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INSTITUTE

OF THE

Brothers of the Christian Schools

INSTRUCTIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE
CIRCULARS

N° 242

1st January, 1925

THE NEW YEAR
THE INTERIOR SUPPORTS OF THE INSTITUTE



MAISON SAINT-JOSEPH
LEMBECQ-LEZ-HAL
BELGIUM

1925

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J. M. J.
J. B.

Lembecq-lez-Hal, 1st January, 1925.
(Feast of the Circumcision of Jesus Christ.)

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AND
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The New Year.
The Interior Supports
of the Institute.



VERY DEAR BROTHERS,

« MAY THE GRACE AND PEACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST BE
ALWAYS WITH US ! »

Our dear Brothers Assistants and myself are still under the pleasing influence of the happy impressions which your kind New Year's letters produced on us. Your affectionate and generous hearts gave expression to sentiments which caused us joy, and made us feel happy and proud for these manifestations of your filial devotedness.

Let me then, Very dear Brothers, first express to you our pleasure and our thanks for your good-wishes, so ardent and so religious. They honour you, and they are for us a sure pledge of your exemplary obedience and co-operation, for they reflect the admirable dispositions which animate you and which you strengthened at the Crib, in intimate and touching converse with the most sweet Infant Jesus.

Your piety afterwards entrusted these good wishes to the benevolence of the most holy and immaculate Virgin Mary, the great St. Joseph, and our glorious Father, St. John Baptist de La Salle.

How could good-wishes, so religiously formed, so fervently recommended, so powerfully supported, not be heard? Thus Very dear Brothers, we have, full assurance that we shall owe you the consolations that the good God has in store for us, and for the good he will enable us to do during this year of 1925.

It has been said : « Love calls for love, and benefits are paid by benefits. » Then, could your Superiors fail to make a return to you, so devoted and affectionate in their regard? You may then be sure that their good-wishes are conceived in accordance with your best desires, that is, a holiness every day greater, an apostleship yet more fruitful, with health and happiness as perfect as they can be here on earth. We also, with our whole heart, ask the holy Patrons of our Institute that the New Year's work, now before you, may be abundantly fruitful for the glory of God, your own sanctification, and the prosperity of our family so dear to St. John Baptist de La Salle.

Last year, at this date, we presented you, as a spiritual New Year's Gift, with some simple and practical considerations on the four exterior supports of the Institute : the Acusation, the Advertisement of defects, the Reddition of conduct, and the Manner of spending recreation time well. To day, Very dear Brothers, we propose to do the same in respect to the four interior supports : Mental Prayer, the Spirit of Faith, the Presence of God, and Interior Recollection.

We shall not repeat the reasons which motived the choice and showed the importance of these spiritual exercises, or why they are pillars of the Institute and a condition of its vitality. Let us recognise, however, that the interior supports, which serve to make our religious life firm and stable inte-

riorly, are of utility still greater than that of the exterior supports, which are intended only to order it well exteriorly. Besides, the results which the religious life produces, including those that benefit our neighbour, depend chiefly on the interior life, as has been well shown by Dom Chautard in his excellent book : *The Interior Life, the Soul of every Apostleship*.

Let us, then, esteem, before all else, the exercises that are our interior supports. We shall treat of them successively, keeping as much as possible, in doing so, to the school of St. John Baptist de La Salle, our Doctor and Legislator in things religious and educational.

I. — Mental Prayer.

The act by which we expressly acknowledge the rights of God over us and fulfil that one of our duties, in His regard the most essential : prayer ; prayer of praise, of thanksgiving, of propitiation, of petition, following the four ends assigned by Theology to this essential exercise of the Christian life.

What is this act of prayer? How is it accomplished? What are the fruits to be expected from it? Let us answer these questions, confining ourselves to Mental Prayer.

A. — What is Mental Prayer?

St. John Baptist de La Salle has defined it with his usual precision and exactness. He says : « It is an interior occupation and an application of the soul to God ». (*Col.*, p. 21.)

That Mental Prayer is *an occupation*, we cannot doubt, we who assiduously practise this exercise. We must readily admit

that this occupation is usually rather laborious. But people of the world are of a different opinion and rather inclined to treat contemplative religious as idle people who spend in prayer a good deal of their time. They do not want to admit that persevering prayer is a labour which requires more effort and courage than many other works apparently more painful. — They are in error. Which of us has not felt sad, to see a tepid religious applying himself to certain works, or a teacher to his class, with more ardour than to Mental Prayer. Did such religious, such teacher, act thus in order to evade trouble on through a false sense of duty:

This *occupation* is *interior*, that is, the prayer is *Mental*, adds St. La Salle. The sacred writers in fact distinguish two kinds of prayers, notably in a verse of the Canticle of Ezechias, where we read : « I will cry like a young swallow, I will meditate like a dove ». (*Isaias*, XXXIII, 14.)

The cry of the swallow is manifested exteriorly; it is a figure of vocal prayer. The groaning of the dove, its cooing, is produced interiorly; it is a symbol of Mental Prayer, which takes place in the depths of the soul, in that region of our being where the greatest calm reigns.

Our soul, in fact, is like the sea. On the surface, it is susceptible of agitation and disturbance, but it remains peaceful in its greatest depths. It is thither that we must retire in order to free ourselves from daily troubles, and to lead a life of union with God in Mental Prayer. « Whatever unites one with God », Says Bossuet, « whatever makes us relish Him, find pleasure in Him, rejoice for His glory, love Him purely so as to find one's happiness in Him, whatever promotes the practice of detachment from oneself and creatures — all this is good, and is true prayer ».

To make Mental Prayer is then to apply oneself to an interior work; it is to work up the three powers of the soul : memory, understanding and will, keeping each of them to its

proper function. The memory presents the subject to be meditated on, with the circumstances which accompany it. The understanding is the plough which digs out the furrow in view of fertilizing the soil. The will is the sower who scatters the seeds destined to produce the fruits of virtue.

It is also said : To make Mental Prayer is to light a fire and produce heat. To obtain this result we employ the three powers of the soul. The memory collects the materials to feed the fire. The understanding arranges and kindles them. Then, under the influence of the heat thus obtained, the will is inflamed for action. All this work is done *interiorly* and is afterwards manifested exteriorly by the efforts which are its consequence.

In fine, St. John Baptist de La Salle sees in Mental Prayer : *an application of the soul to God.*

To apply an object to another is to adapt it, to mould it on that other, in order that it may take its form and become like it. Such is the work of the soul in Mental Prayer. It applies itself, moulds itself, in some way, on God, in order to make itself conformable to Him, that is, to give itself supernatural thoughts, sentiments, and activities. This operation is chiefly the fruit of love, as the term, « application », used by our holy Founder, shows. Besides, this term has the general meaning of love in many languages, ancient and modern.

Thus, Mental Prayer is a work accomplished especially by the heart. In this, therefore, appears the affective character of our method, what we have no reason to be surprised at. For, literary artists among spiritual writers who listen attentively to the Holy Ghost, find words like these, expressive as well as accurate, for stating the truth. Now, St. John Baptist de La Salle belonged to this honourable school, he whose writings are so rich in doctrine, so exact and so clear.

Let us now ask this question : What are we to think of this

interior occupation, this *application of the soul to God*, in which Mental Prayer consists? Must we consider it easy or difficult, agreeable or tiresome, fruitful or barren? We may assert that, if we judge of it in an unfavourable manner, if we find it difficult, tiresome, and barren, it is because we do not devote ourselves to it as we should. The difficulties that are met with in Mental Prayer, ordinarily result from a misconception of the exercise and a mistaken practice thereof. If we were to consider it as a simple and familiar conversation with God, our good Father, should we have so much difficulty in acting in His presence as an obedient and affectionate child? Does not the tedium we feel, come especially from our indolence? May not the well-known maxim : « Ennui is a sickness, the cure for which is work, » find its application here? Or again that other maxim : « If you did your task well, you would not be weary of it ».

