

55. SACRAMENTS

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1. THE SACRAMENTS IN THE APOSTOLIC PLAN OF THE F.S.C.

Already in the first Chapter of the Common Rules, St. John Baptist de La Salle speaks of the Mysteries of our religion and of the Sacraments:

“The end of the Institute is to impart a Christian education to children”. This education consists in “teaching them to live well thanks to the instruction given them in the mysteries of our religion and inspiring them with the Christian maxims” (RC 2,3).

Why is this education so important? John Baptist de La Salle draws up a very clear diagnosis:

“All disorders, especially among the working-class and the poor, usually arise from their having been, in childhood, left to themselves and badly brought up. It is almost impossible to repair this evil at a more advanced age, because the bad habits they have acquired are overcome only with great difficulty, and scarcely ever entirely, no matter what care may be taken to destroy them, whether by frequent instructions or the use of the sacraments” (RC 1 6).

John Baptist de La Salle is deeply convinced that doctrine and life are inseparable. One must therefore forestall at all costs an irreparable dam-

age. It is not at all surprising that we find in the MR a complete programme of initiation to the mysteries of the Christian religion:

“The chief care of the apostles, after teaching the first faithful, was to have them receive the sacraments, assemble for prayer together, and live according to the Christian spirit. Above everything else, this is what you are obliged to do in your ministry. In imitation of the apostles, you must be especially careful that those whom you teach receive the SACRAMENTS, that they are made ready to receive CONFIRMATION with the proper dispositions in order to be filled with the Holy Spirit and the graces which this sacrament produces. You must watch that they go to CONFESSIO often after learning how to do this well. You must dispose them to receive their first HOLY COMMUNION with holy dispositions and to go to Communion FREQUENTLY thereafter in order to preserve the grace they received the first time they performed this action.

“Oh, if you knew the great good that you procure for them in preserving and increasing grace by their frequent reception of the sacraments, you would never let up teaching them about this!” (MR 200.2).

In the seventh chapter of the Common Rules, John Baptist de La Salle reminds the Brothers that:

“They shall however, make it their first and princi-

pal duty to teach their pupils the morning and evening prayers, the commandments of God and of the Church, the responses at Holy Mass, the Catechism, the duties of a Christian [of which more than a quarter are connected with the sacraments] and the maxims and practices which our Lord left us in the Holy Gospel (RC 7, 5).

And further on: "On school days the Brothers shall take the pupils to the nearest church for HOLY MASS" (RC 7, 7).

To conclude: let us not forget that in his testament, John Baptist de La Salle recommends to his Brothers:

"to have a great devotion to our Lord, a great love for HOLY COMMUNION and mental prayer, and a special devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin and to Saint Joseph, the Patron and Protector of their Society; and to acquit themselves of their work with zeal and disinterestedness, and maintain an intimate union among themselves and blind obedience to their Superiors for this is the foundation and support of all perfection in a community" (CL 10,118).

2. THE SACRAMENTS IN THE DIVINE PLAN

When John Baptist de La Salle speaks of the Sacraments, he is careful to specify that he is referring to MEANS OF SANCTIFICATION which GOD in his goodness places at man's disposal through JESUS CHRIST in the CHURCH.

2.1. Jesus Christ, author of all the Sacraments

"It is Jesus Christ who is the author of all the Sacraments of the New Law; having come on earth to sanctify man and having acquired a very large number of merits and graces by his death; He found a way to apply them to them through the Sacraments which he instituted for that purpose" (Da 204).

2.2. The Sacraments, the Church's means of salvation

John Baptist de La Salle likes to speak of the Sacraments of the Church, received in Church. It is an expression which does not exist in the catechism books of Joly and Le Coreur which he consulted.

"Q. Which are the advantages enjoyed in this world by those who belong to the Church?

"A. There are four main ones, namely:

1. They belong to the Communion of saints, i.e. they have a share in the prayers and merits of the Saints and of all the Christians.
2. They obtain the remission and pardon of their sins.
3. They receive graces from Our Lord.
4. They receive the Sacraments of the Church (Db 64, cf. Db 4).

