

**The Meditations for Rogation Days
MD 37 for Rogation Monday
(2/2)**

Br Joseph Le Bars

*Of the obligation we are under to pray for those
whom we are called upon to instruct*

2nd point

The second point begins with: *"The children sent to you"*. This echoes the expression "he comes to you...". The word "children" appears here for the first time in the meditation.

"either have no instruction or have learnt bad things. If perchance some have been taught properly, bad companions and bad habits have prevented them from profiting thereby..."

In this passage De La Salle simply repeats the description given by St Augustine of the situation of the traveller and friend, in order to show that it is also the situation of the children.

"God sends them to you, therefore, that you may instil into them the Christian spirit, and bring them up in accordance with the teaching of the Gospel"

This is the challenge. One could be tempted to join the Prophet Elias, Moses and others in saying: "Who, me?"

The Founder then turns to St Augustine (same chapter):

But you must begin with yourself, says St Augustine, or you will be put to shame by having either to teach what you do not know, or to preach what you do not practise.

And so you find you are unable to satisfy his hunger and this meeting makes you feel your poverty. The obligation to teach forces you to learn. The shame of appearing before the person consulting you, lacking what this person had hoped to find in you, obliges you to seek and to do whatever is necessary to deserve to find what is lacking.

Once again, we have here some observations based on St Augustine, but with a difference: are they a description of certain teachers (Brothers?) at the time [ignorant and far from being models], and at the same

time an invitation to them to mend their ways; or are they intended to shame them into doing better?

This explains the exhortation inspired by the needs of the apostolate, of the pupils, of the "friends" (are they not yet brothers?), whose distress we cannot help sharing.

"Ask God, therefore, to supply what you lack, so that he can give you abundantly what you require, that is to say, the Christian spirit and a solid religious formation".

This is exactly what God wants me to give to the children; this is why "he sends them to me".

Those who come to you, arrive in the dead of night, which signifies, says St Augustine, that they are completely ignorant. Their need is urgent, and you have not the wherewith to supply them. A mere rudimentary faith in the mysteries of religion might perhaps suffice for yourself, but it will not suffice to enable you to teach them. Will you then abandon them and leave them without instruction?

It is the dead of night, that is to say, the darkness of ignorance of this world has spread far and wide, and your friend, under the pressure of hunger, puts pressure on you in his turn. (It may so happen that he asks you questions you cannot answer to his satisfaction, because you are perhaps one of those persons who are satisfied with the rudiments of faith.) Perhaps these rudiments of faith which are enough for you are not enough for him. Will you abandon him, then? Will you turn him away from your house?

The passage in brackets in the text from St Augustine, appears in the preceding paragraph of the same sermon. It is clear that De La Salle took his inspiration from St Augustine.

A conclusion is needed and, here again, De La Salle takes his inspiration from St Augustine.

Turn to God; knock, pray, ask with insistence, and even with importunity.

There is no alternative but to have recourse to the Lord...knock on his door by your prayers, ask, demand, insist. He is not like the man in the parable who gives only...because he cannot resist importunity.

In the translation of chapter 1 of Sermon 105 we find: *"he exhorts you to ask...even to the extent of being almost importunate and impudent"* (p. 482).

The language used is the same. The word "importunity" seems to have been borrowed also, even though St Augustine's context is slightly different. De La Salle's invitation to ask "even with importunity" seems somewhat daring. It is an expression used by St Augustine, however, and it is how De La Salle envisages prayer. He often uses such expressions as "till you have

obtained it" or "till you have chased the wicked spirit far from you". See MD 36.3.2. This was how De La Salle himself prayed: we have only to think of the nights spent in prayer at St Remy, Vaugirard, etc.

As we compare the text of De La Salle with that of St Augustine, it is interesting to see how these texts are both very similar and yet very different.

