

**ST. LA SALLE
AND SACRED SCRIPTURES (2/2)**

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Living the Gospel:

"By their fruits you shall know them."

Ezra Pound, the American poet and critic, claims that we "do not understand books until they have had a certain amount of life. Or at any rate, no man understands a deep book, until he has seen and lived at least part of its contents."

According to his biographers, the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* must have been written towards the end of De La Salle's journey, for they reflect the work of a mature person sharing his experiences with others. Sometimes referred to as autobiographical documents of the Founder, the *Meditations* also serve as a challenge to the Brothers to recognize God's action in their own history. The Bible is the primary source of this book, particularly the epistles of St. Paul. One biographer of the Founder even theorized: "The citations of St. Paul are, in fact so literal that we must presume that the Founder worked with a New Testament constantly at hand and actually copied out certain passages directly" (Michel Sauvage, *Cahiers lasallien*).

What gospel values had he translated in his own life at this time?

Faith, confidence in God's providence that is expressed by his willingness to practice poverty and renunciation. "The Spirit of Faith simply means that we allow ourselves to be guided, not by human views, but by the light of faith as derived from the truths revealed in Holy Scriptures" (Battersby, 1965, pp. 138-139).

He had given up his Canonry, sold his property, distributed his goods to the poor, and established a school for the poor. La Salle taught his Brothers to translate religious knowledge into a Christian life, that "Christian education was not merely a matter of instruction; it was any apprenticeship for life" (Aroz et al. 1980, pp. 103 and 104). He witnessed, through his example, to a firm confidence in God's loving providence. For example, during the famine in France when the Brothers had no money to buy bread, La Salle prepared to celebrate Mass to implore God's help to keep the community alive. On his way to the church, he met a benefactress who donated enough funds to meet their needs (Maillefer, 1979, pp. 118-119).

Spiritual writers tell us that those whom God loves dearly He places under the shadow of the cross. In the life of St. John Baptist de La Salle, the shadows which followed his ministry loomed even darker towards the end of his life. But what can one expect when a person has decided to imitate Christ?

He was a victim of lawsuits, and experienced opposition and polarisation within his community. He went through a dark night of the soul. There were temptations and discouragement. Should the rejection by his disciples be interpreted as a rejection by God? At this late stage in his journey De La Salle, now aged sixty-two, finds himself in a crossroad: the idea of a new form of apostolate was now presenting itself as a serious possibility...another one suggests another option--to remain in seclusion at Saint Maximin and "end his days there, unknown to anyone..."

He forgave an errant Brother who had betrayed his trust, the only one in the community who expressed willingness to receive the prodigal back to the fold. His magnanimity was rewarded; La Salle was the only one in that group who was raised to sanctity.

Whenever we experience life to be unfair and are tempted to bitterness and anger, it would help us see things in proper perspective if we were to reflect on the last days of La Salle. No one could have written a better commentary on the events before the death of the Founder than Canon Blain:

"God is pleased to make use of all kinds of hands to work at the sanctification of His elect, and that even the just, at times, persecute other just men" (p. 196)... "God permits even the hearts of good men to grow passionately bitter towards His favorites; but He does not allow the latter to lose the esteem that their virtue deserves" (p. 199).

He was misunderstood and treated harshly by Archbishop D'Aubigne who was prejudiced against La Salle because of a vicious report from a vicar general, and yet La Salle accepted this with serenity and equanimity. Archbishop D'Aubigne stripped La Salle of his priestly powers and when this information was communicated to him on his deathbed, his only comment was "God be blessed!" He had taught his disciples a most efficacious prayer for obtaining the help of Mary and the prayer concluded thus: "...obtain for us, O Holy Virgin, grace to live and die in the practice of the Gospel maxims, so that we may, one day, arrive at eternal happiness. Amen." On the eve of his death, his disciples could hear him pleading and praying to our lady: "Maria Mater Gratiae" (Dempsey, 1940, p. 167). Like his Master, La Salle died on Good Friday, April 7, 1719. The irony of it was that when the vicar general was told that La Salle died, he exclaimed: "He is a saint! The Saint is dead!"

As the Holy Spirit has prompted our Founder to listen to the word of God and live it faithfully, I believe that the same Spirit is inviting us to experience His presence and discern His will in the light of Sacred Scriptures. In his introduction to St. John Baptist de La Salle's "Meditations for the Time of Retreat," Bro. Miguel Campos observed two movements that flowed in the life of the Founder--from Sacred Scriptures to his life story and from his story back to Sacred Scriptures.

(1975, pp. 9-10). Similarly, those who wish to be formed in the likeness of Christ will also use the Holy Writ as a compass to their journey and find there eventually the story of their lives.

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