

## TOWARD A UNIFIED LASALLIAN SPIRITUALITY

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The title is taken from Circular 435. The Brother Capitulants of 1993 expressed their convictions in a kind of creed:

"2.1 We believe that the contemplative attitude of the Founder, who was always attentive to the concrete situations of his own history and open to God's plan made manifest in his Word, invites us to live a unified Lasallian spirituality..." (p. 52).

Ever since the 39th General Chapter (1966-1967) rediscovered the topic of the constitutive elements of our vocation (consecration, mission, community), there has been insistence on their integration and unity in our lives; being conscious of how they are in harmony with one another, how they complement and interact with one another...many verbs are used to express this idea, especially in pastoral letters that remind us about the theme from 1977 up to and including this year.

On the other hand, faced with the disintegration of human life in our day, there are those who as a remedy are proposing a holistic and unifying approach.

We have had that solution in our midst for centuries. But we are just beginning to become conscious of that source of wealth. For many years we limited ourselves to listening to the reading of the Meditations of the Founder yet without capturing the profound lines of his thought. And at time we even thought that they were too "dry" in comparison with those more "sentimental, with more fervor of other authors."

In 1980, in the Symposium on Prayer, I presented a paper in order to bring us nearer to the Lasallian Method of Mental Prayer. I tried to show how the Method has a unifying meaning in life. Now I would like to further develop these ideas.

I will try to demonstrate how the Method of Prayer produced in St. John Baptist de La Salle (A) a logical mentality and (B) an integrated mentality.

### **A. ORDERED AND LOGICAL THOUGHT.**

De La Salle does well to say that to pray methodically "serves to rectify the spirit and teaches clear thinking..., to clearly think and reflect..." (Literal translation of CL 50, Numbers 84-85).

By the practice of mental prayer, as he teaches it in his Method, our Founder "thought clearly", and reflected clearly. The logic of his method had "rectified his spirit".

This can be seen in several of his writings. For now, I will limit myself to his Meditations.

In them one almost always finds the of old outline of SEEING, JUDGING, ACTING.

Let's take two examples: Meditation 1 (Meditations for Sundays and Feasts) and 208 (Meditations for the time of Retreat). I do not pretend to assert that these are chronologically the first and the last, but only in the 1922 numbering system.

In Meditation 1, for the first Sunday of Advent, we see the mental structure in each point:

Point 1: Beginning with the Gospel text for the day, we SEE the divine judgment. In the light of the teachings of some saints - Jerome, Ephrem, Augustine -, we JUDGE our own life. And he ends by inviting us to ACT: "*let us constantly strive to free ourselves of our defects...*" (very literal translation of CL 12).

Point 2: The same outline is followed. We SEE that judgment is not only for evildoers but also for good people. We JUDGE with the thought of the same saints in the first point. And it ends with a question inviting us to ACT: "*Who of us, then, will not fear God's judgment?*"

Point 3: This follows the theme "How will we God's judgment?" This makes us SEE and JUDGE with the example of Job, Saint Hilarion, Saint Jerome, Saint Ephrem. And it ends with a question that suggests ACTION: "*what feelings of dread should we not experience, we who show such little fervor in God's service?*"

We find the same structure in Meditation 208, for the Time of Retreat:

Point 1: Beginning with a text from St. Paul we SEE what the reward will be in heaven for a Brother of the Christian Schools. This is what makes them think that their happiness will be...With the teachings of St. Paul, making us JUDGE: "*Consider, then, that your happiness in heaven will be all the greater...*". He ends with an exhortation to ACTION: "*Fulfill the duties of your work so well, then, that you may be able to enjoy this blessing...*"

Point 2: We SEE with an enthusiastic language: *"What a consolation for those who have procured the salvation of souls, to see in heaven a great number of them..."* Then the JUDGMENT: *"Oh! What joy a Brother of the Christian Schools will have when he sees a great number of his students in possession of eternal happiness..."* And, in a plainer form, we are called to ACTION: *"Put yourself in such a position in the future by fidelity to your duty, so that at the moment of your death you will possess such a great happiness".*

Point 3: Based on Psalm 16, we try to SEE how God's grace will be and enjoy celestial glory: *"for the sight of God fills all the powers of a person's soul in such a way that all consciousness of self is lost, so to speak. The entire person is entirely present within the divinity and totally penetrated with God himself".* An exclamation allows one to JUDGE this good fortune: *"Ah! What a thrill of joy you will have when you hear the voices of those whom you have led as if by the hand into heaven..."* And it ends with a brief exhortation to ACTION: *"Act, then, in such a way by your good and wise guidance of those who are entrusted to you, that you will procure all these blessings and all this glory for yourself".*

This outline is found in almost every point of the Meditations. And it is helpful to find the ones that are original to the Founder because his inspiration may be present in other authors or because someone else's pen intervened.

In some meditations, the first point is more characterized by SEEING, the second by JUDGING and third by ACTING. As an example, see Meditations 65, 74, 76 and 77.

## B. AN INTEGRATING THOUGHT

By carefully reading the Meditations, we can see that our Founder had in mind the three constitutive elements of our vocation. Allusions to them emerge naturally; one is left with the impression of what he is doing by a type of spontaneous reflection more than by an obsession or an eagerness to refer to them.

The three elements are not always joined together, sometimes there is only consecration; for example, during Lent, Holy Week and the first few Sundays of Easter (Meditations 16-32).

At other times only community is mentioned; for example in Meditations 72-75.

It is rarer to find only mission, even in the Meditations for the Time of Retreat.

The most frequent occurrence is that these three dimensions are interwoven, just as they are in our lives.

