

Prayer Meditations

FROM *THE TWELVE VIRTUES OF A GOOD TEACHER*

INTRODUCTION

"The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher" are based on an original list included by Saint John Baptist de La Salle in his classic work, "The Conduct of the Christian Schools." Published in 1785 by Superior General Brother Agathon, the virtues were a guide for the Brothers in developing the qualities necessary to be effective teachers and mentors to their students. They also serve as a collection of the qualities that characterize the spirit and aims of Lasallian education. These reflections can be used individually or together for Lasallian formation as the subjects of prayer, reflection and discussion by school faculties and boards of trustees during meetings, in-service days or retreats.

By Bob Carrejo

Gravity (Seriousness) and Silence

Let us remember ... **that we are in the holy presence of God.**

OPENING PRAYER

Eternal Father,
in your Son we can see what it means
to be a person of character and integrity.
Inspire us in our words and actions to be persons
who give good example, especially to the young.
May we overcome any weaknesses that prevent us from doing this,
and instead may we be dependable
and true in all of our relationships with others.
Help us to live virtuous and caring lives.
We ask this of you who lives and reigns
with your Son and the Holy Spirit,
one God forever and ever.
Amen.

READINGS

"The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher" by Brother Agathon, FSC, 1785

Gravity (Seriousness) is a virtue that regulates the exterior of a teacher conformably to modesty, politeness and good order. ... Far from seeking only to make them fear him, his main aim is to win his students' confidence, the better to know the virtues they may possess, so as to cultivate and develop them; and the more easily to discern their vices and defects, in order to correct these, if not entirely, at least as far as he can. For this purpose, he carefully eliminates from his behavior whatever might smack of harshness, overbearingness, and bluster – in a word, whatever might make him unfeeling, ill-humored, indifferent or hard to please. He also avoids a menacing tone of voice and a too demanding attitude, which prevent the students from showing themselves for what they are, causing them to avoid the sight of their teacher and to hide the evil traits that he might be able to remedy if he knew about them, thus depriving the students of the possibility of letting the seeds of their good qualities germinate and grow.

Silence is a virtue that leads the teacher to avoid speaking when he should not speak and to speak when he should not be silent. This virtue, therefore, includes two functions. It teaches the art of being silent and that of speaking opportunely. Thus it causes the teacher to avoid two opposite defects that it condemns: taciturnity and loquacity.

REFLECTION

The first two of Brother Agathon's 12 virtues point to one of the core characteristics of Lasallian education – that of the teacher as lesson. The Lasallian educator is called not simply to model but to fundamentally embody for the students the knowledge and character that they are to acquire. In this way, the teacher cultivates a classroom and school culture rooted in respectful, compassionate and edifying relationships.

However, there is another reason for the teacher to embrace these virtues. True to De La Salle's conviction that, in the Lasallian school, all members are catalysts in one another's experience of God's saving grace, the teachers' practice of gravity and silence in ministering to the students is also a path to their own spiritual perfection. As the teachers immerse themselves in these virtues for their students' sake, they also grow in their ability to cooperate with God's graces in their own salvific journey.

SHARED THOUGHTS/PRAYER

Take time to share your thoughts on the readings, reflection and/or your prayer intentions.

CLOSING PRAYER

Eternal Father,
all of your creation is holy and every day belongs to you.
Wherever our being meets your being,
we are on sacred ground
and your presence surrounds us
and calls us to oneness with you.
Set us free from false piety
and help us to live with gravity and silence,
making our lives a sacred space for ourselves and for others.
Teach us to seek salvation in our relationships with others,
especially with those who are most in need.
We ask this of you who lives and reigns
with your Son and the Holy Spirit,
one God forever and ever.
Amen.

Saint John Baptist de La Salle ... **Pray for us.**

Live Jesus in our hearts ... **Forever!**

Humility and Prudence

Let us remember ... **that we are in the holy presence of God.**

OPENING PRAYER

Eternal Father,
you are the creator of all things.
Everything and everyone are reflections
of your love and perfection.
We come to you with both our thanks and our needs
and with confidence that you always hear us.
Open our eyes to your presence and our ears to your word.
Teach us to give ourselves to you in humility and openness.
We ask this of you who lives and reigns
with your Son and the Holy Spirit,
one God, forever and ever.
Amen.