As to the fruitlessness of our prayers, let us not speak of it too hastily. We might deceive ourselves, were we to appreciate them according to the impressions we have felt, rather than according to the acts of the will realized in performing them. Doubtless, even in the time of prayer God may try us, leave us in dryness for entire years, even for all our life time. This is what a devoted and pious missionary in Western Canada, Mgr. Grandin, once said : « I have never been able to pray with pleasure. I always have had to do it through duty, doing violence to myself. I do not recollect having succeeded perfectly in a single one of my meditations, even though it had lasted only a quarter of an hour. »

St. Theresa compares the work of Mental Prayer to the watering of a garden. She points out four ways of proceeding in this operation :

1. To draw water from a cistern by strength of arm, and to carry it in the same way to the plants to be watered ;

2. To make use of a motor to raise the water to the level of the ground, and then to convey it to the plants;

3. To use the motor, and then, channels, to conduct the water to its destination;

4. To give oneself no personal care, confining oneself to looking at the rain falling from Heaven, God doing all the work Himself.

Which is the watering that gives the best results? The fourth, we think, for the works of Providence are perfection itself. But in which work is the merit of the gardener greatest? Is it not in the first, since it is the hardest, the most fatiguing for him?

It is thus with Mental Prayer. Certainly it is consoling to witness the operations of grace, to feel its salutary influence, and to take delight in this enjoyment. But, as the proverb says : « One has something for one's trouble. » Is not this trouble the measure of our merit, at the same time that it is a condition of our progress? This is a doctrine calculated to encourage us, supposing, of course, that we have exerted all our good will and taken the means recommended or prescribed to accomplish well this *interior occupation*, this *application of the soul to God*, which constitutes Mental Prayer.

B. — How is Mental Prayer made ?

By the help of two principal means which consist in preparing it with care, and in making it according to a good method.

CAREFUL PREPARATION (1st means).

For every work that one seeks to perform well, a preparation is necessary. By improvising the work, it is done less perfectly and such good results are not drawn from it. Every-day practice confirms this assertion; thus, we prepare the table for

meals, the bed for sleep, the earth for seed, the subject-matter for a lesson or a conference, our dress for making a visit, and all that in order to attain the end sought after; could we do so without this preliminary work? Now, to make Mental Prayer is to eat, to rest, to sow, to instruct, to have an audience with the good God; if we want to profit by it, we must prepare for it.

We distinguish three preparations for Mental Prayer :

The remote preparation, which is the disposing of the soul in a manner favourable to prayer. It concerns the establishing of this favourable disposition by a life of faith, of recollection, of humility, of penance.

The proximate preparation, which is the work to be done just before beginning Mental Prayer. It consists in selecting the subject, in foreseeing the resolutions we should take and the fruit we should draw from it.

The immediate preparation, which is properly the introduction to the exercise.

These three preparations are clearly seen in the preliminaries of Abraham's sacrifice, which was a holocaust, the best of all prayers.

In the first place, God says to His servant : « Go into the land of vision, and there thou shalt offer Isaac for a holocaust upon the mountain which I shall show thee. » (*Gen.*, XXII, 2.)

The land of vision is a figure of Mental Prayer, in which we see God and things of the supernatural order.

The mountain represents prayer, which is an elevation of the soul to God.

The conduct of Abraham in this circumstance, represents the three preparations for Mental Prayer :

1. He leaves his servants, puts aside what would be useless or prejudicial to the accomplishment of the sacrifice; *this is the remote preparation* ;

2. He carries the wood of the holocaust, along with the fire and the sword necessary for the sacrifice; this is the selection of the matter, or *the proximate preparation*;

3. He builds up the pile of wood, places the victim thereon, and takes up the sword to immolate him. This is the commencement of the sacrifice, its first part, or *the immediate preparation*.

Preparation for Mental Prayer is of essential importance for the success of the exercise. And how easy it is! So it is easy to kindle a fire when the wood has been arranged for it, and when it is well dried.

FOLLOWING A GOOD METHOD (2nd means).

If a good method is necessary for every material work we want to do well, it is still more so for a work of the spiritual order. A method is a collection of means proper to realize an end. The etymology of the word, shows us that a method is *a way towards a determined end*. In Mental Prayer, the end is to converse with God, in order to praise Him, to thank Him, to ask His forgiveness, or to lay before Him our wants. The Apostles said to our Saviour : « Lord, teach us to pray ». (*Luke, XI, 1*). They knew that, in praying, one exercises an art. Now the exercise of every art takes place according to rules, all of which together constitute the method. In the beginning, at least, it is important to follow it faithfully; in the course of time, when a habit has been acquired, it may be allowable to free oneself somewhat from it in order to act more freely. But wise is he who does not believe that he can quickly finish his apprenticeship, and who, for a long time, considers himself a novice in the practice of this art.

The constitutive elements of a method of Mental Prayer appear in the Collects and the Offices of holy Church. The Collects are meditations in miniature. This is easily shown, for

instance, in the Collect of the Mass of St. John Baptist de La Salle. There we find : first, an invocation of God, then a consideration on the Christian education of youth, and, in the end, affections or aspirations towards heavenly things.

It is the same with the Vespers; they are made up, first, of a solemn invocation (« Deus in adjutorium »), of considerations (the Antiphons), then of affections or prayers consisting of the psalms, and finally, of resolutions expressed in the Collect of the day.

As to our method of Mental Prayer, it is very simple and, so to say, quite natural, being, as it were, copied from the method of making a visit to some one of high rank. To obtain from such a one a successful interview or audience, in what way do we go about it? Somewhat in this way :

1. We carefully avoid displeasing him. If we can, we even do him some service so as to dispose him favorably towards us. *This is the remote preparation ;*

2. The time for the audience having come, we dress in our best; then we fix definitely on the object of our petition, and present ourselves;

3. We salute, pay our respects, and give thanks for the reception we have received. If possible, we make use of the names of kind patrons, in order to justify the step we have taken and to support the petition we propose to present. These are *the acts of the first part of Mental Prayer ;*

4. When all these duties are accomplished we state the purpose of our visit, we express the object of our request, declaring our confidence in being heard and urging our case, and finally, expressing how grateful we shall be for the favour we have solicited, should it be granted. These are the considerations, the affections or prayers, and the resolutions, that is, *the second part of Mental Prayer ;*

5. Afterwards, we take leave of the person we visited, renewing the assurance of our gratitude for the kindness shown us; in fine, we examine how we have conducted ourselves in the course of the interview, and whether, in a like juncture, it would be possible to do better. *This is the third part, or the review of the Mental Prayer.*

Such, then, is our Method. Nothing better ordered, more logical, than the way it rules our acts in this divine audience.

C. — The fruits of Mental Prayer.

Let us observe, first of all, that there are various degrees of Mental Prayer. For, if, in general, « God's delights are to be with the children of men » (*Prov. VIII, 31*), He is so, however, more gladly with some than with others. In what happened to Moses and the Hebrew people, at the foot of Mount Sināi, we have an illustration and a proof of this truth.

