgiving gives honor to the one who received, and that is the glory of God. In heaven, joy is constant. On earth, the heart of our Lord suffers. He had to wear his crown of thorns to come and embrace us. He does this so that we will not waste his graces.

I wish you many graces of sweetness and consolation, and above all, a very pure love. Flames rise, they don't go down. The fire that swirls around the hearth is the fire of a storm – if this grace of God swirls around you, it is the fire of a storm. Be careful.



Points for reflection:

What advice did Father Eymard give the sisters on how to receive consolations? How do we nourish a grace of devotion? Explain the three kinds of graces of consolation?