"Q. Which means did God give us to obtain habitual grace, and to increase and preserve it in us?

"A. The Sacraments of the CHURCH.

"Q. How many Sacraments are there in the Church?

"A. There are seven: ... (Db 143; cfr. Da 202). Information about the Sacraments in Db and GA begins invariably with the question:

"Q. Which is the first (second, etc) Sacrament of the Church?

John Baptist de La Salle does not fail to point out that a sacrament is valid when the person administering it intends to do what the *Church* orders to that end and to do what Christ has instituted (Da 202; Db 153).

This remark too is not included in the works of Joly and Le Coreur.

2.3. The Sacraments, tangible signs of grace

The "Sacraments of the Church" are "outward signs of grace which God has established to sanctify men" (Da 200; cf. Db 144). They therefore occupy a place in the designs of God who conducts and rules everything in an admirable way and with great wisdom. "He is so good that he caters for all his creatures' needs" (Da 16).

Through the Sacraments, man penetrates the realm of mystery. "Baptism makes us Children of God and of the Church, Members of Jesus Christ and Living Temples of the Holy Spirit" (Da 212; cfr. Db 157).

Men's relation with God is made up of intimacy with the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity.

That is rendered possible because "God to accommodate himself to man's nature (made up of body and soul) thought it fit to grant him his graces only through means that fitted his nature and for that reason these means are tangible" (Da 200).

John Baptist de La Salle goes further:

“Man is so materialistic and unrefined that he is drawn willingly and naturally to exterior things, while he easily neglects the spiritual and interior ones; for this reason, God granted him as of necessity supernatural gifts and especially grace, through tangible things, to help him concentrate more easily on interior things, and take his mind and heart off the penchant he has towards things that are purely exterior.

“If Man, says St. Chrysostom, had been purely spiritual, God would have given him grace and the gifts which concern the soul, without resorting to any exterior or other means, as he did with the angels” (Da 199-200).

3. UNITY AND DIVERSITY OF THE SACRAMENTS

John Baptist de La Salle stresses how the various sacraments are related to each other and which is their place in the New Law: the Law of Grace.

3.1. Baptism – Confirmation

“Baptism is the first of all the Sacraments, ... it is the Gateway to the Spiritual Life” (Da 211).

...“It is also the most necessary of all (the Sacraments) because it is not absolutely necessary to receive the other Sacraments but one cannot be saved if one has not been baptized” (Db 157).

“Confirmation ... must be the first Sacrament to be received after baptism” (Db 166).

“It is the crowning and consummation of Baptism” (Da 232).

3.2. Penance and Extreme Unction

Jesus Christ “instituted the sacrament of Penance as a sovereign remedy for all sins which would be committed after baptism” (Da 280).

“The sacrament of Penance has been called by the Doctors of the Church a sort of painful and laborious Baptism” (Da 335).

“Extreme-unction is called by the Council of Trent the consummation of Penance” (Da 356).

Baptism and Confirmation, Penance and Extreme-Unction are therefore intimately related and through them we achieve our salvation.

Baptism gives us Sanctifying grace, Penance helps us to recover it. Confirmation and Extreme-Unction are the consummation of either our spiri-

tual growth or of our life of penance (cfr. Da 205).

3.3. The Eucharist – Holy orders

We have then the EUCHARIST which is both Sacrament and Sacrifice. In our spiritual life, there is first the Sacrifice of the Mass.

“Of all the actions that are ordinarily performed every day, the principal and most excellent is assistance at Holy Mass” (I. 3).

“The Sacrifice of the Mass honours God in the highest way possible, because it is his own Son who renders him homage by annihilating himself and destroying himself as far as possible for the glory of God: and those who assist at Holy Mass and take part in it, honour also God in the highest manner available to them, through their union with Jesus Christ.

“This sacrifice provides us with the means to thank God in the most perfect manner possible, by offering him his own Son in thanksgiving” (I 7).

Union with Jesus Christ is realized through the reception of the Sacrament of the Eucharist “the most august and holy of all; because it contains what is greatest and holiest which is Jesus-Christ as God and as Man” (Da 242).

