

God's love in everyday life according to Francis de Sales (Morand Wirth, sdb)

Francis de Sales wanted to bring religion back to life and life back to religion. The *Introduction to the Devout Life* does not speak of ecstasies, raptures, impassivity and deifying union, but *proposes a lower but safer road, one less excellent but more suited to everyday life*. For Francis, *everyday life is the providential place in which I can encounter God*. Francis proposes a spirituality for ordinary life, thinking about everyone. *Outwardly, nothing seems to distinguish them from others; inwardly, the flame of love transforms them*.

We need to flourish where God has planted us. This is a central sentence in this spirituality. It consists first of all in honestly loving our state of life. *"We need to love what God loves; now, he loves our vocation; so let us also love it, and let us not waste time thinking about the vocation of others"*. So there is a need to keep an eye on our desires, since they risk leading us up a blind alley, or in other words into serious error. *We need to put our desires in order and turn them into works as the time and opportunity arise. We often waste so much time trying to be good angels, while neglecting to be real human beings. So, there is a need to learn to take pleasure in being where we are called to be to bear flowers and fruit and accept the law of growth. We must not wish to achieve perfection in one fell swoop, he insisted; we need to follow the common and ordinary route that is safer.*

Thus far, this spirituality seems rather passive. But this is only the departure point. From then on, **it is a matter of practising the virtues of the present moment and in the providential place where God has planted us**, and produce not only flowers but fruits in accordance with each one's vocation: *"At the creation, God commanded plants to bear fruit, each according to its kind: in the same way he commands Christians, who are the living plants of his Church, to bear fruits of devotion, each according to their quality and profession."* It is good to recall that there is a hierarchy of virtues. But **charity comes first**. *"Charity, like the queen bee, pulls behind it the whole retinue of other virtues that depend on it and serve us every day"*: patience, humility, gentleness, diligence in everyday duties, kindness, mortification of the heart, tenderness towards others, putting up with imperfections, hold fervour; but also prudence, temperance, honesty, courage, simplicity, modesty, la cordiality, affability. *"To acquire charity we also have at our disposal three great means that consecrated persons vow: obedience, poverty and chastity"*.

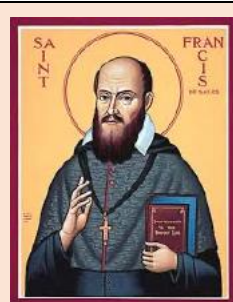
Being aware, therefore, that God also makes himself known through the things that happen in my life and in the world. The element in this spirituality that in a certain sense is the peak to be achieved is called *"holy indifference"*, summed up in the formula *"ask for nothing, refuse nothing"*. Francis starts from the principle that *"everything that happens in life (except for sin) is will by God or at least permitted by him"*. Consequently, those who truly love God prepare themselves to welcome every event, whatever it may be, as coming from the *"beneplacito divino"* or with divine approval. This frame of mind is founded on a great trust in Providence, without which nothing happens in this world. From a purely human point of view too, this confidence contributes greatly to maintaining a constant mood, especially in difficult times. *"Holy indifference"*, you see, is a virtue gained over the years. Practising this spirituality does not mean being completely passive and inert before events, but it leads us *"to want what God wants, matching my will with his"*. *"Everything contributes to the good of those who love God"*, St Paul writes.

It is a **spirituality that unites prayer and life**. There is no Christian spirituality without prayer. Francis de Sales considers three kinds of prayer: vocal, mental and vital. He recommends *vocal prayer*, be it liturgical, communal or personal. *"The quality of such prayer comes from within, from the heart of the person who is praying"*. In fact, God scrutinises the heart of the one who prays and not the words one says. The Bishop of Geneva even greatly appreciated *mental prayer*, which he recommended for everyone. It is an excellent kind of prayer because it effectively gives priority to the inner over the outer. *"Its quality depends, however, on love, because prayer is only as good as the love with which it is performed."* Its secret is to follow the attractions of grace with simplicity of heart, because *"true love knows of no method"*.

There is a third kind of prayer, one very close to life and compatible with any kind of occupation. It is **vital prayer**. This consists in *"performing all actions in love and for the love of God, so that all of life becomes a continuous prayer"*. Our occupations should in no way hinder our union with God, and those who practise this kind of prayer do not run the risk of forgetting about God. *"When two people are in love with one another, their thoughts always go to the other"*. Those who live pressed for time are strongly advised to find *"even brief moments of recollection to unite the heart with God with short aspirations, brief prayers and good thoughts, or to draw God into our spirit. While with the body we are in the midst of conversations and chores, with the spirit we can always remain in the presence of God"*. This way, true prayer does not make one neglect the obligations of everyday life. Francis de Sales believed that this *"active prayer"* was better than others... Thus *"Life becomes continual prayer"*.

