

**LASALLIAN SYMBOLS
FOR A SCHOOL
PRACTICAL? ART?
BRONZE SYMBOLS?**

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When the Brothers of Illertissen, Germany, had to replace the door of the main entrance to their secondary school, they took the opportunity to draw attention to certain ideas related to the spirit which should inspire all the members of the educational community. They commissioned the artist, Klaus Ringwald, to produce two large ornamental bronze door handles.

The front door of the secondary school now has one door handle in the form of an owl, and the other in the form of a bee. This is not really surprising, since these two creatures are a symbol of man's long search for wisdom, and of his assiduity and zeal in work.

What is the place of zeal and wisdom in a school, or in the mission of an educator? Or are they rather (only) an aim or a possible aim?

Is not the proverbial zeal of a bee a pious hope rather than a reality in a school? And is not the wisdom of Athena-owl (as far as the daily life of a school is concerned) a great secret which is revealed only after death?

It would be possible to meditate much longer about mythology and the real lives of owls and bees, if only because owls are capable of turning their head through 180 degrees. This is a gift shared by many pupils looking for "inspiration" during tests and exams! And as for the "dance of the bees", there is perhaps a parallel in the gesticulations of some people who wish to demonstrate somewhat questionable methods to their friends.

However, when the artist produced these door handles he had none of these allegorical or ironic ideas passing through his head. Nor did De La Salle either, when he discovered the basic ideas behind his educa-

tor's ideal. To put it more seriously, for him the Owl-door handle is the spirit of faith, and the Bee-door handle is the spirit of zeal.

* Spirit of faith: Wisdom

* Spirit of zeal: charitable actions = Caritas

Wisdom and zeal should be, in fact, characteristics of higher education and of career guidance, which are needed as much in our times as they were when the symbolism of the owl and the bee came into existence.

However, when we think about the symbolism of these two creatures in the context of learning and the sciences, which are so necessary for us, our thinking automatically ranges far beyond these school subjects: this symbolism leads us to a better understanding and appreciation of wisdom and zeal, as understood in the spirituality of the holy Founder, John Baptist de La Salle.

The bedrock of Lasallian spirituality is the spirit of faith and of zeal. Of what importance is this spirituality for the programme of a Christian school and for our lives as Christians? John Baptist de La Salle said that the spirit of faith must lead us to see everything with the eyes of God, that is, with the heart of a believer; and that this attitude should permeate all our personal life.

If we interpret in this way the events of each day; the happy events of our personal lives as well as those which are less happy; and what is going on in the Church and world history; then we will acquire the kind of wisdom that guided God in creating the world. We will see that we are invited to prepare, with the help of wisdom, a better future, the kind of future initially willed and created by God: "*He saw that all was good*".

With regard to the beginning, the hymn for morning prayer says: "*Wisdom has built itself a house, the Word of God has spoken, and his words have struck us*".

To be full of faith means doing everything with our eyes directed towards God, being open to his call, acting in conformity with his will, wanting to be led by our love for God.

Letting our interior life be guided by the spirit of faith engenders wisdom and understanding which console and inspire. As the hymn says: "*Now the world is not so empty, the burden is not so heavy, the way to the Father lies open before us*".

St. La Salle's last words on his death-bed were: "*I adore in all things the will of God in my regard*".

According to De La Salle we acquire this spirit of faith by means of the spirit of zeal which leads us to do charitable work.

When we wish to act as Christians, when we wish to educate young people; when we wish to show solidarity, availability, sharing, what we do must be visible

and concrete, because it is clear that only charity and love bring about salvation in this world of ours.

According to St. La Salle, salvation is the fruit of the spirit of zeal. That is why he demands this spirit of all those who wish to work in the Christian schools and in the Lasallian Family.

The works of charity are engendered by the spirit of zeal which is founded on the wisdom of faith. What is there better than inspiring young people with admiration and respect for God's plan of creation, and with the wish to cooperate with it in the world in which we live? What better mentality can we form in them than one which makes them work for the good of others, and which, through a practical love for others, brings salvation to all now and forever?

The owl and the bee, the spirit of faith and of zeal, invite us in a concrete way to become more and more aware of, and moved in our lives as Christians, by the depth of our (Christian) faith, which is the fruit of wisdom and charity.

May the owl and the bee, the spirit of faith and of zeal, bring to our school each day benefits that are visible and beneficial, because a "Christian school" is a place where faith is lived and zeal is manifested in a concrete way.

Photographs: door handles made by the great artist Klaus Rinwald. They are not only ornamental, but also have a great symbolic value: bee and owl, zeal and wisdom. ●