The Book of Exodus thus relates the facts :

« And all the people saw the voices and the flames, and the sound of the trumpet, and the mount smoking; and being terrified and struck with fear, they stood afar off, saying to Moses : Speak thou to us, and we will hear; let not the Lord speak to us, lest we die. And Moses said to the people : Fear not; for God is come to prove you, and that the dread of him might be in you, and you should not sin. Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abiu, and seventy of the Ancients of Israel, went up; and they saw the God of Israel; and under his feet as it were a work of sapphire stone, and as the heaven, when clear. And when Moses was gone up, a cloud covered the mount... six days; and the seventh day he called him out of the midst of the cloud. And he was there forty days and forty nights. And the Lord spoke to Moses as a friend is accustomed to speak to a friend. »

This text describes how the relations between God and the

Christian people are acted on in prayer. The mass of the faithful, unenlightened and much absorbed in temporal affairs, are called to the practice of vocal prayer alone, and to the contemplation, as from afar, of the divine mysteries, chiefly those that inspire the fear of God and dread of His justice. These men are thus incited to give up their sins, to do penance and reform their lives. Others of the faithful are prefigured by the seventy Ancients. God calls them to come nearer Him by the exercise of Mental Prayer, by a more thorough consideration of the divine mysteries, and by more ardent proofs of love and confidence. To this category belong religious, and even those seculars who are somewhat familiar with spiritual things, and who, from contact with them, draw more or less abundant fruit.

Lastly, there are other souls, few in number, represented by Moses, whom our Lord, by a very special favour, raises to a higher degree of prayer and union with Himself. He admits them to His intimacy. He makes them experience great delight in the contemplation of His infinite perfections, and He gives them the most special graces. This is a wholly gratuitous gift of God to these privileged souls. Bossuet advises us not to seek this high degree of prayer, but only to desire a more and more intimate union with our Lord. « The best prayer », he says, « is that in which one endeavours, with simplicity and humility, to conform to the will of God, that in which one abandons oneself the better to the dispositions and movements which God puts into the soul through His grace and by His spirit. » (*Med. on the Gospel*).

As to the fruits of Mental Prayer, the Holy Ghost has summarily indicated them by comparing the soul that piously applies itself to it, to « a well-watered garden » and to « a fruitful olive-tree in the house of God ». (*Ps.*, LI, 10.) A garden is pleasing to the eye; it is a pleasant place of resort when shade and verdure, flowers and fruit, abound. Every dwelling which is not surrounded by one, looks sad and desolate. On the

contrary, the vicinity of a garden gives freshness to a dwelling, together with an air of gaiety becoming a human abode. Thus a proprietor who is prudent and who possesses good taste, will not be content with having around his home extensive fields for the ordinary crops. He will artistically arrange, close to his house, a little garden which he will plant with choice and various kinds of plants. And he will be seen endeavouring to improve it, for the pleasure of life and the profit of his table. By this garden, well cultivated and duly watered, such a person increases the happiness of his life.

Here is an illustration of the soul that is assiduous in Mental Prayer. Drawing divine fruitfulness « from the Saviour's fountains, » it offers heaven and earth the beautiful sight of holiness and zeal. This soul, sterile of itself, has become fruitful by its habitual intercourse with God through meditation. For after having « planted and watered, » it enters into a partnership with Him who alone « can give the increase. » (*I Cor.*, III, 6.)

The Holy Ghost testifies that the soul that applies itself to Mental Prayer is likewise to be compared to « a fruitful olive-tree in the house of God ». There are trees larger and of a more luxuriant foliage than the olive tree; but there are none that produce a fruit more useful and more typical. From the olive is extracted the best of oils, an emblem of sweetness and strength. In cookery, it is used for seasoning. Athletes rub their limbs with it to give them suppleness and vigour — excellent qualities for combatants. In the same way Mental Prayer procures a relish for spiritual things; it infuses into the soul strength and sweetness for the practice of the most excellent virtues, and for the acquisition of the most precious merits. Adam, our first father, became conscious of weakness and trouble only after having broken off his communications with God. Moses was the meekest of men because he went to God as to a friend. St. Ignatius would be resigned

with the ruin of his Society after a quarter of an hour of Mental Prayer. St. John Baptist de La Salle used to say, when in any trial : « God be blessed », and this made him strong to bear it.

In this connection we shall also cite St. Vincent de Paul — that saint of good sense — with whom our glorious Founder presents many traits of resemblance. This great apostle of charity, and indeed of piety also, has left us this warning : « Expect nothing good from a religious that does not make Mental Prayer; he will be useless to everyone : to God, to his neighbour, and to himself ».

Useless to God, whose reign can be established only by workers animated by His spirit; now this spirit is obtained by Mental Prayer.

Useless to one's neighbour, because a salutary influence on souls requires the intimate co-operation of the Holy Ghost, which is obtained, especially, by Mental Prayer.

Useless to oneself, because the light to know oneself, the strength to combat and overcome oneself, that is, to make oneself really better, are assured only to men of Mental Prayer.

Thus, in the supernatural order, we are useful and good for something, only by Mental Prayer. This is what the Saints teach us by their example and their writings. This is indeed of a nature to prove to us the excellence of this holy exercise, to make us appreciate its fruits, and, therefore, to decide us on making the efforts required by « this interior operation and application of the soul to God. » (*St. John Baptist de La Salle.*)

II. — The Spirit of Faith.

The second interior support of our Institute, very dear Brothers, is the Spirit of faith. To live under its influence is, for the Brother of the Christian Schools, a necessity, an

essential duty, since it is the very spirit of his religious family. St. John Baptist de La Salle teaches us that *we must always abide by this Spirit, otherwise we lose everything* (letter to Br. Gabriel Drolin), and also that, for want of having this spirit, *one ought to be regarded and to regard oneself as a dead member, and that it would be very difficult to keep oneself in the grace of God, that is, to be saved.* (*C. R.*, II, 1.)

In order to keep more closely to this teaching of our holy Founder and to understand its importance better, let us answer these three questions :

1. What are the nature and the conditions of the spirit of faith?
2. What is its object?
3. What are its effects?

St. John Baptist de La Salle, who has treated of the spirit of faith with more exactness and fulness, perhaps, than any other spiritual writer, has given us this grand definition : « The spirit of faith is a participation of the spirit of God dwelling in us, which makes us rule and conduct ourselves in all things by the sentiments and maxims which faith teaches. » (*S. and V.*, Ch. II, p. 57).

The Spirit of God — the Holy Ghost — dwells in us by grace. Such is the teaching of our Saviour in the Holy Gospel : « If any one love me », He says to us, « my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and will make an abode with him. » (*St. John*, XIV, 23).

The domicile of the Holy Trinity will be appointed in the soul of such a one. What a signal honour! What a priceless benefit! But, alas! This holy presence, this divine indwelling, is not always well utilized. How many Christians, even religious, know not how to use it to advantage! They act in regard to their good and powerful Guest, as if He were a

stranger, little facilitating, even hindering, His liberty, which is, nevertheless, so beneficial. Whoever acts by the spirit of faith turns to good account the presence of the august Trinity in himself. On the contrary, by following the impulse of nature one derives no benefit from it. What an opportunity is thus lost for enriching oneself for heaven! What precious merits are squandered by carelessness or tepidity.

The Spirit of God, thus residing in our soul, is for it light, strength, and joy. It is enlightened by this light; it is helped by this strength; it draws profit from this joy. Under their influence it performs divine and supernatural works, and thus acquires a great religious and apostolic fruitfulness. But what rule should we follow so as not to be deluded in this matter? Well, that of the maxims and sentiments which faith teaches. These maxims are to be found in the holy Gospel; these sentiments are to be seen in Jesus Christ and experienced in His company. It is, then, our Saviour, His teaching and His example, which will enlighten our conduct and guide it that we may follow on the lines of faith.

Let us here admire the logic and wisdom of St. John Baptist de La Salle. Since he places us in the school of the Divine Teacher by inviting us listen to Him and to follow Him in order to think and act as men of faith, it is also Jesus Christ, in His mysteries, maxims and virtues, that he proposes, almost always, for our meditation. Acting thus we are, indeed at the school of faith; for, to offer for our consideration every day some one or other of our Divine Saviour's mysteries; to propose to ourselves every day to practise some one of His virtues; to examine thoroughly and assimilate every day some of His teachings; always to carry the New Testament about one and frequently to read it — is not all this to maintain thoughts of faith in one's mind? or to nourish one's heart with sentiments of faith? or, in a word, to apply oneself to live by faith.