“It is called the Holy Sacrament par excellence” (Da 206).

“The Fathers of the Church call it “the perfection and consummation of the sacraments and of all the graces” (Da 401).

With regard to the Sacrament of Holy Orders, John Baptist de La Salle will stress its association with the Holy eucharist.

“Holy Orders is the Sacrament which represents for us the Priesthood of Jesus-Christ and his role as Mediator between God and mankind” (Da 366).

“It has been found necessary to set up in the Church Officials and Ministers of Jesus-Christ who would offer to God the Sacrifice of the Eucharist and administer the Sacraments to the faithful, and instruct them in their religion and all their duties. Through the Institution of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, Jesus Christ, the sovereign legislator of the Law of Grace, Teacher and Head of the Church, has provided the means to do it” (Da 365).

“There are seven grades in this Sacrament: The Priesthood, the Diaconate, the Sub-Diaconate which are called Major Orders and the Porter, the Lector, the Exorcist and the Acolyte which are cal-

led the Minor Orders. All these Orders have been instituted to make known the excellence of our *MYSTERIES* which require the services of so many Officials, some of whom consecrate the Eucharist, others distribute it and others prepare the people to receive it" (Da 367-368).

3.4. Marriage

John Baptist de La Salle will delve deeply into the mystery of the sacrament of Marriage while referring clearly to the effects of Baptism:

"St. Paul says that this Sacrament is a mystery that is great, it applies to Jesus Christ and the Church. and in fact it represents the Indissoluble Marriage of Jesus Christ with the Church and the union of human nature with the Word in the Incarnation, who did not unite himself in it but to give God his Father children who would be worthy of Him and live of his Spirit. It is also the intention of Jesus Christ and of God himself in the institution of Marriage, that the husband be one with his wife, through God's Spirit, with the sole intention of providing *Members to Jesus Christ and Sons to his Church*" (Da 378).

3.5. Conclusion

After this general survey on the Sacraments, we can state that John Baptist de La Salle has a comprehensive idea of the Christian mystery. In his view, there are two sacraments which need to be brought to the fore: Baptism and the Eucharist. All our supernatural life is contained in them. Hence, it is very interesting to see how he made his own a comparison quoted in the Catechism of the Council of Trent.

"Just as there are seven things which are necessary for man to live and preserve the life of his body, publicly as well as privately, the soul also needs many different things, to have and preserve the life of grace".

"Man must be born, must grow, be nourished, be cured when he is sick, grow strong and recover his forces. Concerning his public life, he needs enough OFFICIALS to direct him, to perpetuate himself and to grow in number. Man finds all he needs for his supernatural life in the Sacraments. For it is by Baptism that we are engendered in Christ; through Confirmation, we acquire strength and an increase in grace; it is the Eucharist, as if through a spiritual food, that our soul feeds itself; Penance helps to cure our soul, when it is wounded by sin; through

Extreme Unction, what remains of our sins is forgiven and we receive a special power enabling us to combat and triumph over the enemies of our salvation at the hour of death; Holy Orders empower the Ministers of the Church to guide it and rule over it and Marriage leads to the procreation of children and to bring them up in the fear and service of God" (Da 203).

4. THE SACRAMENTS IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

4.1. The Sacraments in general

In order to understand well the role of the Sacraments in the spiritual life, according to St. John Baptist de La Salle, one must keep in mind that he writes on several occasions "that they consecrate us to God" (cfr. Da 201). De La Salle and his Brothers have "lived" this Consecration in a practical way: by consolidating their vocation as Christians and binding themselves by the vows they made. Thus we see how the sacramental life, the vocation and the mission are linked together.

The sacraments "consecrate us to God by the grace they impart to us" (FDa 201).

This grace makes of us:

"the beloved children of God, the brothers and co-heirs of Jesus Christ, and gives us the right to eternal glory. It is also the thing we must consider most precious in this world, since, if we possess it, we possess God himself, enjoy even in this world his holy Love and if we die in a state of grace we shall possess him eternally in heaven" (195).

4.2. Baptism

We shall now see what John Baptist de La Salle teaches us about the effects of the first sacrament on divine adoption and inhabitation.

