



# Our Lasallian Heritage

## Through the Agency of the Holy Spirit

What comes to mind when you think about the Holy Spirit? More than likely your mind flashes on the visual image of a **hovering dove**, perhaps with a small halo around its head, as if in a Renaissance painting. If pushed a little further, you might say that the Holy Spirit is a member of **the Trinity** and somehow involved with various charismatic movements in the church. The Holy Spirit remains a bit of a mystery, however, removed from everyday life, the subject of theological speculation.

For De La Salle, the Holy Spirit was as **real and alive** as the kids that were encountered in the classroom each day. It was because of the Spirit of Jesus that he had become involved in this work in the first place, and it was the **dynamic presence** of the Spirit in the teaching encounter that transformed it into a means of salvation for both the students and the teacher. Teaching became a **gospel ministry** through ongoing, genuine, and wholly engaged efforts to work with and through the Holy Spirit.

17th century French spirituality recognized that the Holy Spirit played a **central role** in Christian life. One's daily life became more "Christian" to the extent that the Spirit of Jesus shaped one's **interior dispositions**. The Christian incarnates the very being of Jesus through the actions and attitudes of his / her life. The more that the Christian becomes engaged in good works with an attitude like that of Jesus, the more the Spirit of Jesus—the Holy Spirit—comes alive in the process and advances the work of the Church, which is itself the mystical body of Jesus that is an active and present reality in the world today because of the vitality of the Holy Spirit.

The key elements in this process are the **actions** we take, the **attitudes** we have, and the **articulations** that we make. De La Salle urged his teachers to constantly pray for their students, bringing all their daily teaching concerns to God, and to ask that the Spirit of Jesus come alive in them and in their work in the classroom. He also told his teachers that their attitude should be the same as Christ's, that they should see Jesus in their students and look upon them as Jesus would. All their most important and effective actions will flow from both their prayer life and from their **deliberate effort** to take on the dispositions of Jesus.



*De La Salle's writings and reflections were based on a deep appreciation for the Holy Spirit's role in the work of education and Christian life.*

### Reflection Questions

- 1) How do you the Holy Spirit as part of your life? Do you ever think about it? Where would you look to deepen your knowledge about how the Spirit of Jesus engages your life today?
- 2) Where in your life or in the life of your institution could the Spirit of Jesus find an opportunity to have an influence?

When we take Jesus seriously and enter into the **dynamic mystery** of God's life in our midst, we discover that the Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, bursts forth with **unexpected** strength and abundant grace. Approaching a situation with the **dispositions of Jesus** and moving forward in deliberate action based on those dispositions, brings God's dynamic into play. And suddenly we find **more** than we had any right to expect. This is the life of the Holy Spirit and one central reason why De La Salle's approach to education is consistently more **dynamic**, more **desired**, and more **demanding** that most of us may realize. It is eminently worthwhile to find out more.

# De La Salle

In order for you to fulfill this duty with as much perfection and exactness as God requires of you, frequently give yourselves to the Spirit of our Lord to act in your work only under his influence, so that your own spirit may have no part in it. This Holy Spirit, then, will come upon them generously, so that they will be able to possess fully the Christian spirit. (*Meditations, 195.2*)

The more your work for the good of your disciples is given life by him and draws its power from him, the more it will produce good in them. This is why you must ask him earnestly that all your instructions be given life by his Spirit and draw all their power from him. [He] . . . is the one who enlightens the minds of your students and leads them to love and to practice the good that you teach them. (*Meditations, 195.3*)

The truths which the Holy Spirit teaches to those who receive him are the maxims found in the holy Gospel. He helps them to understand these maxims and to take them to heart, and he leads them to live and act in accordance with them.

For the Spirit of God alone can give us a correct understanding of these maxims of the Gospel and can inspire us to put them into practice, because they are above the level of the human spirit. How, indeed, can we ever realize that blessed are the poor, that we should love those who hate us, and rejoice when we are calumniated and when people say all sorts of evil against us, that we should return good for evil, and so many other truths entirely contrary to what nature suggests, unless the Spirit of God himself teaches them to us?

You are obliged to teach these holy maxims to the children you are charged to instruct. You must be thoroughly convinced of them yourself, so that you may impress them deeply on the hearts of your pupils. Make yourself docile, therefore, to the Holy Spirit, who can in a short time procure for you a perfect understanding of these truths. (*Meditations, 44.2*)

In all we do for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, we should undertake nothing without praying to ask God for the light and grace we need to succeed in whatever we undertake for him in this holy ministry, which can succeed only insofar as we are aided by his help and directed by his Holy Spirit. (*Meditations, 107.1*)



[Lasallian educators] are convinced that in the life, work, and writings of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, the Holy Spirit is revealed in a privileged manner, and that they will find there even today a living principle for their guidance.

– Declaration, 5.1

Through a spirit of prayer and attention to the presence of God, [Lasallian educators] remain open to listen to the Holy Spirit, who increasingly reveals to them the truth of faith. By their biblical and theological studies, the Brothers nourish and strengthen their faith. By their constant efforts to achieve interior purity and self-mastery, they strive, as far as possible, to perform all their actions “by the guidance of God, by the movement of his Spirit, and with the intention of pleasing him.”

– Rule, Art. 8



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## Consequences for taking the agency of the Holy Spirit seriously:

To Introduce – *Explicit*: begin each quarter with a faculty prayer service on teaching, the students, and the school. *Implicit*: solicit candid input from new teachers about school life.

To Foster – *Explicit*: address a particular student's needs at each faculty meetings, agreeing on specific goals. *Implicit*: give students a real voice in evaluating and developing school policy.

To Enhance – *Explicit*: address serious challenges as a group after invoking the Spirit's help in prayer. *Implicit*: develop effective methodologies for discerning individual vocations.