Daily life is marked by fleeting moments, but *"in these moments of our life is contained, as in a kernel, the seed of eternity"*. Its quality depends on us. We can *"spend all our years, our months, our days and hours, sanctifying them through good and faithful use"*. *"It is important to take into account the small occasions of each day, especially the annoying little insults, the unimportant losses, the small daily acts of charity, the small inconveniences, the small humiliations, the small sufferings. The smallest of these moments can acquire extraordinary value if they are lived with love."* *"It is not the quantity or greatness of the works we do that makes us pleasing to God, but the love with which we do them."* *"It is love that gives perfection to our works."*

Love is the secret of the Salesian alchemy. *"In this way, you will transform the lead of your heaviness into pure gold."*



Let us entrust ourselves to the intercession of St Francis de Sales

Saint Francis de Sales, Bishop and Doctor of the Church, who by your life and words enlightened so many souls, guiding them, with strength and gentleness, along the path of evangelical perfection, teach us today, too, to follow the Lord more closely.

You said: "Make your Saviour the heart of your heart", so help us to walk in the ways of love, so that our faith may never be dry and without ardour but always led by the divine charity which makes our relationship with the Lord a relationship of those who are in love.

You said: "Ask for nothing and refuse nothing", so sustain our desire to live in trusting abandonment to God's will, certain that everything is grace, the mysterious but true sign of the love with which the Lord accompanies our lives.

You said: "There is no greater difference between the Gospel and the lives of the saints than there is between written music and sung music", so remind us of the beauty of holiness, the joy of a life lived according to God in all respects.

You said: "It is in prayer that we learn to do what we do well", so accompany us every day so that we do not forget the primacy of prayer, the importance of growing in the spirit of prayer which is the true foundation of our faith.

You said: "All that is not for eternity is nothing but vanity", so prevent the realities of this world from distracting us from Heaven, the happy goal of our earthly pilgrimage.

You said: "Our misery is the throne of God's mercy", so maintain in us the serene hope that God's love is always greater than our poor hearts.

Most gentle shepherd, intercede for us with the Lord, "God of the human heart". Bring our desires and intentions before him and watch over us in your spiritual friendship. Amen.

(Bishop Guido Marini)

SCS INFO

Salesian Family World Advisory Council Meeting

Convened by the Rector Major, the World Advisory Council of the Salesian Family meeting was held in Valdocco, Turin from 19 to 22 May. Twenty-four world leaders from as many Groups participated in the meeting, and four others were connected online. They were days of intense communion, in which the spirituality and pedagogy of St Francis de Sales was shared, as well as the charism of the "visitation" in the life and mission of the different Groups.

We were accompanied by Morand Wirth, a Salesian and author of *Saint Francis de Sales, A Program of Integral Formation*. His replies to questions and concerns of those taking part touched everyone's heart. The selection of the previous page is taken from this book, the Italian original of which has already been published in English and will soon be published in Spanish. The contents of the meeting will also be published on www.famigliasalesiana.org. It is an excellent tool to help us get to know and appreciate the figure of St Francis de Sales more deeply.

7th Assembly of the Volunteers With Don Bosco

The CDB are finalising preparations for their 7th General Assembly to be held, God willing, from 28 December to 4 January next winter in Turin. This is a year later than planned due to the pandemic. The Assembly will be focused on mission, with the theme: "*The CDB, a choice of life for the world, so that it may have life and have it in abundance.*"

It is a theme that seeks to continue to revitalise the vocation of the members of the Institute and to strengthen their evangelising mission in the midst of the circumstances of their lives, in harmony with the teaching of the Pope and the proposals that the Rector Major makes to the Salesian Family. Let us not fail to intercede with the Lord for the fruits of this Assembly.

Bishop Luc Van Loy, a cardinal of the Church

Most of the VDBs and CDBs got to know Fr Luc as he was then over the years when he was Councillor for the Missions, Councillor for Youth Ministry and the Vicar of the Rector Major. In 2003 he was appointed Bishop of Ghent (Belgium), a ministry that he remained in until 2019. On Ascension Day Pope Francis added him to the College of Cardinals.

As Fr Luc he gave a strong impetus to the VDB in Korea, and in his years of Salesian service and episcopal ministry, he has maintained his great sensitivity for secular institutes and, in particular, for the VDB. We congratulate him along with the entire Salesian Family. And we pray that he will continue to be a faithful witness to Christ in the service of the Church.