A. — The object of the spirit of faith.

St. John Baptist de La Salle makes this known to us in the formula we recite every day at morning prayer : *You shall do all things through the spirit of faith, and for God alone.*

Therefore, everything that, directly or indirectly, goes to form the fibre of our life : our thoughts, our sentiments, our actions — such constitute the object of the spirit of faith. In order really to practise this spirit, we must have thoughts, sentiments, and conduct, conformable to the thoughts, sentiments, and conduct of God; we must treat men and things as God Himself treats them, see them in the same light, and assure them the same destiny, as far, at least, as our weakness permits.

Is it so that we make use of our various powers? Is it according to the principles of the Gospel? Has it not been, too often according to the views of the world? In order to render ourselves this account, let us choose some examples : our time, our employment, our sufferings. Let us examine the respective attitudes which the world and faith take of them, and to which of the two does ours come nearest : —

1. *Time.* — The world holds the maxim : « Time is money. » For, it says, time is the means of earning money, and there is reason for employing it for this end until, having acquired a sufficient fortune, one may, beyond the reach of want, take one's rest and enjoy the fruits of one's labour. On the contrary, faith teaches that time is given us to attain our end : to glorify God and to do good; that we should use it in a supernatural manner, as a precious means of sanctification for ourselves and others; or again, as money with which we purchase Heaven for ourselves and our pupils. Faith is founded on truth, the world on error. Which, in our opinion, is right? The world, or faith?

2. *Employment.* — In general, the world regards it as a hard and humiliating necessity, from which we should free ourselves, if we can do so without serious injury; or as a great honour, a lucrative position which we have reason to preserve at all costs, on account of the temporal advantages that flow from it. On the contrary, Faith teaches us that an employment is assigned to us by God, as an efficacious and practical means for leading a well regulated and useful life, for « going about doing good » (*Acts*, X, 58), like Jesus Christ. Faith judges wisely, the world foolishly. On which side are we placed when judgment is passed on our employment? With the world or with faith?

3. *Suffering.* — The world looks on it as a bitter and troublesome problem, which it would wish to be able to solve by suppressing it altogether; or as a cruel destiny against which we must do battle, so as to limit, at least, its painful effects. To suffer the least possible, and even to enjoy the most possible, is the motto and the constant pre-occupation of the world. Faith passes a very different judgment on suffering. It knows that our Lord made use of it to satisfy divine justice offended by sin, and thus to save mankind. In the eyes of faith, suffering is the true way to arrive at holiness and glory. For, says the *Imitation*, « There is no other way to life but the way of the holy cross and of daily mortification. » (*Imit.*, II, XIII, 5.) The world is mistaken in regard to suffering; faith gives correct ideas about it. And we? Do we fly from it? Do we bear it? Do we seek it? What should we not gain by loving it and taking it for our constant companion!

The Brother of the Christian Schools ought also, in order to act according to the spirit of his Institute, to treat persons and things after the dictates of faith and not according to the suggestions of nature. Do we do this? In order to render an account to ourselves of this matter, let us consider two cate-

gories of persons : our confreres and our pupils, and two groups of things : disagreeable things and agreeable things.

1. *Our Brothers.* — Nature too often represents them to us as troublesome persons or as rivals who take from us some of our tranquillity, our reputation, or our influence. Consequently, our relations with them become strained, unkind, unmeritorious also when we do not overcome such impressions. Faith, on the other hand, shows us in our Brothers other Jesus-Christ, like ourselves called to enjoy God in Heaven. Even if their exterior does not please us, if their manners shock us and their defects become irritating, Faith makes us look on them as the Sacred Host that is contained in the sacred vessel, more or less rich. With regard to our confreres, do we act, according to the inclinations of nature or the dictates of faith? Nature inspires the pagans; faith gives the rule for Christians. On such a practical and important point as this, are we sufficiently Christian?

2. *Our pupils.* — Pagan-like, Nature prompts us to regard them as beings unworthy of interest, because they are ruled by egoism, inclined to ingratitude, adverse to discipline; or else as interesting and enjoyable company — a fatal and degrading tendency, which, if not repressed, would lead to softness. In the eyes of faith, on the contrary, our pupils are the dearly-beloved children of the good God, precious plants to be cultivated for Christian society, and the elect to be led to Heaven. Do we, in our relations with our pupils, follow nature, or do we follow the dictates of faith? It was said of old : *The greatest reverence is due children.* Have we this reserve in their regard? Or, still better, do we follow the advice of Rollin, who recommends us « to respect them as angels and to watch over them as devils »? Or, in fine, do we practise the teaching of our Saviour concerning the little ones, *whom we must become like in order to enter the kingdom of heaven.*

3. *Disagreeable things.* — Nature suggests that they should be put away, so much does it hate what is opposed to it, so much does it eagerly seek what is pleasant and convenient, so much inclined it is to take for its motto : « Let us free ourselves from what is troublesome. » — But, regarding faith, outside of sin, there is nothing really disagreeable. For faith accommodates itself to everything and makes out of it a source of merit. In fact, every trial gives one the occasion of gaining heaven, and so much the better as it all the more mortifies self-love.

4. *Agreeable things.* — As for nature, these are matters of good luck. It speaks of them as did the rich man in the Gospel : « Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thy rest, eat, drink, make good cheer. » (*St. Luke, XII, 12.*) — But it knows at the same time, that this enjoyment will be short. The banquet of life lasts for so short a time that one must sit down to it as soon as possible, for death is close at hand. This is what was said a few days ago by a merchant who was more taken up with making money quickly than with safeguarding honesty, and whose maxim appears to be : « A good business before all, so as to have a good income soon ! » — It is thus that nature reasons and decides. Faith, on the contrary, esteems nothing absolutely agreeable. For, the pleasures of this life, even should they be noble and legitimate, will always be fleeting and vain, since, as the Holy Ghost says : « Man's days are as the grass; as the flower of the field so shall he flourish. » (*Ps., CII, 15*), and since, in like manner, our little successes vanish with the smoke of glory which accompanies them.

B. — Two effects of the spirit of Faith.

Having the spirit of faith, or living by faith, makes us attribute everything to God and inclines us to act only in view of pleasing Him. This should be the ordinary practice of the religious man.

1. I SHOULD ATTRIBUTE EVERYTHING TO GOD, notably the favours received from Him, such as the physical, intellectual, and moral gifts with which He has endowed my body and my senses, my soul and its faculties. I should also attribute to God my health and my strength, my mind and my understanding, my will and my energy, with all the effects which result from them, my goodness of heart, with that sweet and strong disposition which makes me find happiness in devoting myself to the interests of my neighbour. I should also attribute to God the honour and the fruits of my religious vocation, the fruitfulness of my apostleship, the resources with which He has enriched my nature and which He has confided to me for His glory and service. I should likewise attribute to God the success I have obtained in my employment, the fruit of His grace and of His blessing much more than of my zeal or of my good management. As to unexpected reverses, they enter into the divine plan, though they are often the consequence of my blunders or my want of attention.

