

## THE MEDITATIONS FOR THE TIME OF RETREAT AND THE DIRECTED RETREAT (2)

The *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* in the context of a directed retreat:

As stated in part one of this article, the role of the spiritual director is to assist us in paying attention to God, as God is revealing himself in our lives, and to help us in recognizing our reactions to God's revealing and in deciding on our responses. Lasallian spirituality is admirably suited to foster this movement. By the Spirit of Faith and Zeal we are formed to a posture of looking for God present in every aspect of life and responding to God concretely in our daily activity. The purpose of a directed retreat and the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* is co-extensive, as indeed it must be, since both are expressions of the one spirituality of Jesus found in the Gospel.

In the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* De La Salle shows himself to be a remarkable spiritual director; he exhibits a profound understanding of the fundamental movements of the spiritual life. The *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* enunciate clearly the normal flow of these movements in a Christian spirituality: the awareness of a loving and forgiving God inviting us into relationship the way we are at the moment; the contemplation of the life and ministry of Jesus with a view to becoming His disciple; our lives as sacraments of Jesus present in the world helping others to discover the kingdom of God. Because the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* are both biblical and historical, they root the Gospel in our experience of relating to God and others, especially our students.

The fundamental movement in a Christian spirituality is the experience of a God who loves us unconditionally as we are; a God who continues to be faithful to us in the midst of our own infidelity. The *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* begin by presenting us with an image of a loving and forgiving God who desires a relationship with us:

God is so good that he not only brings us into existence by his act of creation but also desires that all of us come to a knowledge of the truth. This truth is God himself and all that he has willed to reveal to us through Jesus Christ, through his apostles, and through his Church. God desires all of us to be taught this knowledge that our minds may be enlightened by the light of faith (MTR 193:1).

Notice the personal and relational language of De La Salle: God is good, God desires. The truth spoken of is personal Truth, relational truth, God Himself! The knowledge spoken of is a felt knowledge, an experiential knowledge, a living knowledge, a faith experience of this personal God. The language is reminiscent of the creative language of *Genesis* where God creates in His image, blesses and fills with life:

God created man in his image;  
in the divine image he created him;  
male and female he created them...  
God looked at everything he had made  
and he found it very good. (*Genesis* 1:27,31)

The movement of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* is a biblical movement beginning with images of *Genesis* and ending with images from the *Book of Revelation*. The *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, like the Scripture which inspires them, tell the story of salvation in sixteen simple but pointed reflections. But they are a special story of salvation: the story of God interacting with De La Salle and with us, inviting us to discover how God is present in our lives. As John the Baptist invited his disciples to recognize Jesus present in their midst and to follow Him, so De La Salle does the same for his disciples. As a good spiritual director, De La Salle points to Jesus and then gets out of His way! Again as a good spiritual director, he points to the events of our lives as the place to meet Jesus:

Examine before God how you are acting in your ministry and whether you are failing in any of your responsibilities. Come to know yourself as you are. (MTR 205:1)

Lasallian prayer is an apostolic prayer; the fundamental act of this prayer is the ongoing dialogue with God about the reality of our lives. We are invited to share with God and with one another what is the truth of our experience: "Come to know yourself as you are," says De La Salle! We will come to know ourselves as we are when we come to know ourselves as God knows us, this is the truth of our lives and this is what both a directed retreat and the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* are all about. Joys and sorrows, hopes and anxieties, gifts and sins, loves and hates, successes and failures, the daily life of interpersonal relationships, these constitute the "stuff" of our lives. The agenda, the content for a directed retreat, is the reality of my lived experience shared honestly with God. The *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* are an invitation to lay before the Lord what is happening in my life and ministry today:

You must then devote yourself very thoroughly to prayer in order to succeed in your ministry. You must constantly represent the needs of your students to Jesus Christ, explaining to Him the difficulties you experience in guiding them. Jesus Christ seeing that you regard Him as the one who can do everything and yourself as an instrument to be moved only by Him, will not fail to grant you what you ask. (MTR 196:1)

The *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* help us to focus our lives of Faith and Zeal by asking in different ways two fundamental questions: How is God present in my life today? What is God asking of me in this situation?

### **Ways of Using the Meditations for the Time of Retreat in a directed retreat:**

In the context of a directed retreat the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* can be used in various ways, the director always being careful to respond to what is happening in the prayer of the retreatant so as not to impose the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* in an artificial manner. Perhaps what is needed is to focus the image of God better; *Meditations* 193, 195 and 196 are excellent for this purpose. Maybe the retreatant needs to deepen his/her understanding of ministry; *Meditations* 195, 196, 199, 200, 201 and 202 will be most helpful here. If the quality of my personal prayer is the issue, *Meditations* 195, 196, 197 and 198 will have much to say about this exercise.

The *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* may also be prayed with a view to salvation history and the great mysteries of God in my life: the act of *Creation* in 193; the mystery of the *Incarnation* in 195 and 196; the *Redemption* 199 through 204; my response to God's goodness in these mysteries in 205 and 206; the desired union with God spoken of in 193 comes to fulfillment in 207 and 208.

Using the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* in conjunction with the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* can be a rich experience of Lasallian prayer. For example: consider God present in the place in which we are using *Meditations* 193 through 196; God present in us using *Meditations* 197 & 198; God present in the Church using *Meditations* 199, 200, 203 and 204.

Simply to use the Scripture of the *Meditations* is another way of making the *Meditations* useful as prayer material. Or to use the first six *Meditations* as a unit of prayer is helpful. In a retreat of eight, fifteen or thirty days the *Meditations* may be used as they are, one at a time or in different groupings.

The most effective way to use them seems to be as they are needed to move the prayer of the retreatant. In other words, be selective as to how they are to be used. Do not follow any particular sequence, but when something in the prayer of the retreatant seems to suggest that a particular *Meditation* or a particular point of a *Meditation* would be helpful, then use it. The director must be very attentive to what is happening in the prayer of the retreatant and know when and how to introduce material to deepen the prayer experience of the moment.

Neither the directed retreat nor the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* is a program to be completed in some prearranged fashion. Like the Scripture the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* are a means to an end. They are an aid, a method to help us enter into dialogue with the Lord. They are an invitation to us to write the Scripture of our own lives from our relationship with the Lord. The *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* are to stimulate our prayer; they are not the prayer proper. When we finally enter into dialogue with the Lord then the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* have served their purpose and should be put aside. In the hands of an experienced spiritual director the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* can be the catalyst for a powerful prayer experience. Coming as they do from the intimate personal relationship of God with Saint John Baptist de La Salle they are their own best advertisement of success. They are a magnificent expression of De La Salle's wish written in his letter to Brother Barthélémy:

It seems to me that what I desire in prayer is that God make known to me what he wants of me and that he put me in the dispositions he would like me to have.

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