"Baptism, gateway to the spiritual life, (as we have already pointed out) "is a sacrament which frees us from original sin and all the others we may have committed before receiving it, and makes us children of God and of the Church, Members of Jesus Christ and living Temples of the Holy Spirit" (FDa 211-212).

John Baptist de La Salle develops at length this definition. To begin with, he refers to the re-

mission of sins:

“Baptism is defined by its effects, because we can only realise the greatness and excellence of this Sacrament by its effects on the soul. These are considerable for not only are we freed through baptism from original sin and all actual sins we may have committed if we possessed the use of reason before receiving it, but the punishment which they deserve, according to the teachings of the Council of Trent, is completely remitted and the baptised has no obligation to atone for them” (Da 212).

John Baptist de La Salle likes to stress the full power of baptismal remission, compared with that of the Sacrament of Penance, in which the punishment due for sins is not entirely remitted.

He then goes on with an exposition in which he tries to explain in simple language and by a comparison what is habitual grace:

“This Sacrament gives the soul a very abundant grace which sanctifies it and renders it pleasing to God. That is what Tertullian means when he says “that the body is washed in Baptism so that the soul may be sanctified”.

“It is thanks to this grace that we are made CHILDREN OF GOD because this grace makes us share in the holiness which God possesses naturally and it is in giving it to us that he adopts us as his Children and that he assures us that if we preserve this grace we shall inherit his Glory in heaven” (Da 212).

This theme of the divine adoption so rich for the spiritual life is referred to several times in Da and Db and Dc. We already came across it when we dealt with Marriage.

But through Grace we are not only adopted by God, we also become Children of the Church. Let us listen to John Baptist de La Salle:

“When we receive this Sacrament, we have the happiness of becoming *Children of the Church* and that is when we acquire the right to participate in all her benefits and particularly in applying to ourselves the merits of Jesus Christ through the reception of the sacraments. We all have a share in them in proportion to the Grace and Love of God which is in us” (Da 213).

In Db, we find more detailed information:

“Q. Why do we become Children of the Church?

“A. For three reasons. 1. Because when we receive this sacrament we submit to the authority of the

Church and what it commands. 2. Because it nourishes and elevates spiritually those who have received it. 3. Because they are entitled to share in all the spiritual benefits of the Church” (Db 157-158).

The first two reasons are not to be found in Joly. John Baptist de La Salle wishes here to stress the Church’s role in our spiritual life.

In the definitions which Joly and Le Coreur give of Baptism, the fact that we become Members of Jesus Christ and Living Temples of the Holy Spirit is not mentioned. The Trinitary perspective is therefore John Baptist de La Salle’s own.

“Baptism opens to the soul that receives it the Gate of Heaven which had formerly been closed and expels from it the Devil which possessed it. That is what the Church means by the exorcism that the priest performs on the person to be baptised. At that same time, the devil leaves the soul and the Holy Spirit takes possession of it; for this reason, we are told that through Baptism we become Temples of the Holy Spirit” (Da 213).

This topic recurs in the writings of John Baptist de La Salle.

In the second manner in which we consider God present in ourselves as expounded in “Explication de la Methode d’Oraison”, John Baptist de La Salle provides us with a remarkable explanation of it (EM 15-19).

However, there is yet another effect, the last one:

“In this Sacrament, we receive the Spirit of Jesus Christ and are united to him in a manner so particular and intimate that as soon as we receive it, we become MEMBERS OF HIS SON made man” (Da 213).

The Christian will achieve this union with Jesus-Christ in an exemplary manner by atoning for his sins and those of others, by offering with the priest the Sacrifice of the Mass, and receiving Holy Communion.

In their morning and evening community prayers and in the R. and EM. (in the first as well as in the second part), John Baptist de La Salle suggests to his Brothers Acts of Union with Jesus Christ.

Let us now see which are the Effects of Confirmation, Penance, Extreme Unction and Holy

Eucharist. We shall also note the very close connection they have with the qualities of Child of God and of the Church, of Member of Jesus Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit.

