

Reading the Complete Works: MEDITATIONS FOR THE PRINCIPAL FEASTS OF THE YEAR

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In another article concerning the *Meditations for Sundays* (MS) some characteristics have already been pointed out. This may serve as a point of reference along with the important study of the sources for the *Meditations for Feasts* (MF) published by Brother Jean-Guy Rodrigue in the Cahier Lasallien 47 in 1988.

108 Meditations

The "second part" of the first edition which appeared in 1730 is numbered independently from pages 1-252 and includes 108 meditations.

Pages 253-268 contain 6 additional meditations (MA), namely, MA 103;184, taken from Beuvelet; 168; 181; 83 and 188 (after MF 180 for October 21, referring to the feast of Saint Romanus, "see at the end", MA 181 for October 26; after MF 167 for September 21, indication is given for the feast of St. Yon for September 22, MA 168).

Afterwards there are the lives of St. Yon (MA 301) and St. Cassian (MA 303).

These additions are not works of the Founder (see CL 47, p. 539). The *Complete Works* does include them (pp. 495-508) but after the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*. We will not study these here but only the *Meditations for Feasts* (MF).

In the first edition, these meditations are not **numbered** and they appear in the order of the civil calendar (beginning in January). The numbering scheme was added in 1882 and it has remained ever since, following the liturgical calendar (beginning with Advent) and after the *77 Meditations for Sundays* (MS). The additional meditations were included at this time also, each on its own day. Therefore now the meditation for November 30 is number 78 and the one for November 25 is number 192.

The number 94 was assigned to the meditation on the Most Holy Name of Jesus, introduced in 1882 by Brother Irlide. And the mediation for St. Joachim (moved from March 20 to August 16) became number 157.

This briefly explains the jumps in the numeration or on the indicated dates.

Except for number 107 for February 24 on Saint Matthias, the first meditations, 93 to 118, had no mention of **date**, in the first edition. Beginning with April 30 on Saint Catherine

of Siena, the dates are given except for MF 164 which is celebrated on the Sunday within the octave of the Birth of Mary.

Some meditations are **subtitled** in order to specify the meaning of a particular feast: "On the submission that we owe the Church" (MF 106), "On devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin" (MF 151 which also has an introduction), "Meditation for the Holy Name of Mary" (MF 164).

Finally, the three last meditations (MF 90 to 92) are titled in terms of topics for the examination of conscience for the year just concluding. They are the only meditations that are directly related to one another; the others do not form a complete unit that is immediately evident.

Sequences to keep in mind

There is an average of two meditations per week. **Why were these particular ones chosen?** De La Salle's catechism concerning worship (*Duties of a Christian, DC*) and the *Collection* in the index of topics for recreation (R 10), offer the Lasallian reader a clue to discover in the *Meditations for Feasts* a "sequence" which corresponds to the selection criteria.

The Duties of a Christian (DC 42.0.2) lists 12 feasts in honor of the 12 **mysteries of Our Lord Jesus Christ**.

The first 5 correspond to the cycle of saints that the *Meditations for Feasts* covers:

1. Incarnation or Conception of Our Lord - Annunciation of the Most Blessed Virgin (MF 112);
2. The Nativity of Our Lord (MF 86);
3. The Circumcision (MF 93);
4. Epiphany - Adoration of the Magi (MF 96);
5. The Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple - the Purification of the Most Blessed Virgin (MF 104);

In the *Meditations for Sundays* (MS 18, 22, 27, 29, 40, 43, and 47) another 8 mysteries are covered. It is interesting to read these meditations in this order in order to enter into the Christology of the Founder and capture the way that he applies it to the life of Christian teachers.

If one adds the feast of Our Lady of the Snow (MF 151), **the Marian meditations** correspond to the 7 mysteries that are brought out in *Duties of a Christian* (DC 43.0.1):

1. Immaculate Conception (MF 82);
2. Birth of Mary (MF 163);
3. Presentation of Mary in the Temple (MF 191);
4. The Visitation (MF 141);
5. The Annunciation (MF 112);
6. The Purification (MF 104);
7. The Assumption (MF 156);

This order may seem strange and it does not follow the development in *Duties of a Christian* (DC 43.3.5). The Seminary of St. Sulpice celebrated a particular feast concerning the interior life of the Most Blessed Virgin. Perhaps what we read in MF 163.3 is an echo of that.