READINGS

"The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher" by Brother Agathon, FSC, 1785

Humility is a virtue that inspires us with low sentiments of ourselves; it attributes to us our just due. Humility makes us realize what we are, according to these words of the Apostle: "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?" (1 Cor 4:7) Thus it directly opposes pride, which gives us an unjustly exalted notion of our own excellence; yet in truth this vice does not indicate any solid good in us, for it is only a swelling that puffs us up and makes us appear in our judgment greater than we really are.

Prudence is a virtue that makes us understand what we need to do and what we need to avoid. Prudence indicates to us the sure and legitimate means of attaining a praiseworthy end. It, therefore, determines the use we should make of our intelligence and of our mind to turn us aside from what we might have to regret in the undertakings or actions of life. Besides, the means it uses will always be legitimate if they are inspired by reason or by faith; and they will be sure to be neither insufficient nor excessive.

REFLECTION

Humility and prudence are two virtues that, in practice, form a natural partnership. Humility is essentially self-honesty. It is an act and attitude of accepting and surrendering to the truth of who we are. We acknowledge both strengths and weaknesses, both the correctness and the errors of which we are capable, as we strive for greater character and integrity. By acting with prudence, we apply our humility as good judgement in embracing words and actions that reflect our desire to realize our best and truest selves. Together, these virtues form a Lasallian educator's moral compass, a guide in exercising care and vigilance for how we treat our students and

colleagues and cultivate our schools into places of salvation.

SHARED THOUGHTS/PRAYER

Take time to share your thoughts on the readings, reflection and/or your prayer intentions.

CLOSING PRAYER

Eternal Father,
from you we draw our life, our nourishment and our strength.
When we become lost, you light our way.
When we grow weary, you renew us.
Teach us to come to you with our needs,
and to place in you our trust and hope.
May we seek always to do your will with humility,
living each day with prudence in our choices and actions
as we seek to follow your ways.
We ask this of who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God for ever and ever.
Amen.

Saint John Baptist de La Salle ... **Pray for us.**

Live Jesus in our hearts ... **Forever!**

Wisdom and Patience

Let us remember ... **that we are in the holy presence of God.**

OPENING PRAYER

Eternal Father,
we pray you will help us learn what it means
to build your kingdom each day.
Teach us faithfulness, so that
every one of our words is true to your Word
and every one of our actions
is an instrument of your presence.
Teach us servanthood, so that
we know how to welcome and care for one another,
especially those who find themselves most in need.
Teach us justice, so that
we will strive in every possible way
to transform our hearts into instruments
of your righteousness and compassion.
We ask this of you who lives and reigns
with your Son and the Holy Spirit,
one God forever and ever.
Amen.

READINGS

"The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher" by Brother Agathon, FSC, 1785

Wisdom is a virtue that gives us knowledge of the most exalted things through the most excellent principles so that we may act accordingly. ... In what, then, does the wisdom of a good teacher consist? It consists in making him know, love and fulfill the exalted and infinitely precious object for which he is responsible; from this it follows that a good teacher should begin by imitating the example of Solomon, who spoke humbly to the Author of all good, the God of Knowledge, the Father of Lights: "Give me," said this prince, "the wisdom that sits by your throne, and do not reject me from among your servants. ... Send her forth from the holy heavens, and from the throne of your glory send her, that she may labor at my side and that I may learn what is pleasing to you. For she knows and understands all things, and she will guide me wisely in my actions and guard me with her glory. Then my works will be acceptable." (Wis 9:4, 10-12)

Patience is a virtue that makes us overcome, without murmuring and with submission to the will of God, all the evils of this life, especially the cares inseparable from the education of youth. ... Patience is not only necessary but even useful in all our ills. It is necessary because the law of nature obliges us to bear trials patiently and because murmuring about what happens is to outrage Providence. It is useful because it lightens our sufferings, making them less dangerous and shortening them. The fruit of Christian patience, says Our Lord Jesus Christ, is the peaceful possession of our souls (Lk 21:19). According to Saint Francis de Sales, the more perfect our patience, the more absolutely

do we possess our souls.