4.3. Confirmation

Let us deal first with Confirmation where the connection with Baptism is more explicit:

“The second of the Sacraments is Confirmation which increases in us the grace of Baptism by giving us the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

“This sacrament is called Confirmation because of its main effects, which are to strengthen us in the faith and to fortify considerably the grace we receive in Baptism. We also confirm and ratify in this sacrament the promises we made solemnly at Baptism.

“It is Jesus Christ who has instituted this Sacrament in order to make us participate in his unction and in the plenitude of his grace and spirit” (Da 231-232).

“The advantages this Sacrament procures are so great and so important, that the Holy Fathers comparing Confirmation with Baptism say that it is its completion and crowning. In fact, the Holy Spirit is given in it in abundance and with his gifts, it is the same Spirit that the Apostles received visibly on Pentecost, that we receive invisibly in this sacrament” (Da 232).

John Baptist de La Salle has already put forward this idea in Da 61 and he repeats it three times in Db 53; 168; Dc 181. He goes on, seeking inspiration in Le Coreur:

“This Holy Spirit increases in us three sorts of graces in Confirmation:

1. He makes Faith in Jesus Christ so strong in us that he puts us in condition to confess our faith even at the risk of losing our life; 2. He gives us sufficient strength to resist all that opposes our salvation; and 3. Patience to put up with the pains and miseries of this life for the sake of Jesus Christ” (Da 233).

In order to teach Christians the extent of the abnegation required at Baptism and shouldered at Confirmation, John Baptist de La Salle is now about to try to explain the exact nature of our spiritual combat.

“We have three enemies to fight against, all of whom oppose our salvation: the Devil, the World and the Flesh. The Devil is the leader of the angels who were damned; he makes use of all the spirits of

evil, as Scripture calls them, and through them he resorts to all sorts of ways to tempt us and bring about our damnation.

“By the World, we mean those men who live according to the spirit of the world and of that which in creatures may lead us to sin and the passion which may lead us to exhibit ourselves and live in luxury and frivolity.

“The Flesh is the inclination we experience to enjoy sensual pleasures, the weak attraction we feel towards what is good and our tendency towards evil; both of these have become so to say natural since the sin of Adam” (Da 234).

In MD 44 and MD 45 (for Monday and Tuesday of Pentecost), John Baptist de La Salle refers to the effects produced by the Holy Spirit in a soul, thanks to which it considers events through the eyes of faith and lives and acts through grace.

4.4. The Sacrament of Penance

Jon Baptist de La Salle dwells at length on the various parts of this Sacrament in Da. In the section on Contrition, he insists on the two types of love and the two types of fear of God.

“Now there are two types of love of God one of which causes contrition and the other accompanies attrition. The Love of God which brings about Contrition is a love called of FRIENDSHIP or benevolence; it makes us love God out of love for him and that is a perfect type of love. The other is a love prompted by self interest” (Da 292).

“The fear of God is to be found in contrition as well as in attrition. However, this difference exists between the two: in the first place, contrition is not motivated by fear but by PURE CHARITY and PERFECT LOVE OF GOD; this fear, being a consequence of the love of God which is the real reason for contrition, is a respectful fear such as that of CHILDREN towards their FATHER. Hence, it is called FILIAL. On the contrary, as it motivates attrition, without being accompanied by any formal act of charity and love of God, it is the same fear as that of the SERVANT towards his MASTER and for that reason is called SERVILE (Da 293).

We may note how John Baptist de La Salle is imbued with the idea of a Perfect LOVE of God, pure POVERTY, how spontaneously he reverts to his intuition of divine adoption: we are Children and Friends of God.

It is therefore not surprising that in I (Prières avant la Confession), he seeks inspiration from all

that which in the Gospel refers to the Conversion of sinners and especially the Parable of the Prodigal SON. Among the famous converted sinners he mentions, let us recall the publican in the Parable, Mary-Magdalen, Zaccheus and Saint Peter.

