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THE SPIRITUALITY OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE

In a circular addressed to those in charge of formation, the General Council of the Institute pointed out a number of basic themes in order to help young people, preparing to become Brothers, to assimilate the spirituality of St. John Baptist de La Salle.

These elements can also be helpful to those who are seeking to share more fully in the spirit of the Founder and his successors.

HERE ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECTS

A warning

★ The spirituality of St. John Baptist de La Salle is not bound to any particular devotion. He does not base his message on any of those he recommended: devotion to the Child Jesus, to Mary, to Joseph among others.

★ His spirituality cannot be reduced to a spiritual theory. John Baptist de La Salle wrote about perfection and other aspects of the Christian life but none of these aspects represent his main contribution to our spiritual heritage.

Consistency of life and thought

The spirituality of John Baptist de La Salle is consistent:

★ between his concept of Christian life as centred on the essential: faith in God and commitment to others on the one hand;

★ and on the other, the life he himself led, totally consistent with his thinking. You believe witnesses whose lives confirm their words.

A concept of Christian Life

Though written for the Brothers this concept is valid for all Christians.

"The spirit of this Institute is first, a spirit of faith, which should induce those who compose it not to look upon anything but with the eyes of faith, not to do anything but in view of God and to attribute all to God.

"Secondly, the spirit of their Institute consists in an ardent zeal for the instruction of children and for bringing them up in the fear of God..."

What is implied in the spirit of faith and the spirit of zeal?

★ *God first of all.* The first Person in whose name we are asked to change our outlook and ways of acting. Therefore, a God who enters into relation with us and asks us to allow ourselves to be penetrated by His presence and to collaborate with Him. God in our mind. God in our heart. God in our actions.

★ *Each one of us.* The appeal is made to our sense of responsibility to commit ourselves. Our whole being is involved, our judgement, our feelings about what happens to us, our activities.

★ *Life of reality.* Far from leading us into a world of abstractions this spirit involves us in relationships with those around us, whom we are asked to look upon with the eyes of faith: It involves us in new relationships with the events which concern us so that we act and react according to that same faith.

Consistency between the thought and life of John Baptist de La Salle

The life of John Baptist de La Salle is based on a few convictions and major decisions in which his way of looking at things and of acting and reacting in a spirit of faith and zeal is strikingly evident.

★ God is so good that He wishes to save all mankind.

★ But our knowledge of the world, and particularly of the world of the poor makes us realise that people remain far from God, especially if they have not received a Christian education in their youth.

★ God calls us to collaborate with Him, to become the ministers of His saving presence to these people.

★ I accept this invitation from God, I dedicate my life to Him, I try to live and act only for Him.

★ To accomplish this work I associate myself with my brothers in order to create with them that community of evangelical love through which men, and particularly the most deprived, the farthest from salvation, may perceive the love that God has for them.

Sketched thus, in broad outline, the life of John Baptist de La Salle illustrates his spirituality: that of a man, responsive to God's call, who enters daily into new relations with the Lord, with men, with those who share his faith...

THE WAY OF THE SPIRIT OF FAITH AND OF ZEAL: CHANGING MY RELATIONS

My relation to God

★ Who is God for me? A vague notion... a Being as remote as He is supreme? Or the God revealed by Jesus — the father who knows and loves me better than I know and love myself.

★ What is the place of God in my daily life? in my prayer? in my thoughts? in my family and professional relationships?

★ What means do I take to come closer to God? to get to know Him better? What time do I give to my own religious culture, especially to improving my knowledge of Holy Scripture?

My relations with people

★ St. de La Salle called his Brothers "ministers" of Jesus Christ, messengers of His love and salvation, especially to those who are far from Him and who endure poverty and injustice.

★ And I, who am I for those with whom I come in contact? What image do people have of me? A professional and nothing more? Do I occasionally, allow something more to appear, a something in my words or actions which shows a little of the love of God?

My relations with my "brothers"

★ John Baptist de La Salle formed the schoolmasters into an association. He made Brothers of them so that they could live the Gospel publicly and become a living cell in the Church.

★ With whom do I unite myself and for what?

★ Is there a group with whom I could learn what God wants of me and which I could join?

★ Am I aware of what is happening around me in the Church? — what is being done to spread the Gospel? — to work for greater justice among men?

PRAYER TO ASK THE SPIRIT OF FAITH AND ZEAL

Here is the prayer which the Founder, himself, suggests to the Brothers for the feast of Pentecost:

"In your state you need the plenitude of the Holy Spirit, since you should live therein and be conducted solely by the spirit and light of faith. Only the Holy Spirit can give you these dispositions... Beseech God to confer on you to-day the same grace He gave to the Apostles so that after filling you with His Spirit for your own sanctification, He may confer it on you for the salvation of others also." (43rd Meditation)

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