REFLECTION

For Brother Agathon, wisdom is how teachers know what it is God wants them to know, to what they are being called as their students' servant-leaders. Patience is for teachers a resilient and open trust in ultimate meaning of the demands and trials of their ministry. Through patience, they are able to connect their daily experiences with the purposes and rhythms of God's time. Connecting with God's rhythms, in turn, deepens their awareness of God's wisdom, which then connects them with the God's purposes in ways that instruct their own. Taken together, the virtues of wisdom and patience lead to the practice of reflective living that Saint John Baptist de La Salle called seeing with "eyes of faith." While having eyes of faith can take different forms, it almost always begins as learning to look at everything from the inside out. We move our main awareness from ourselves, our spots, our thoughts, to the lives, worlds, and possibilities that dwell beyond the limits of our immediate understanding. Eyes of faith can see both through and beyond boundaries, both inner and outer, to places where the fulfillment of God's promises dwells. The virtue of wisdom graces Lasallian educators with eyes of faith and patience guides the educators in how to use them.

SHARED THOUGHTS/PRAYER

Take time to share your thoughts on the readings, reflection and/or your prayer intentions.

CLOSING PRAYER

Eternal Father,
you sent your Son to show us
life as you would have it.
Grace us with wisdom and patience
to build a world where the weak are protected
and none live in want,
where all people and cultures live together in peace and justice,
where all of us are guided every day by your love and compassion.
May we be ambassadors of your presence to one another.
We ask this of you who lives and reigns
with your Son and the Holy Spirit,
one God forever and ever.
Amen.

Saint John Baptist de La Salle ... **Pray for us.**

Live Jesus in our hearts ... **Forever!**

Reserve and Gentleness

Let us remember ... **that we are in the holy presence of God.**

OPENING PRAYER

Eternal Father,
Jesus spoke to people in words that
showed them your heart so that
they might come to know the
greatness of the love that you had for them.
May we hear and rejoice in these same words today.
Help us to accept in faith and humility your gift of salvation.
Help us, too, to live well our relationships with one another,
to become the presence of your honesty,
justice, mercy, righteousness and love in this world.
We ask this of you who lives and reigns
with your Son and the Holy Spirit,
one God forever and ever.
Amen.

READINGS

“The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher” by Brother Agathon, FSC, 1785

Reserve is a virtue that makes us think, speak and act with moderation, discretion and modesty. ... Reserve, then, consists in controlling ourselves in circumstances where we might grow angry or upset; in not allowing ourselves anything not entirely proper and beyond the reach of any just criticism or evil suspicion. It teaches us to regulate all our conduct so that the students will not remark anything not imitable and edifying in us. It requires us to act everywhere with due consideration for the concerns, the understanding, and the precautions demanded by the innocence of the children, the weakness of their age, their impressionability, and their tendency to imitate evil. A word, a gesture, a smile, a wink – something insignificant in appearance – can call into play their imagination, becoming for them a fruitful source of reveries, a rich font of unjustified conclusions and sometimes of dangerous moral decisions in the future.

Gentleness is a virtue that inspires us with goodness, sensitivity and tenderness. ... In general we can distinguish four kinds of gentleness. The first is that of the mind, which consists in judging without harshness, without passion, without considering our own merit and our supposed superiority. The second is that of the heart, which makes us want things without being stubborn about it and seeks them in a righteous manner. The third is that of our manner, which consists in behaving according to good principles without wanting to reform others over whom we have no authority or in things that do not concern us. The fourth is that of our conduct, which makes us act with simplicity and uprightness, not contradicting others without reasonable cause and without any obligation to do so; and observing, in this case, a reasonable degree of moderation.