In a first prayer entitled "The Return of the Sinner", John Baptist de La Salle urges us to share the sentiment of the Prodigal Son:

"How would I dare to appear before you, o my God?... I have in my heart an aversion towards you and I said to myself that I DID NOT WANT YOU TO BE MY GOD ANY LONGER. A deplorable state of a soul which you created exclusively to love you. I therefore desire, o my God, to FREE MYSELF FROM THE BONDAGE OF SIN, with the help of your holy grace. I ask you this insistently and fervently" (I 175-176).

Just like the Prodigal Son, the sinner confesses that he no longer wished to be a Child of God, he no longer cared for God's love. Among the prayers to be said after Confession, we find acts of thanksgiving to the persons of the Holy Trinity. A first act is addressed to the Father to thank him "for having clothed us with the robe of innocence like the Prodigal son":

"Eternal Father, ... you have come to meet me as the Father of the Prodigal Son and you have clothed me once more with this robe of innocence, with which you covered and honoured me in Holy BAPTISM, although I divested myself of it; you have given me back my RIGHT to YOUR INHERITANCE and you are ready to admit me once more at your BANQUET and to the WEDDING OF YOUR SON; I admire, o my God, the graces which you bestow on me and the happiness which I am enjoying after my sinful life; I would have considered it an honour to be treated as one of your servants but you consider me as your SON, as soon as I return to You" (I 210-211).

We therefore find again the same topic of the filial adoption, enriched with the images of the Banquet and the Wedding of the Son, to express that we are Brothers and Members of Jesus Christ.

In a second act of thanksgiving, John Baptist de La Salle asks us to address the Son of God:

"Word Divine, Uncreated Wisdom, who became Man for the love of us... Today you are truly my Saviour: you have *returned me to the bosom of the Church* of which I was only a dead MEMBER and

at the same time you gave me a share of all her gifts and of your divine Spirit; you have even given me back all the RIGHTS which I had lost and you have shown me that YOU had come for sinners and not for the just since YOU are so keenly interested to make me recover your grace and the FREEDOM OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD" (I 211-212).

In this prayer, John Baptist de La Salle reminds us that we recover our friendship with God in the Church. We are once more the Children of the Church. We are invited to make an act of thanksgiving to the Holy Spirit who has purified our heart:

"Holy Spirit, who have animated Jesus Christ, who atoned for our sins, who constantly urge sinners to repent and who keep alive in the Just and the Saints a love for Penance, I thank you for the kindness You have shown me when you made my soul recover its interior purity so pleasing to you and be the object of your divine largesses... As I have gone astray through overconfidence in my own judgement, I abandon myself entirely to your will to PRESERVE ME IN A STATE OF GRACE and make me suffer the punishment my sins quite rightly deserve. "Do not forsake me, I implore you, and allow me to promise you NEVER TO COMPEL YOU TO WITHDRAW FROM ME" (I 212-213).

Whilst he refrains from repeating the same expressions he used in the explanation of the graces of Baptism, John Baptist de La Salle asks in this prayer to the Holy Ghost to make of us his Living Temples.

We could thus go on looking for abundant references to our filial adoption related to the Sacrament of Penance, but we must now conclude quoting the MR:

"Ah, what a thrill of joy you will get when you hear the voices of those whom you have led almost by the hand... "these men are servants of the Most High; they have made known to us the way of salvation!" (Ac. 16.17). Then they will represent the good you have done among them. Some will represent to Jesus Christ on the day of judgment the ROBE OF INNOCENCE you helped them keep in all its purity. Others will represent to him the trouble you took to help them wash away their sins IN THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB, and to lead them on the path of salvation.

"All of them will join in asking Jesus Christ to grant you a favourable judgment, praying him not to de-

lay putting you in possession of the happiness you procured for them by your work and your concern" (MR 208.3).

4.5. Extreme Unction

When John Baptist de La Salle refers to this Sacrament, he refrains from developing explicitly the theme of adoption and inhabitation, yet he shows clearly the intimate relation that exists between Baptism and Christ's return to earth.

Let us first consider the explanation of St. James' words: "He will ease his pain":

"(This Sacrament) strengthens and relieves the soul of the sick person, arousing in him a GREAT TRUST in the MERCY OF GOD, which makes him bear more easily the inconvenience and sufferings brought about by the illness, and makes him stronger and more prompt to react against the temptations and the snares which the Devil will have ready for him in this LAST EXTREMITY" (Da 355).

