

DE LA SALLE'S SENSE OF HUMOR

What is a Sense of Humor?

«the mental faculty of discovering, expressing, or appreciating ludicrous or absurdly incongruous elements in ideas, situations, happenings, or acts.» Webster's

«the sense within us which sets up a kindly contemplation of the incongruities of life and the expression of that sense in speech, literature, or art forms of various kinds.» Arbuckle, *Strategies for Growth in Religious Life*

«Irony: humor, ridicule, or light sarcasm that adopts a mode of speech the intended implication of which is the opposite of the literal sense of the words (as when expressions of praise are used where blame is meant).» Webster's

Humor is kind, gentle; irony is a form of humor; sarcasm also focuses on the incongruous, but it is harsh and often crude and contemptuous. See *Random House Dictionary*.

The hearty laugher is not always humorous, gigglers and snorters are more authentically humorous.

Some Incidents of De La Salle's Sense of Humor:

1. He played a joke on Reims when he took Nyel home with him. Nyel was planning to organize a school for poor boys which those in power would oppose. De La Salle made it appear that Nyel was only another priest staying with him. They could have chuckled, but it wasn't necessary for the humor of the situation.

2. De La Salle accepted Barré's pun, «If you found the schools (i.e., endow them), they will founder.» (les écoles fondées seraient fondues) To rely entirely on Providence is a joke.

3. It took a sense of humor (laughing at himself) for De La Salle to accept seriously the remark of the early Brothers that he could speak eloquently about Providence when he had so much guaranteed security in his wealth.

4. In 1712, when his trip to Rome was canceled at the request of the bishop of Marseilles, «he rejoined the Brothers, to whom he said, "God be blessed. Here I am back from Rome."» (CL8:94)

5. When he was retired at St. Yon De La Salle was not always treated respectfully by one of his oldest disciples. Blain recounts that on one occasion this Brother told him that he was being fed and lodged at St. Yon out of charity as a penniless priest who was no longer good for anything. «On hearing this "compliment" the Servant of God could not help laughing (ne put s'empecher de rire de ce compliment).» (CL 8:166; Arnan-dez BK 3, 194)

Examples of Irony in De La Salle's Letters:

12:17 (Hubert): «So you are ready to let the Brothers lose their vocations because you are not courageous enough to reprimand them, and you let Brother Quentin do as he pleases. Through your easygoing attitude you will bring him to the state where he will leave.»

18:5 (Drolin) «You say that you do not like being in debt. It would be nice to know if you are in debt, and how much you owe, to whom and why. That's just what you don't tell me.»

23:8 (Drolin) «Do you think I would let you starve?»

38:6 (Robert) «It seems to me that you want nothing to be lacking that will give you pleasure. Well, who wouldn't be poor under those conditions? ... Please remember that you did not join the Institute to enjoy every comfort and satisfaction, but to embrace poverty and its consequences. I say its consequences, because there is no point in loving virtue unless you love all that comes with it and gives you the means of practicing it.»

81:4 (Anonymous) «Now I see quite clearly what you want, my very dear Brother. You very much want to profess that you are a great lover of humility and that you have a great esteem for it, just as long as you can avoid humiliations as much as possible. What good will it be for you to love the virtue and refuse to practice it?»

85:5 (Anonymous) «You complain that others haven't enough charity, but you don't complain that you haven't enough humility. What good is that great desire you have for this virtue if it does not help you be more aware that you are culpable before God?»

85:6 (Anonymous) «You will tell me, perhaps, that you very much want to observe (silence), but that the situation in which you continually find yourself of having to answer those who ask you questions does not allow you to do so. What a trifling excuse! Don't you know the occasions when you should reply and those when you should remain silent?»

105:11 (Woman religious) «You commit plenty of serious faults which you will have to account for, without putting a wrong interpretation on what others do... You want others to be reprimanded for their faults, but do not wish to be reprimanded for your own... You can see the splinter in your brother's eye, but cannot see the beam in your own.»

107:7 (Woman religious) «A fine sort of religious perfection that would be, to be ready to do only what pleases you!»

120:3 (His nephew) «I am surprised you have not arranged that the chalice and the surplice be restored to you with appropriate ceremony by some officer of the court, as if recognizing in him as much right to restore to you your priestly faculties as your bishop had in bestowing them in the first place.»

126:4 (Bartholomew) «I do not think I have seen, at least for a good many years, a novitiate like this in the Community, and yet with such a situation you hope to establish new foundations!»

129 (Bartholomew) «...I did not vow obedience to do what I like...»

132 (Director of Calais) (Perhaps unintended, but pointed out by Brother Felix Paul.) De La Salle quotes St. Augustine (Rome has spoken, the case is closed) against Quesnel and the Jansenists whose primary book was Augustinus.

Bro. Augustine Loes