These similarities and differences can be found in the ideas, but they occur mostly in the vocabulary. One might have expected the vocabulary to be typical of the Founder. What one finds, however, is that many of the terms used do not belong to the Lasallian Vocabulary, or occur only rarely. An example of this is the use of "délinquent" [wayward] and "tutelle" [guardianship], which is found nowhere else.

One is led to wonder, therefore, whether De La Salle used some other translation. This question often comes up. Or did he translate the text in the breviary himself?

At the present moment, it is difficult to give a clear answer. Others like Maurice Auguste et Jean Guy Rodrigue, for example, have asked the same question regarding other works. It is difficult to say when we will find an answer to this question.

The meditation continues with another quotation from St Augustine.

By the three loaves that you should ask for, says the same Father, you are to understand the knowledge of the three Divine Persons. If you obtain this from God you will have ample provision wherewith to satisfy those who apply to you in their need for instruction.

The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit are the three loaves mentioned here. When you obtain your three loaves, that is to say, when you come to the knowledge of the Holy Trinity, which is the true food of our souls, you will have the wherewith to nourish yourself and to nourish others.

The word "repâitre" [nourish] occurs twice in the Lasallian Vocabulary: here and in the Collection, in the article "On Meals" (R 14.9.1), which seems to be taken from Nicolas Roland's "On Meals" (Cf. Lasalliana 25-3-A-105).

The last two quotations come from chapter 3 of Sermon 105.

This is a meditation exceptionally rich in deep feeling. The Founder begins by making us feel almost physically the needs of the children entrusted to us. We have only to note his insistence on such expressions as "addresses himself to you", "in the belief that you have received the grace", "he comes to you", "the children sent to you", "those who come to you", etc. In the third point, the Founder continues to put pressure on us, appealing, one could say, to our paternal and even maternal instinct (Cf. MF 101.3.2). One can imagine what kind of impact this meditation and this appeal would have had on the teachers who were attached to the really poor pupils and enjoyed "their affection".

What a powerful call to prayer this is.

3rd point

The first sentence of this point continues in the same vein: *"You should look upon the children whom you are called to instruct as poor abandoned orphans..."*

One is tempted to think that De La Salle wrote this meditation shortly after he had given up the guardianship of his brothers, or after they had been taken away from his guardianship. The words "orphans" and "guardianship" were obviously very much on his mind. This would explain the emotion that surfaces throughout the meditation.

"...for although most of them have a father alive, they are as if they had not, being abandoned to themselves as far as the salvation of their souls is concerned. It is for this reason that God has appointed you their guardian. He has pity on them, and cares for them as being their Protector, their support and their Father. But the care he seeks to take of them he devolves upon you".

St Augustine says in chapter 2: *"There is no alternative but to have recourse to the Lord, and to this great father of a family..."*

"This God of mercy places them in your keeping, promising to give them all that you ask for them: piety, modesty, reserve, purity, segregation from bad companionship which might be dangerous for them. As he knows that you have not sufficient virtue or influence to supply them with these things, he desires that you should ask him to do so, often, fervently and insistently. Thus owing to your care, nothing will be lacking for them of what is necessary for salvation".

One could say that John Baptist de La Salle experienced something similar to this on the human level when the family wanted to take his younger brothers out of his care.

This is a marvellous meditation which deserves to be contemplated rather than meditated. It casts a lot of light on the personality of the Founder. It makes him dear to us, and helps us to understand how and why both children and Brothers were greatly attached to him.

It gives us an insight also into the way he envisaged God, whose name occurs more than 6,400 times in his writings.

"This God of mercy"

who entrusts them (children) to your care
 who brings them to you
 who makes you responsible
 who puts you under the obligation (we could say despite ourselves)
 who sends them to you
 who makes you their guardian.

This is surely how God acted in the Founder's regard. And in Mary's too, as a pupil once illustrated so well - probably without realising it - when he quoted the angel's words to Mary at the Annunciation: "You're going to have a child. Do you wish to be its mother?" •