2. I SHOULD DO EVERYTHING IN VIEW OF PLEASING GOD. — « Everything », especially the exercises of piety, my acts of charity, the work of my employment.

a) *The exercises of piety.* — We should acquit ourselves of them with all the care and fervour we can, and, in performing them, have in view only to please God. To please God, by praising Him for His perfections or thanking Him for His benefits; to please God, by exciting oneself to repentance for one's faults and expiating them by a penance proportioned to their number and their grievousness; to please God, by increasing one's intimacy with Him; to please God by a conduct at once trustful, honourable, and religious. Such is the general end we should propose to ourselves. While pursuing it, we are also working for our personal benefit, since « God is not undone in generosity ».

b) *Acts of Charity.* — In accomplishing them I have, doubtless, in view to help and serve my neighbour, but also to please God, remembering the engaging word of our Lord : « What you do to the least of mine, you do to Me », and knowing well that the sentences passed at the general judgment will be supported by reasons founded on fraternal charity. (*St. Matth.*, XXV, 53.)

5. **WORKS OF ONE'S EMPLOYMENT.** — If a religious courageously gives himself up to them, if he spends therein his time, his strength, all his energy, it is in order to please God. — To please! Is there an end more agreeable to the kind-hearted, more sought after by generous souls, more proper to sustain courage, abnegation, even heroism? What do we not do to please a person we love! If it is necessary to inconvenience oneself, to fatigue oneself, to go so far as to sacrifice oneself, we are disposed to do all this. Have we not heard words such as the following : « Provided I can please you, that is the essential point, and I am amply rewarded for my trouble by the happiness I experience in being able to oblige you ». Oh! if the good God were dear to us to this degree, Very dear Brothers, what an ardent and fruitful life ours would be! How it would reproduce the dispositions we admire in St. John Baptist de La Salle, whose biographer tells us that he was so penetrated with faith, so elevated and absorbed in God, that he no longer knew but God, had no longer esteem but for God, that he no longer relished anything but God, and, therefore, that he could no longer apply himself to anything but God. (*S. and V.*)

Besides, if we did not make God the end of our life, what should we put in His place? What thoughts would be dear to us? What sentiments would fill our heart? To what would our activity tend? What end should we assign to our existence? — Without the spirit of faith, alas! we should be swayed by very vain, if not unworthy thoughts : —

a) By *thoughts of vain complacency in ourselves*, which would

incite us to erect a pedestal to our « Ego » and to our nothingness, poor idols, to which we should render a shameful worship ;

b) By *thoughts of esteem for the opinions of men*, which would induce us to seek their approbation, their praise or compliments, often insincere, and frequently accompanied by a smile of pity ;

c) By *thoughts of ambition*, on which our pride would feed, and which would be for it much more a torment than even a vulgar enjoyment ;

d) By *mean and degrading thoughts*, the chastisement of a soul created to soar on high, but which crawls on earth — to be exalted to heaven, but which degrades itself to hell.

Without the spirit of faith, alas ! our sentiments would have no dignity ; they would be : —

a) Earthly sentiments, by which our heart would be weighed down, as happens to anyone who lets himself be absorbed by material cares ;

b) Harsh sentiments, for, not seeing God in our neighbour, we cannot long regard the latter as another self, or, consequently, make much effort to treat him as we wish to be treated ourselves ;

c) Selfish sentiments, inspired by self-interest alone and thus deprived of all abnegation, cut off from all generous aspirations.

Without the spirit of faith our activity would be employed for the sole benefit of the creature and to the prejudice of the Creator ; disorder would reign in our conduct. Time, so fleeting, would become the whole of life, and eternity, so long, would not have the preponderating share in our pre-occupations and solicitude. — Without the spirit of faith our existence would not attain a noble end. We should not be able to consecrate it to God and to souls, but to human learning, to self-interest, to

pleasure. The best of us would apply himself to what is his duty, that duty which we tire of so quickly, when it is only a work of reason and when the will of God is not considered. What a poor life is that in which faith does not hold the principal part and inspires neither its thoughts, sentiments, nor activity. Without that faith how shall we be victorious over the world? For St. John says : it is faith alone which makes one triumph over it (*St. John, V, 4*), and over our two other enemies : the devil and the old man.

It is then faith — a living faith, or the spirit of faith, which makes victors and saints. Happy he who is of its school and follows its lessons with docility!

III. — The Presence of God.

The Presence of God is the third interior support of our Institute. It is also one of the most efficacious means, if well employed, for the sanctification of a Brother of the Christian Schools.

This means is not new. It dates from the time of Abraham. God Himself recommended its use when He said to that great Patriarch : « Walk before me and be perfect ». (*Gen., XVII, 1.*) — Yes, the thought of God's presence is supremely helpful towards holiness, on condition that it be frequent and interior, as is prescribed to us in this Commandment of our Society : « You shall often think of the presence of God interiorly. »

A. — The thought of the Presence of God is helpful towards Holiness.

It has been said : « The eye of the master does more work than his hands ». This maxim is true when the master is at once feared, respected, and loved. His presence then suffices to keep the servant actively to his work. We all know the

strong impression produced on soldiers by the presence of certain military leaders. When under the eyes of their chief, these soldiers, whether working or fighting, become, so to say, other men, heroes of endurance and bravery. — On the other hand, the want of attention on the part of the master, or his prolonged absence, causes the work to languish or to be badly done. If one is not followed up, one sometimes yields to the temptation of taking things easy and of neglecting work. Now the eye of God is always open on us. He sees our life in its entirety and in all its details, and He heeds our sayings and doings, in order one day to reward or to punish us for them, as the case may be. What religious would not be incited by this thought to fulfil his duty with care! If the mere presence of an equal or even of an inferior, suffices to make us watch over our bearing, our manners, our language, our entire conduct, as happens to us in class in the presence of our pupils, how would not the presence of God, such as reason and faith reveal it, be for us an efficacious stimulus to what is good?

Therefore, St. John Baptist de La Salle, a wise and practical man, points out to us its important effects, particularly the three following : —

1. *To prevent us from offending God when we are exposed to do so*, for the reason that, thinking on Him, we would be ashamed to outrage Him by violating His holy law. « How can I do this wicked thing, and sin against my God, » (*Gen.*, XXXIX, 9), when I should blush to do it in presence of a fellow-man? A certain physician, a good Catholic and friend of the Institute, the rules and customs of which he was acquainted with, once said to me : You, Brothers of the Christian Schools, cannot sin ». « And why, doctor », he was asked. « Because you lead a life in common; you are always together and protect one another from all evil. » Doubtless this remark was exaggerated ; nevertheless it contained a good deal of truth.

2. *To exclude from our minds undue attention to creatures.* —

This is another effect of the thought of God. « Man », says the Holy Scripture, « is bewitched by vanity » (*Wisdom, IV, 12*); trifles make him forget the Creator, who is everything, and he lets himself be bewitched by the creature, which is nothing. This is a disorder, and one of the most serious. — Well, the thought of God, well maintained, re-establishes order in the mind; it puts everything therein in its place : the creature in the back-ground and God in the fore-ground. When an architect, with the sense of religious Art, builds a church, he orientates the entire structure towards the altar and the tabernacle, as the central point of the edifice. Then the attention of the pious visitor, on entering the holy place, is directed to the Master of the House, our Lord Jesus Christ. This is order.

Now, by the thought of God, the guiding thought of the Christian, we likewise orientate our life. We make it, first of all, a homage to our Creator, and thereby withdraw it from creatures. Turenne, one of the greatest men of the reign of Louis XIV, was at first a Protestant. Bossuet instructed him and brought him around to the Catholic faith. One morning Turenne was in a church in Paris for his devotions; his servant was there also, but neither was aware of the other's presence. At the time of Communion the servant approached the Holy Table first. Then, noticing his mistake, he drewback and respectfully said to his Master : « Go first you, Sir ». Turenne replied : « You go before me, I left my dignity at the door. » This is noble and Christian language, and reminds men that, before God, all human dignity disappears, and that our services should be addressed to the Creator and not to the creature, the latter, of itself, having no right to them. This is also what St. John Baptist de La Salle teaches us when he signalizes this supernatural attitude as one of the effects of the holy presence of God.