Thanks to Extreme Unction, we receive the grace to keep until the end the solemn promises we made at Baptism to renounce the Devil, the World and the Flesh and to believe in God (cfr. Da 288; 233-234). And besides:

"The second effect this Sacrament produces in the soul is the remission of sins expressed in these words of St. James: "If he is guilty of any sins, these will be forgiven him". First of all, the mortal ones which he remembers having committed, if, not being able to confess them and not having of them a perfect contrition, he receives the sacrament with attrition; "for then this sacrament acts as a substitute for Confession and perfect contrition and remits all the sins and, on this occasion, this sacrament is so necessary that one *would not be saved without it.*"

"Secondly, it remits the mortal sins the sick person is not aware of and those he may have forgotten...

"This sacrament is called by the Council of Trent the Consummation of Penance, because it removes the residue of sin, freeing the soul from distaste, dejection, a certain numbness, a certain languidness and weakness which is a vestige of sin, from which the soul has not fully recovered through Penance" (Da 355-356).

The effect of Extreme Unction is therefore comparable to that of Baptism (cfr. Da 212) and it is precisely the explanation of this effect which in-

troduces the filial adoption theme. At the end of the chapter he wrote on Extreme Unction, John Baptist de La Salle writes:

"A blessed candle is placed in the hand of the sick person, when he is about to expire, to expel the Devils, who are Spirits of Darkness, through the particular power which this candle derives from the blessing of the priest and to prove that he wishes to die in the spirit of Christianity, which he already received at *Baptism*, during which a candle was placed in his hand; and that he wishes until the end to remain faithful to Jesus Christ and his doctrine, who is the true Light, to be himself an ARDENT AND SHINING LIGHT BEFORE GOD, which consumes itself for his Love, while he offers God the last moments of his life with the deepest affection of his heart" (Da 364-365).

To remain faithful to Christ, to be an ardent light, to consecrate to God the last moments of one's life, that is truly the way to go to meet the Spouse, to be ready to enter into the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity.

4.6. The Eucharist

How does John Baptist de La Salle view the Eucharist's role in our spiritual life? In the Instructions and Prayers (CL 17), he deals first with the Holy Mass and later with Confession and Communion. But there is a third aspect of the Eucharist to which John Baptist de La Salle attaches a very great importance. It is the attention and respect owed to Our Lord Jesus Christ really present and resident in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. It is interesting to note that these three aspects are to be found in the various names given to the Eucharist.

"The word Eucharist signifies grace or thanksgiving... It is called thanksgiving because it has been instituted and is OFFERED IN SACRIFICE to thank God through Jesus Christ for all the benefits corporal as well as spiritual we have received from him.

"It is called the Most Blessed Sacrament because it HOLDS IN IT JESUS CHRIST who is Holiness itself and because it imparts an intense holiness to those who receive it worthily.

"It is called the Sacrament of the Altar, because the Altar is the place where it is CONSECRATED and KEPT.

"It is called COMMUNION, because it unites inti-

mately to Jesus Christ those who receive it and because those who communicate are joined together by a sincere and exterior love.

"It is called the SACRED HOST, because it contains JESUS CHRIST, who offered himself by dying on the cross and who continues to be offered every day in this Sacrament, when the host is CONSECATED" (Da 243).

CONCLUSION

Concluding this survey of the role of the sacraments in the spiritual life, we may unhesitatingly state that John Baptist de La Salle focuses all his

spirituality regarding the sacraments on Baptism: filial adoption and inhabitation. We have not been able to enumerate all the explanations of the symbols and the ceremonies of the sacraments in Da, Db and Dc. We have preferred to limit ourselves in a general way to the prayers contained in the "*Instructions et Prières pour la Sainte Messe, la Confession et la Communion*" (I, CL 17) where this topic recurs often on important occasions. But as these Instruction have not yet been the subject of an intense study and of a scientific publication, there was nothing else for me to do but to find my own way.

Complementary themes:

Consecration; Duties of a Christian; Church; Grace; Sanctification...

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