REFLECTION

It is worth noting that Brother Agathon's treatise on the virtue of gentleness is the longest and most detailed of his 12. While reserve seems to echo both the virtues of prudence and patience, it also serves as a bridge, if not preface, to his thinking on gentleness. Why all the emphasis on gentleness? One simple explanation could be that being a teacher is stressful work. Then, as now, the Brothers' dispositions toward the challenges of managing and correcting students' activities and behaviors were a central concern in their formation and growth. However, what likely was the main reason for Brother Agathon's extensive writing on gentleness was to focus Brothers on the primacy of cultivating life-giving relationships through the schools in their work. Relationship-building is the alpha and omega of Lasallian school's activity, particularly in regard to the everyday interactions that teachers conduct with their students. This is where the teacher most becomes the face and heart of Christ in ways that elevate the students' learning experience from the mere acquisition of knowledge to the transformation of their lives. The Lasallian educator's role is to empower the young to discover and celebrate their own sacredness, and building life-giving relationships creates both the individual space and school culture in which this predominant Lasallian lesson can thrive.

SHARED THOUGHTS/PRAYER

Take time to share your thoughts on the readings, reflection and/or your prayer intentions.

CLOSING PRAYER

Eternal Father,
there are so many things that are possible through you
if we just take the time to come to you.
May we see that our days are filled
with amazing potential and that
we have the capacity to bring something
unique and good into this world.
Help us always to act with kindness and reserve,
ready to serve everyone with gentleness and respect.
Make of us a creative and loving people.
We ask this of you who lives and reigns
with your Son and the Holy Spirit,
one God for ever and ever.
Amen.

Saint John Baptist de La Salle ... **Pray for us.**

Live Jesus in our hearts ... **Forever!**

Zeal and Vigilance

Let us remember ... **that we are in the holy presence of God.**

OPENING PRAYER

Eternal Father,
in you we find our life, our nourishment, and our strength.
When we grow weary, you renew us.
When we have fears, you reassure us.
Place within us faith-filled hearts
with which to love one another
and courageous hands and voices with which to do your will.
We ask this of you who lives and reigns
with your Son and the Holy Spirit,
one God for ever and ever.
Amen.

READINGS

“The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher” by Brother Agathon, FSC, 1785

Zeal is a virtue that makes us procure the glory of God with great affection. ... Characteristically, this virtue is active: This is its distinctive mark. With what eagerness and what exactness does not a good teacher, for instance, fulfill the duties of his state if he has real zeal? ... But genuine zeal is not only active: It is also enlightened and prudent. A teacher truly zealous for the instruction of his students makes himself all things to all people, following the example of the Apostle (1 Cor 9:22), becoming little with the little ones, that is, conforming himself to their level of understanding and manner of appreciating things; he will take into consideration their weakness, their limited degree of intelligence and reason, while using more elevated language with those who are capable of understanding it. In all this he acts so as to instruct the students to their greatest advantage.

Vigilance is the virtue that makes us diligent and painstaking in fulfilling all our duties. A teacher needs this virtue both for himself and for his students. He must watch over himself, that is, over the thoughts of his mind, over the movements of his heart, over the use he makes of his senses, and over his entire person so as not to do anything except what is good and to fulfill his obligations worthily. The faults he might commit through lack of vigilance in any one of all these different ways would obviously jeopardize the education of the children and might even inspire them with lack of esteem and liking of him.

REFLECTION

Zeal and vigilance are two of the earliest virtues De La Salle identifies as central to the lives of the Brothers. It also is worth noting that both virtues strongly signify public action. This is not surprising. The Lasallian path is defined by prophetic and

transformative work, by making cooperation with God's redemptive presence a human activity that leads to radical change in both persons and society. In the Lasallian ethos, zeal eliminates any distinction between proclaiming the Gospel, conducting schools, and accompanying students, while vigilance refers to watchfulness that the Gospel lives in every aspect of Lasallian education, from the preparation of everyday lessons to the most serious attention given to the condition of the students and the quality of their lives. Together, in the practice of these virtues the educator strives to make the Lasallian school a community that provides both the means and the end of all Lasallian education - an experience of learning that holds the power to reveal to all students their best and truest selves and the best possible version of their world.

SHARED THOUGHTS/PRAYER

Take time to share your thoughts on the readings, reflection and/or your prayer intentions.