5. *To bring vigour to the spiritual exercises.* — What a stimulus to our attention, piety and fervour, when we are well convinced that, in performing our spiritual exercises, we are speaking to God. To believe firmly that the good God gives us audience in order to treat with Him of our spiritual interests, is one of the most favorable dispositions for keeping away distractions and for giving efficacy to our prayers. Who that has had to prepare for entertainments, religious ceremonies, public examinations or competitions, has not seen a great difference in the alertness of the pupils or the actors on the occasion of the rehearsal on the eve, and, the performance on the festive day itself? How much better young men succeed when they have before them the public ready to applaud or the judge that awards the highly-prized diploma! In the same way our spiritual exercises are performed with more fervour when we have the firm conviction that God is present and takes part in them. The thought of His presence intensifies our application and, therefore, increases the good results that are obtained. This is why St. John Baptist de La Salle, ever consistent with himself, urges us so strongly to be well impressed with the thought of the holy presence of God, especially for Mental Prayer, « the first and the principal of our daily exercises ». (*Com. Rule, IV, 1.*)

**B. — Conditions of the efficacy of the thought
of the Presence of God.**

Our holy Founder and Father indicates two : that it be frequent and interior.

1. **FIRST, THAT IT BE FREQUENT.** — One of the defects of the human mind, not the smallest, nor the least harmful, is to be fickle and inconstant. Hence its weakness.

a) *Being fickle*, our mind fixes itself only with difficulty on a determinate object. It flits from one thought to another, from

one impression to another, without giving itself the time, nor taking the care, sufficiently to turn to account the first thought or impression. Such is the butterfly which we see going from flower to flower, without extracting from each of them the nourishing juice it contains, like a dilettante eager to go about and to vary his pleasures, rather than a serious workman, intent on doing useful work.

b) *Being inconstant*, our mind does not apply itself for long to the same work. It soon gets tired, because it is not inured to patient and sustained work. This is very prejudicial to us; for, without persistence in effort, no fruitful work can be accomplished. This fact explains our intellectual and religious mediocrity, and our relative sterility, in fruits of learning and virtue. Therefore it is, also, that our tastes are capricious and changeable, an unfortunate disposition which we should try to remedy. We can do so only by struggling with vigour and perseverance against our habits of mind, against the frivolity and levity in which we find pleasure, until we come — if such be our good fortune — to that blessed state at which St. Francis de Sales arrived, whose biographers assure us « that he was not subject to distractions; for, by a special grace, he did what he wished with his mind. » — To do what one wishes with one's mind! What a great and precious power! Why should this mastery of ourselves have escaped us for a long time, perhaps! Well! if our thoughts have taken the habit of roaming about, there is reason to make an effort to bring them back to their legitimate and necessary object : God, before all and above all. He alone is worthy to engage their attention. It is on Him they should be fixed. — Besides, let us not think that there is any incompatibility between our functions, however absorbing and distracting they may be, and the frequent thought of God. There is no such incompatibility. What man was more occupied, more burdened with cares than St. John Baptist de La Salle? And yet what man more

faithfully kept the thought of God in his heart? Was it not said of him that, *being raised above visible and perishable things, he lived only to adore God, thought only to pray to Him, spoke only to praise Him, worked and suffered only to merit Him.* This is the testimony given of him by the Pastor of Saint-Sever, in the chapel of Saint-Yon, in 1754, on the occasion of the translation of the relics of the Saint.

Let us then take St John Baptist de La Salle for our Model in his union with God; or, if you will, Brother Dominic, one of his first disciples, who, in the distraction of a large class, which, it seemed, he controlled with some difficulty, used to say, as he pointed to his pupils: « *I see only God* ». Or again, General de Sonis, a great Christian, very spiritual, who was so familiar with the interior life that, after having commanded his troops during a fierce engagement, he was able to give himself this testimony: « *Whilst the struggle lasted, the thought of God never left me for a moment.* » What a habit of the presence of God must not he have acquired in order not to lose sight of it for a single moment, in circumstances fraught with such serious pre-occupations. — Another model is the pious and zealous Brother Altigien-Louis, who died as Visitor of Puy, in 1912. Among his papers, there was found, with others, the following resolution: « *I shall raise my soul to God every quarter of an hour, at the stroke of the clock: the first quarter, to God the Father, my Creator, thanking Him for having drawn me from nothingness; the second quarter, to God the Son, my Saviour, thanking Him for having redeemed me; the third quarter, to God the Holy Ghost, whose temple I am, thanking Him for sanctifying me; the fourth quarter, to the most Holy Trinity, saying in its honour the *Gloria Patri.* » — We should, at the very least, reach the degree fixed for the pupils, and, twice every hour, recall to memory the holy presence of God. We remember two of our young Brothers, who worked in the garden of one of our large establishments. The house clock*

was heard all over the grounds. As soon as it struck the hour or the half-hour, our two workers suddenly stopped and, taking the recollected attitude of Millet's personages in his picture *The Angelus*, they recalled the thought of God and offered Him their work, in imitation of their Brothers in class : a pious practice, which is a source of good resolutions and many merits.

2. THAT THE TROUGHT OF GOD BE INTERIOR. — An interior thought! Is not this a pleonasm? Is not a thought always interior? Yes, without doubt. Nevertheless it may fix itself on what is outside of us, and thus become externalized in its object. This is the case when we consider God in His material works. Certainly, when we contemplate the earth and its varied riches, the sea and its mighty waves, the heavens and its shining orbs, the universe full of magnificent sights, we discover God and His action everywhere present in the world : a spectacle proper to elevate the soul and do it good. — But this God, wholly exterior, wholly under the senses, so to say, is incomplete. When we think of Him solely in this manner, we should have only one aspect of His action and that the least. We should make of Him, in some way, only « the great architect of the Universe », as the Free-Masons of old used to style Him — the Free-Masons of old, for, those of our day have other views concerning Him.

The saint thinks of God « interiorly ». He believes, with a firm faith, in that spirit which is in us to give us « life, movement, and being. » (*Acts*, XVIII, 27.) — And this spirit is God. To think of Him « interiorly » is to attend to His action in us and try to facilitate it; it is to follow and second the movements of His grace in our souls; it is to regard Him as the necessary Workman, with whom we must co-operate, according to our feeble means, in order to effect the work of our sanctification. To think of God « interiorly, » is to believe that saying of our

Lord : « If any one love me, my Father will love him, and we will come to him and will make an abode with him. » (*St. John*, XIV, 25.) — To think of God « interiorly » is, as St. John Baptist teaches, « to fill oneself with Him, to nourish one's soul with Him, to participate in His life, and thus to make one's apprenticeship for eternal life. » (*Method of Mental Prayer*.) — Let us remark that by these words our holy Founder manifested his own interior state; for, his biographer says, « the exterior of the Founder of the Brothers revealed an interior in which God dwelt, and in which he kept all the powers of his soul applied to the exercise of adoration, love, and self-annihilation. » (*S. et V.*, Ch. III.) St. John Baptist de La Salle is again our model in the practice of this great and fruitful exercise of the presence of God. The habit he had of keeping his mind continuously filled with God, made him scarcely able to speak but of this divine Master and so occupied with Him in all places, and even in sleep, during which he was sometimes heard to cry out : « Lord, you know I desire only you; my God, you know that I love you. » (*S. and V.*, Ch. IX.)

