

**MEDITATIONS
OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE**

- II - (1/2)

Brother Mario Presciuttini

5. The central themes of Lasallian teaching

This article sets out to summarise the basic themes of the spiritual teaching of De La Salle, as contained in his works as a whole and in particular in his Meditations. It is based broadly on a summary of the Saint's teaching drawn up by Saturnino Gallego (op.cit. pp.17-57).

**1. The underlying principle:
THE SPIRIT OF FAITH**

This is the central core and the underlying principle governing the thinking and lifestyle presented to us by De La Salle in his Meditations.

The "spirit of faith" means, first and foremost, trust and self-abandonment into the hands of God, as expressed by De La Salle on his deathbed: "I adore in all things the will of God in my regard." This is the permanent attitude of the person who lives and walks in the presence of God, and who looks upon reality in terms of its relationship to God. It is the internal and supernatural principle behind every thought, judgment and action.

For De La Salle, the spirit of faith does not mean so much an intellectual act of acceptance of truths, as a

faith that is lived intensely and in which the whole person is involved. "But let us remember that it will profit us little to have received the light of faith if we do not live according to the spirit of Christianity, and if we do not observe the maxims of the Gospel. The chief aim to be realised by our faith is the practice of what we believe" (Med. 175, 2; cf. also 84, 3; 139, 3; 197, 2; etc.).

The following consequences follow quite naturally from this basic principle:

1.1 Discerning the will of God

For De La Salle this is the first effect of the spirit of faith: a person undertakes to listen for the calls and the plans of the Father who loves, saves and sends.

There are three basic ways in which we can listen and which involve discernment:

(a) Holy Scripture

While statements about the central position occupied by this source of discernment are frequently repeated in the Meditations, it is the practical example of how one should set about this listening to the Scriptures that is even more frequently illustrated: references to the Word of God are part of the very texture of all the Meditations; explicit quotations and allusions reflect the permanent dialogue of the author with the God who speaks and calls, and is a practical spiritual example for the reader.

"May this reading fill you with God's divine spirit that you may do all these things with ease" (Med. 192, 1). One could say that this summarises what is meant by this means which is recommended so frequently.

(b) The guidance of the Holy Spirit

A characteristic recommendation of De La Salle is that one should think and act "under the impulse of the Spirit" (cf. Med. 43, 2; 44; 79, 1; etc.). He is the interior guide who enlivens the spirit of faith and with his gifts (De La Salle stresses in particular wisdom, piety and fortitude) guides discernment and stimulates and accompanies action.

(c) In community

This is an easy form of discernment in particular for religious, but not only for them. To seek the will of God together in faith is a way open to all Christians, especially if they are involved in apostolic work undertaken as part of a community.

"When choosing Mathias to replace Judas, the Apostles not only prayed but they also conferred among themselves in order not to settle anything without taking counsel...It is thus that God wishes you to act in all that pertains to your conduct and your ministry" (Med. 107, 2).

1.2 To follow the will of God

This is the second effect of the spirit of faith: the faith that served to guide the listening and discernment also guides and sustains the implementation of God's known will.

That is why De La Salle insists in his Meditations on the practical expression of faith by acts. The words of St. James' epistle are constantly quoted: "Faith is like that: if good works do not go with it, it is quite dead" (Jm 2, 17; cf. Med. 84, 3; 175, 2; 197, 2; 200, 3...).

All the Meditations, therefore, offer a practical way of implementing this faith each day both in the personal spiritual life as well as in the apostolic or professional work of the Christian educator.

1.3 The principal devotions

The spirit of faith is increased and deepened by means of a number of well-tried and recognised devotions.

De La Salle does not involve himself in special and passing "devotions". Taking as his point of departure the Word of God and the light of the Holy Spirit, he suggests the following basic devotions:

(a) The person of Jesus as a model seen especially in the three principal "mysteries" of his life:

* childhood (cf. Med. 85; 86; 93; 96;...)

* the passion: (cf. Med. 23-28; 104; 121; 129; 145; 152; 165; 195, 1).

* the Eucharist: (cf. Med. 26; 47-55; many passing references)

(b) The person of Mary as a model. The use of "The most Blessed Virgin" by De La Salle. Many Meditations treat of this devotion which was so very much a part of his life and which he taught so vigorously to his spiritual sons (cf. Med. 82; 83; 88, 3; 112; 146; 151...). Very specially recommended is the use of the rosary (cf. Med. 150, 3; 151, 3).

(c) In connection with Mary, St. Joseph is given special prominence as an example of the spirit of faith, of openness to the will of God and, in particular, as a model for the Christian educator (Med. 110).