- In Meditation 37 about the obligation that we have to pray for our students, we find in each point a reference to the elements of our life:

Point 1: *"you have received the grace to support the weak, to teach the ignorant, to correct the wayward..."* (Consecration for a mission).

Point 2: *"The children who come to you...God sends them to you so that you may give them the spirit of*

*Christianity..."* (Mission).

Point 3: *"You should look upon the children you are charged to teach as poor, abandoned orphans...This God of goodness places them in your hands and undertakes to give them everything you ask of him for them..."* (The educational community, paternal attention).

In Meditation 39, about what we should ask of God in prayer:

Point 1: Jesus asks that his disciples, whom he has destined to preach the Gospel, be free from sin. And the same for us: *"Beg him, therefore, most earnestly that nothing may make you displeasing in his sight, since you are obliged to inspire his love in the hearts of those whom you instruct..."* (Consecration for a mission).

Point 2: Jesus asks that his disciples be sanctified in the truth. *"Because in your state of life you are called to procure the sanctification of your pupils, you should be holy yourself in no ordinary degree...Beg God for it daily with great earnestness..."* (Consecration with the accent on mission).

Point 3: Jesus asks for his disciples *"a great union among themselves, so close and stable that it resemble the union among the three Divine Persons"*. This union is contagious as St. Luke reminds us in Acts. And De La Salle ends with a beautiful exhortation: *"Entreat the God of hearts to keep your heart and those of your Brothers one in the heart of Jesus"*.

- The three elements are found in some Meditations dealing with the mysteries. For example: Meditation 93 (Circumcision) and Meditation 96 (Epiphany).

- But where the Founder demonstrates best that he is attentive to the "not making any differentiation" between the dimensions of our life is in the majority of the Meditations about the Saints and in those for the Time of Retreat.

- The Meditation on Saint Joseph (Meditation 110) merits special consideration: the model of the just man, committed to care for Jesus, obedient to God's plan in his everyday life and diligent in caring for the Baby Jesus. *"Take St. Joseph as your model, since he is your patron"*.

- In almost every Meditation about the Apostles the following are pointed out: the community aspect as a vocation for the integrating of the group of Jesus disciples; the mission aspect as evangelization; the consecration aspect for the love of Christ, prayer and martyrdom.

- As has been noted (see the topic of "Solitude" by Brother Martín Lasa in Lasallian Themes Number 2, point 3.2), for our Founder the COMMUNITY element is very much tied to solitude, retreat and to withdrawal from the world. Therefore, it is interesting to find the three dimensions of our life in the Meditations about Saints who lived alone: St. Peter Celestine (Meditation 127), St. Alexis (Meditation 143), St. Jerome (Meditation 170), St. Remigius (Meditation 171), St. Francis (Meditation 173), St. Bruno (Meditation 174), St. Hilarion (Meditation 180). This last

one especially had some very valuable ideas about a life in a "community of faith in which the experience of God is shared" as our Rule says in number 48.

- The Meditations about Holy Founders of monasteries or congregations are noted for their integrating vision. For example: St. Benedict (Meditation 111), St. Germain (Meditation 131), St. Basil (Meditation 136), St. Ignatius of Loyola (Meditation 148), St. Dominic (Meditation 150), St. Cajetan (Meditation 153), St. Augustine (Meditation 161), St. Martin (Meditation 189).

- In the sections dealing with the Saints who were bishops, De La Salle underscores community value as participation in the life of the Church. This is a very valuable theme, based on St. Paul who speaks of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ; and our congregation, our community is referred to as "*a small Church*". For example: St. Ambrose (Meditation 81), St. Augustine (Meditation 161, already mentioned), St. Marcellinus (Meditation 186, see points 2 and 3 for the integration of the three elements), St. Charles Borromeo (Meditation 187).

- In the life of some female Saints, our Founder insists on the community value of family life, the sense of mission in the upbringing of children and consecration in prayer. For example: Saint Monica (Meditation 122), St. Margaret of Scotland (Meditation 133). In this last one one can glean two very visionary ideas: "*In your state you have the opportunity to pray often (mental prayer) and the ability to pray well*" (Point 1). "*She devoted herself to it with respect to her children in her devotion to their education*" (Point 2).

- It is curious to see how De La Salle devised ways to help us integrate the three dimensions in difficult topics such as that of St. Michael the Archangel (Meditation 169).

This meditation has a beautiful final synthesis:

*"Often pray to St. Michael to have the goodness to protect this little family, this Church of Jesus Christ according to the expression of Saint Paul, which is our community, that he give it the means of preserving within itself the spirit of Jesus Christ, and to all its members the graces they need to persevere in their vocation, and procure the spirit of Christianity for all those who are under their guidance".*

Something similar can be seen in the meditation about the Guardian Angels (Meditation 172) although this is also treated in two of the Meditations for the Time of Retreat: 197 and 198.

- In the Meditations for the Time of Retreat the reference to the three elements is very clear. Each one is almost always reflected upon in each point. Sometimes, he intertwines the whole of the dimensions of our vocation in one point or all three. This can be seen clearly in Meditations 196, 197, 198 and 200.

It's interesting to see how naturally our Founder takes "the new and the old" out of the background of his own prayer experience in terms of each one of the sectors of our lives so that nothing is forgotten and so that we continue making our own vital synthesis.

I believe that a return to sources - the Method of Mental Prayer and the Meditations - with all the filial liberty that he himself suggests (EMO, CL 50, Numbers 325-330), can contribute still today so that we ourselves are formed "with a well made head", according to the expression of his contemporary Montaigne. And also that what Number 10 of our Rule asks of us happens in our life and in many more places.