There are, indeed, very dear Brothers, some Christian practices difficult for pride or sensuality. The constraint and the suffering they impose, make them distasteful to our nature. Such are the practices of humility and penance. To humble oneself, to mortify oneself, is evidently necessary, but how difficult to the effeminacy and to the rationalism of a human being! — It is not thus with the remembrance of the holy presence of God, even when frequent and intense. Is there an exercise easier and sweeter? One must then be inexcusable for neglecting it. So much the more as our Rules come opportunely to the help of our memory, to remind us of its practice. So many times a day they prescribe to us the beautiful and suggestive invocation : « Live Jesus in our hearts! For ever! » — a favourable occasion for thinking of God living in us, and

for intensifying our life of union with Him. Morning and evening, at the beginning of our prayer, our formulas give us the means of renewing our attention to the holy presence of God. When we enter a room to remain there for some time, or before leaving it, our Rules require us to make an act of adoration of God present. Before undertaking an action of some duration, we should say the *Veni, Sancte Spiritus*, which allows us to think of the life of the Divine Paraclete and His holy assistance. It is by a very definite act of faith in the presence of God that we begin Mental Prayer, — an act which is a necessary condition for acquitting ourselves well of it and for deriving fruit therefrom. In class, at the hours and half hours, we are bound to have the suggestive formula recited aloud : « Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God », — a beautiful practice, not less useful to the teachers than to the pupils. How many other customs there are which give occasion to the regular religious to recollect himself under the eye of God and to put himself once more under the beneficent influence of His holy presence. Let us be faithful to them, very dear Brothers, in the two-fold view of our personal sanctification and our Christian apostleship. There is no easier or better means for supernaturalizing our intentions, for rendering our exercises of piety profitable, and for multiplying the fruits of our zeal.

IV. — Interior Recollection.

This is the fourth interior support of our Institute.

While we regulate our exterior by the practice of the virtues of reserve and moderation, we must, says St. John Baptist de La Salle, establish the reign of recollection in our interior. This latter work is the more necessary; it keeps the former under its dependency. For, the outward man cannot be cor-

rectly ordered unless the inward man is set aright. The body is for the soul and subject to its orders, in order to be influenced by it, as the servant is influenced by his master.

From this fact let us deduce the great importance of Interior Recollection, and how expedient it is to apply ourselves well thereto. Here, moreover, are three reasons given by our saintly Father and Legislator : —

1. « Interior recollection recalls the soul to itself; »
2. « It establishes the soul in peace; »
5. « It disposes the soul to the presence of God and the exercise of Mental Prayer. »

On recollection, then, depends the peace of the soul; moreover, two of the fundamental exercises of our spiritual life are closely connected with it, namely : the Presence of God, and Mental Prayer.

A. — Interior Recollection recalls the soul to itself.

By these few words our holy Founder reminds us of one of our greatest weaknesses and point out the means of remedying it. Truly, in man it is a great weakness to deviate from his rôle, to neglect his principal duty, which is to be occupied with God, in order to spend himself on scenes and works foreign to his proper sphere. Who has not many times recognised and deplored these digressions, this scattering of our powers? and who has not felt the pressing necessity of « recalling the soul to itself » so as to concentrate its strength in view of making a better use of it, a use more conformable to the divine will and our eternal interests. — Our memory is fickle. It passes from recollection to recollection, making them revive at every turn, and often even to the prejudice of an occupation which suffers from this variety of affairs that encumber the thought. One single idea, well weighed, well

matured, is ordinarily better than this multiplicity of questions on which the memory dissipates its effort. — Our imagination is capricious. Writers have called it « the fool of the house. » It abandons itself to dreaming, to castle-building; it revels in unreality and collects all sorts of images, in order to build up fantastic representations, without objective reality, and even dangerous to innocence and virtue. — Our understanding also sometimes leaves its own work, abandons its essential offices, to give itself to secondary occupations or such as are at hand; this is a squandering of one's strength and a poor use of one's toil. — All these powers of mind, made to be occupied with God, to harmonize their action with His and act under His dependence, should all be frequently brought back to the proper object of their activity, if they are to contribute in making life useful.

The passions and the will have an equal need of the same rein to hold them from the bent of caprice, while they apply themselves to the work assigned them. — But, in place of that, what do we sometimes find, in our examinations of conscience? We discover a passion which attaches itself, without prudence or reason, to objects of a useless and ephemeral character, which, mingles with our exercises of piety, charity, and zeal, impressions without either consistency or moral vigour. We discover a will which, far from performing works, noble, and of an elevated character, is content with a common, shabby programme, and, in place of pursuing the noble ends of the glory of God and the salvation of souls, substitutes self-seeking and the worship of self, — a sacrilegious way of occupying our time and using our activity. It is thus that we employ or rather dissipate the resources of mind and heart which God has bestowed on us. Hence arise the desultoriness of our life, the dearth of our merits and even of our human results. Oh! what reason the prophet had to cry out: « With desolation is all the land made desolate, because there is none that

considereth in the heart » (*Jer.*, XII, 11), because every one allows his soul to drift along in the wake of its versatility, in place of gathering its powers together and applying them to the noble ends for which God gave them to us.

Who will not recognise here a great weakness and a lamentable disorder. Happily there is an efficacious remedy for this weakness and this disorder, so fatal and so prejudicial to our spiritual life : *it is interior recollection*. It is that which recalls to their proper places and to their regular work, all these vagrant or eccentric workers; it is that which, concentrating their action, makes it strong and fruitful; it is that which limits for the memory the field of its recollections, fixes for the imagination the limits of its workings, and holds the understanding to its proposed work. — It is that which corrects the extravagances of our passions, which makes the ruling power of the will find its true point of application and its executive strength.

Therefore, interior recollection fulfils one of the most useful offices in our soul. Its role may be compared to that of the faithful dog, keeping the sheep of the flock together, so that the wolf may not carry off any, or to that of the officer who draws up his batteries against the point to be stormed, and uses them to attain it, or to that of the mechanic whose machine has parts so well adjusted that each of them concurs in producing the entire work. Interior recollection might then take for its device : « Union is strength, » for it realizes it in us.

**B. — Interior Recollection establishes the soul
in tranquillity.**

On one of the principal monuments of a large city, we once saw an allegorical chariot drawn by eight horses. These were pulling in several directions, each of them endeavoring to draw the car with itself. A witty journalist of that time — it is

said that almost all are so — allowed himself irreverently to write that this was a faithful image of the Car of State. At all events the work well represented the man whose interior is badly ordered, who has not known how to concentrate the faculties of his soul towards one only and precise object. It was a figure of anyone who does not keep himself under the influence of recollection, but allows himself to be dragged about by contending forces. Such a man will experience only uneasiness, and his life will be troubled by the division of his moral resources acting in a disorderly manner. On the contrary, whoever lives in recollection establishes his soul in a happy and salutary tranquillity, because all things are in their proper place, every power does its assigned work, all efforts are coordinated with this, in a word, because order reigns therein, and therefore, *peace, the tranquillity of order*, as St. Augustine calls it.

To live in this way is what St. John Baptist de La Salle earnestly wished and recommended, especially to him who lacked control over himself and gave way to distraction of mind or senses. To one of his disciples, who was somewhat giddy, he gave this advice : « Watch over yourself and correct your hastiness and be not so exterior. I pray God to grant you this grace and to take away from you something of your liveliness, for it is not proper for you to manifest so much of it. » (*Letters.*)

To another Brother the Saint wrote : « If your soul does not possess the happiness of the interior life, endeavour to procure it by recollection. This is the greatest happiness you can enjoy in this world. » (*70th Med.*) — Lastly he told a third that « one of the principal signs that a person lives an interior and spiritual life, is that he has peace within him ». St. John Baptist de La Salle then believed that peace and recollection are always associated as the effect is with its cause, the former being a result of the latter. — Again, he also used to say : « To

live in a recollected manner, to be wholly occupied with directing one's interior activity towards God, is to fulfil the conditions of peace. »

**C. — Interior Recollection disposes the Soul
for the presence of God and for Mental Prayer.**

Interior recollection produces most excellent fruit. We have seen this : it has over our faculties the role of a general grouping his forces to fight with success against his enemy and to take away from him the positions he occupies. In the course of the Great War there was often question of preparing artillery. It was necessary, after having located the position of the enemy, to place the cannon and the troupes in the the most favourable position, so as surely to reach him and cause by means of the proposed assault, the greatest loss of men and ground. Such is also the preliminary work to be done before undertaking a spiritual assault. One's forces must be collected and arranged in the order for attack. This is the effect of recollection; it is it that facilitates and regulates the use of these two great arms : the presence of God and Mental Prayer, without which there would be no hope of victory.