CLOSING PRAYER

Eternal Father,
when you sent your Son to fulfill
your promise of faithfulness to us,
he called us to take up this work of fulfillment ourselves.
May we build places for the young -
especially for those whose voices are not heard
and those who are trying to find their way.
With zeal and vigilance, help us to be
your good news for others through our love and service.
We ask this of you who lives and reigns
with your Son and the Holy Spirit,
one God forever and ever.
Amen.

Saint John Baptist de La Salle ... **Pray for us.**

Live Jesus in our hearts ... **Forever!**

Piety and Generosity

Let us remember ... **that we are in the holy presence of God.**

OPENING PRAYER

Eternal Father,
your Son came to show us
how to be faithful to your ways.
Help us when we stray from your ways.
Gather us back to you and
open our minds and hearts to changing our lives.
Help us to remain strong
in the face of temptation and discouragement,
and to seek first and always your kingdom.
We ask this of you who lives and reigns
with your Son and the Holy Spirit,
one God forever and ever.
Amen.

READINGS

"The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher" by Brother Agathon, FSC, 1785

Piety is a virtue that makes us fulfill worthily our duties toward God. ... What indeed is a Christian teacher charged with the education of the young? He is a person into whose hands Jesus Christ has placed a certain number of children whom he redeemed with his precious blood, for whom he gave his life; in whom he dwells as in his temple, whom he looks upon as his own members, his brothers and co-heirs; who will reign with him and glorify God through him for all eternity. Why has Jesus Christ entrusted these children to the teacher? Was it merely to make them good penmen, great mathematicians, clever calculators, learned savants? Who would dare say or even think in this way? He entrusted them to the teacher to preserve in them the precious and priceless gift of innocence that he placed in their souls at baptism so that they will become true Christians. Such is, in fact, the end and the purpose of the education of children: All the rest is accessory.

Generosity is a virtue that makes us voluntarily sacrifice our personal interests to those of our neighbor, conformably to the example of Saint Paul, who said that he was "not seeking my own advantage but that of many so that they may be saved" (1 Cor 10:33). ... It is freely done. A man is not generous when he gives to others only what belongs to them. Its object is something of considerable moment, for in general a person is not generous except insofar as he gives up his rights in favor of another and gives him more than he can demand. We can, therefore, consider generosity as the most sublime of all sentiments, as the motive of all noble actions, and perhaps as the root of all great virtue.

REFLECTION

In the Lasallian story, reverence for God finds expression in its practices of human care, community and justice. It began when De La Salle was introduced to an urgent need for which he was being asked to provide a particular kind of response. Rather than being driven by the urgency alone, it was his prayerful discernment and reflection on this need that led him to his ultimately successful and revolutionary vision of what had to be done and how it should be done. A deeply pious man, De La Salle's piety as manifested and fed by his prayer life provided a strong foundation for the series of actions that he would take, one of which was his generosity. But for him, generosity was more than gestures of kindness. From the giving away of his patrimony to the gratuity of his schools, De La Salle saw generosity not as mere charity, but as an abandonment to providence and commitment to social justice that might have been too intimidating to consider if they had not been rooted in a strong and well-contemplated faith. The Founder would center the formation of his Brothers on cultivating their spiritual lives, as the way in which they would discover and live the relationship with God without which they could not discover and live their vocation as teachers. It was indispensable to the character of their mission that there be a constant, critical dialogue between their zeal for God and their zeal for their work. Now as then, the virtues of piety and generosity can contribute to that dialogue. They can serve as an example for Lasallian educators that it is always necessary that even the purest ideals and actions be guided by prayer and discernment. There can be no authentic Lasallian ministry that is not animated by Lasallian spirituality.

SHARED THOUGHTS/PRAYER

Take time to share your thoughts on the readings, reflection and/or your prayer intentions.

CLOSING PRAYER

Eternal Father,
throughout our lives, whenever we
come to you in times of prayer, you are there.
You always dwell in our hearts.
Guide us with the light of your wisdom and
help us to serve others as you would have us serve,
nourishing those in need with care and attention.
Make of us today a pious and generous people.
We ask this of you who lives and reigns
with your Son and the Holy Spirit,
one God forever and ever.
Amen.

Saint John Baptist de La Salle ... **Pray for us.**

Live Jesus in our hearts ... **Forever!**