The Duties of a Christian (DC 44.0.1) numbers the major feasts of the saints and all of them correspond to the meditations in MF:

1. All Saints (MF 183);
2. St. Michael (MF 125 and 169);
3. The Holy Guardian Angels (MF 172);
4. St. John the Baptist (MF 138 and 162);

5. Holy Apostles and Evangelists
St. Peter (MF 139, 149 and 106);
St. Paul (MF 99 and 140);
Others (MF 119, 145, 159, 182, 78, 84, 116, 88, 124,
167 and 178);
6. St. Joseph (MF 110);
7. St. Stephen (MF 87);
8. St. Lawrence (MF 154);
9. St. Martin (MF 189);
10. St. Nicholas (MF 80);
11. Patron saints of the dioceses or of the church (cf. MF
131, 186, 98).

In St. Sulpice there was a great devotion to the holy Apostles and the meditations for their feasts formed a wonderful short treatise on the apostolic life of the Christian educator.

All these feasts correspond to the principal feasts of the Church, which used to be classified as “first class”, “second class” and “major”.

Other feasts also give rise to meditations like those pointed out in the *Collection* (10.2.7). These are the patron saints of the Society (St. Joseph, St. Cassian, MF 155) or **those whose lives best reflect the spirit of our Institute** such as those already mentioned like Saints John the Baptist, Peter and Paul, John the Evangelist, as well as Ignatius, martyr (MF 102), Francis of Assisi (MF 173), Dominic (MF 150), Vincent Ferrer (for whose feast the Founder did not write a meditation), Charles Borromeo (MF 187), Francis de Sales (MF 101), Ignatius of Loyola (MF 148), Francis Xavier (MF 79), Philip Neri (MF 129) and Theresa (MF 177).

A very important work of composition

Brother Jean-Guy has shown (CL 47, 538) how the Founder, as he wrote the Meditations for Feasts, was **mainly inspired** by the *Martyrologe* of F. Paris, by *Fleurs des vies des saints* (Exemplary lives of the saints) of Ribadeneira, and by the *Roman Breviary*.

“Some points of meditation are formed exclusively with Pauline texts that are sprinkled with brief phrases or with appropriate commentaries (see MF 90.3, 93.1, 112.2-3, 140.2-3, 152.1, 165.1, 183.1-3). On the other hand, some meditations contain a linked series of biblical texts or quotations from the fathers of the Church (see MF 84.1-2, 87.1-3, 88.2, 91.2, 96.1-3, 138.1, 140.1, 144.2-3, 145.1, 149.1-2, 152.2-3, 191.3)” (CL 47, p. 36).

“De La Salle always applied the same **procedure for the composition** of the *Meditations for Feasts*. Each point is developed around a very specific topic which is spelled out

in the very first lines of text. First of all, some traits taken from the life of a saint confirm the practice of a virtue or illustrate his efforts at defending the interests of God or the Church in his own epoch. Using such examples De La Salle concludes with an application for the spiritual life of his disciples or for the way they are to carry themselves in their employ. Very often a short exhortation is added about the given topic from examples taken from the life of the saint and their practical application for his disciples” (ibid., p. 26).

“With regard to the sources and the place they occupy in MF, the term to **make use of** seems to be appropriate. In fact, De La Salle used texts for a specific purpose and they were not necessarily or specifically designed for the use he made of them. His great gift was the way he discovered the basic elements of a story and used it to fit his own needs, utilizing the words from the source text but occasionally interjecting his own comments...The situations that were laid out and the spiritual teaching contained in the MF reveal a man who was very lucid and who was deeply religious” (ibid., p. 30).

Vaugirard or St. Yon

Blain tells us that in Vaugirard, around 1695, De La Salle composed the “Meditations and other books of piety for the private use of his disciples” (I, 341). After his return to Paris in 1714, the biographer also notes that “he was almost always in his room, praying or reading and composing the Meditations for the private use of the Brothers” (II, 125). And the preface to the *Meditations for Sundays* recalls that “in the last days of his life this great saint devoted the major portion of his time to this project” (CL 12).

Brother Saturnino Gallego has noted that between the middle of January and the end of August (MF 97-159) the meditations are noticeably shorter than the others. Brother Jean-Guy Rodrigue (CL 47, 527-537) establishes that the New Testament quotations use the Amelote version especially from the beginning of February to the end of August while the remaining sections normally use the Mons text. We might add that these have the title “meditations about...” only 6 times in May, once in July and once in August.

It is probable, then, that there were at least two periods in which the Founder devoted himself in a special way to write the *Meditations for Feasts*.

If it is clear that they were written “for the private use of his disciples”, we are eager to point out that by means of these meditations many educators have learned how to participate in his own spiritual experience. •