1. *Interior recollection is a help to the holy presence of God, and reciprocally.* — This has been spoken of above. To complete the explanations already given, let us add that this exercise, while possible in the midst of noise and the most absorbing occupations, is neverthelers easier in calm and peace of soul, that is, in a state of composure. For, just as is related by the sacred writer in the history of the prophet Elias : « The Lord is not in the wind,... the Lord is not in the earthquake,... the Lord is not in the fire (*but only in*) a whistling of a gentle air » (*III Kings, XIX, 11*), that is, in a calm and composure wholly penetrated with sweet grace.

This is also what St. John Baptist de La Salle teaches us in the following words : « There are many souls so interiorly free, so detached from all created things, that God bestows on them this great grace, that they never lose, or only very rarely, the sense of His holy presence ; a favour which gives them in this world a foretaste of the happiness of the Blessed in heaven. » (*Meth. of Men. Prayer*, p. 52.) And he adds : « The soul becoming filled with God, insensibly detaches itself, by being occupied with His divine presence, from creatures and, by recollection, becomes interior. » (*Meth. of Men. Prayer*) — These two texts of our holy Founder show us : a) that interior recollection is a great help to the exercise of the presence of God ; b) that the exercise of the presence of God is, in return, a help to the practice of recollection. — This reminds us of reversible machines, which transform power of one kind into another, and *vice versa* ; thus we see electricity producing motion, and motion producing electricity. We may deduce from this fact that the physical world and the moral world follow analogous laws. God, the Author of both, has put a certain similarity into their organization. Thus, by visible things, He instructs us on the phenomena of the invisible world, — for which, we should thank Him — for in this way truth appears to us more clearly, and we better weigh its effects on our conduct.

2. *Interior recollection is a help to Mental Prayer.* — It will always be one of the essential elements of that state of the soul which we call, the *remote preparation for Mental Prayer*. — It has been said : « Without recollection, no Mental Prayer, » and still less of the spirit of Mental Prayer. This is why St. John Baptist de La Salle could write to one of his Brothers : « The dryness you experience in Mental Prayer comes from your not applying yourself to spiritual things, not even thinking of them, outside of the time of meditation, » that is, from your not

practising recollection. He stated also to another : « The distraction to which you give way, is the cause of the difficulty in applying yourself to Mental Prayer. It is the sign and the effect of the derangement of your interior. Be then very careful to correct this defect ». (*Letters.*) — We likewise read in the 1st Point of the Meditation for the Feast of St. Remigius : « In retirement, where we are entirely separated from creatures, we learn to be disgusted with, and to wean ourselves from, all that pleases people of the world, in order to converse the more easily with God ». (*Med.* 171.) — Let us then recognize that, without living in recollection, we cannot easily pass from a life of action to that of prayer. During the course of the day so many objects attract our eyes, so many words and noises reach our ears, so many impressions affect our minds, so many motives influence the will ! If we do not remove these, it will be impossible to cut off, at a certain point, the source of the distractions that come therefrom, and to hold, in their regard, the language of St. Bernard : « Business-thoughts, I am going to converse with God in His house. You that can only make the exercise of prayer more difficult, remain at the door; on going out, I shall take you up again, if you are worth the trouble. »

By remaining under the empire of recollection, the religious will have some facility and at times a real attraction for Mental Prayer, and he will thus realize the counsel of our Saviour : « We ought always to pray, and not to faint ». (*S. Luke, XVIII.*) St. John Baptist de La Salle had come to this edifying and fruitful state. He applied himself so much to interior recollection, that it had become to him, as it were, a second nature. He everywhere united it with Mental Prayer and gave himself simultaneously to these two exercises : by day and by night, in the house and in the Church, in his room and in the streets, he prayed and kept himself united to God in deep recollection,

which sometimes became ecstasy, as happened even on his journeys.

St. Francis de Sales, whose moral physiognomy and whose method of spiritual direction offer more than one trait of resemblance with those of our holy Founder, used to call interior recollection « the gathering together of the powers of the soul into the heart to treat there alone with God, without company or occupations being able to prevent this retreat. » He used also to say that recollection should be as frequent and as familiar to us as respiration, and that, outside its influence, all spiritual exercises were a holocaust without marrow, a heaven without stars, a tree without leaves, that is, something dry, sad, and sterile. — When some one lost the occasion of making Mental Prayer, the holy bishop wished that this loss would be made good by recollection and more frequent ejaculatory prayers, being sure that, in this way, losses are made good, and great progress in virtue is made. St. John Baptist de La Salle speaks the same language. How many passages in his *Spiritual Doctrine* are echoes, if not reproductions, of the same counsels! Besides, could there be any disagreement between these great saints on the manner of glorifying God and of conducting souls to perfection?

Here you have, very dear Brothers, briefly laid down, the principal means or exercises given us by St. John Baptist de La Salle for the practice of the supernatural life, and designated by him as Supports of the Institute. Let us employ them with assiduity and fervour in order to realize the end for which they are intended. This is what our glorious Founder did during his whole life. He never proposed to himself any other end than to make his thoughts, his sentiments, his acts, truly supernatural. To live as an interior man, was always his great solicitude.

The picture of him which Canon Blain has left us, shows the magnificent results of this long continuity of effort. We cannot better close this circular than by reproducing this splendid page. It will show the effect following the cause and the practice flowing from the theory.

« No one », says Canon Blain, » looked more like a saint than St. John Baptist de La Salle. Grace, enthroned, so to say, on his brow, seemed as if to point out to men what he was before God. All in him exhaled the odour of the virtues of humility, modesty, mildness, equanimity, mortification, charity, and of signal piety. Always the same in so many sorrows and griefs, in so many sad and afflicting events, on so many occasions of trouble and uneasiness, he appeared like one whose heart, fixed on heaven, seemed to take no interest in what is passing here below; like one applied to regulating all his holiest desires and most glorious projects for God, and solely according to His will and pleasure. « To do penance, to humble himself, to crucify his flesh, to pray, to converse with God; to appear among men only to work for their salvation or to meet with their contempt; to suffer all, to yield to every one, never to complain, always to decide against himself, to be the first to condemn himself, to love his friends in Him and his enemies for Him, to see and will but God in all things, to be interested but in His glory and to forget all else; to have a desire only to imitate Jesus Christ, an attraction only for His Cross : is not all this the summary of the life of the holy Founder? And also the consequence of the faithful accomplishment of his spiritual exercises, especially of those he has termed *the supports of the Institute?* » (S. & V., Ch. XXIX, p. 467.)

Very dear Brothers let us strive, every day, to reproduce this noble model a little better, in order that the present year may mark in us a notable progress in the practice of the interior life. This is the wish that we now add to those we

expressed at the beginning of this circular. Such is also the earnest prayer that our dear Brothers Assistants and myself offer, for your intention, to the divine Heart of Jesus, to the most holy and immaculate heart of Mary, to the great St. Joseph and to our Father, St. John Baptist de La Salle, our powerful patrons, while remaining with religious and lively affection in our Lord Jesus Christ,

Your every humble and devoted servant,

BROTHER ALLAIS-CHARLES.