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**The Holy Spirit in the life of the Brothers:
inspirations
(1/2)**

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The search for the will of God in the spirituality of St John Baptist de La Salle. This is the title of the licentiate thesis Brother Richard defended in 1996 at the Claretian Institute of the Theology of Religious Life in Rome.

There is much material in its 320 pages that can help us prepare for the Jubilee by reflecting on the Holy Spirit acting in us. Before we turn to the two sections of the thesis which speak of this topic, we shall quote from other passages which will place them in the context of the work as a whole.

God «wishing to make me take complete charge of the schools, did so in an imperceptible manner and over a long period of time, in such a way that one commitment led to another, without my having foreseen this initially» (Memoir on the Beginnings). De La Salle spoke of this personal experience of becoming aware of God's loving plan, and of the role teachers could play in it by being sacraments of the Father's love for his children, at the beginning of his *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*. It is interesting to note that, when the Founder speaks of the Brothers' work in the service of poor children, he regularly uses the term «ministry» to describe it. He does this to show the value he attributes to it.

The Founder realised that, if the teachers were to be capable of undertaking such a ministry, they would have to be given a solid spiritual formation, and it would have to be based on the spirit of faith. The word «spirit» was constantly used by French spiritual writers in the 17th century. Among other meanings, it could have an existential one which stressed the fact that the spirit is the moving force, the fundamental source of human activity, and that, as a consequence, it gives this activity its overall orientation, its nature as a whole. This is the meaning the Founder gives it when speaking of the spirit of faith (Cf P. Maymi, *Vida de Fe y Catequetica de la Fe segun San Juan Bautista de la Salle*, Sinite, 1966-1985).

The *Collection* speaks of faith as a light and guide for all Christians «to lead and direct them on their path to salvation». To raise up children in the spirit of Christianity, the Brothers must, therefore, be imbued and filled with the spirit of faith. The necessity of this spirit for the Brothers is derived, therefore, not from an abstract principle, but from their ministry of Christian education. Without this spirit, they can, of course, teach, and do so even with great competence, but they will never be capable of fulfilling adequately their ministry of Christian education.

By inspiring all their actions with sentiments of faith, the Brothers «will always have in view the orders and the will of God, which they adore in all things, and in accordance with which, they will take care to conduct and regulate themselves» (RC 2,4).

«Not to do anything but in view of God, that is, when doing something, to have one's attention fixed on God, and to consider God as the beginning and end of everything one does» (Collection 11,2,11). If one's attention is not fixed on God, it will be difficult to consider him as the beginning and end of all that one does.

«The dryness you experience in prayer and in Holy Communion is due to the fact you do not apply yourself, and you do not think of spiritual things outside the time for prayer» (Letter 40,14 to Br Robert).

In the Meditation for Tuesday in Holy Week, the Founder exclaims - something unusual for him: «O amiable abandonment of the human will of Jesus, submissive in all to the divine will» (MD 24,3) and tells the Brothers "In imitation of your divine Saviour, endeavour to desire only what God wishes, when he wishes, and how he wishes" (MD 24,1).

«Though to preserve the life of grace is in itself a special act of divine goodness towards us, this will not suffice in your profession. In order to live according to the spirit of your state you must act through grace and show that you are moved by the impulse of the Spirit of God. «*Since we live by the spirit*», he says, «*let the spirit be our rule of life*» (MD 45,3, quoting Gal 5,25).

In the meditation for the end of the year on duties towards God, the Founder says clearly that: «If we truly love God, we should, as St Paul says, «do everything as for God's glory»» (MD 90,3). This should be, moreover, the reason why Brothers joined the community, since God must be the end of their actions, just as he is their beginning. Elsewhere, he shows how God, wishing all men to be saved, «has himself enlightened the hearts of those destined to announce his word to children, so that they, in their turn, can enlighten them by revealing to them the glory of

God» (MR 193,1), by teaching them the truths of the Gospel, and by giving them the means to practise them.

«If you act to please men, you will receive no other reward but that which men will give you, and which is very base, fragile and short-lived» (MD 75,2).

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To establish relations with man, God normally uses tangible intermediaries: creation, things, persons, events, as in the history of Israel. The most perfect intermediary and, in fact, the only intermediary, is the Son of God made man, Jesus Christ. «At various times in the past and in various different ways, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but in our own time, the last days, he has spoken to us through his Son, the Son that he has appointed to inherit everything and through whom he made everything there is» (Heb 1,1).

Jesus himself wished to use a variety of intermediaries. He used a great many parables to help people understand his message. He used his apostles to distribute bread and fishes when he multiplied the loaves. He sent them, finally, to continue his mission. Above all, he gave his apostles and those who would believe in him, the Spirit who would teach them all things and remind them of all the things he had said (Cf. Jn 14,26).

In the same way, in order to make known his will to us, God uses various intermediaries. Some of these are spiritual, as, for example, the inspirations of the Holy Spirit; others are more tangible, such as the Rule and Superiors. The Founder gives us some very clear teaching on these three intermediaries. In what follows, we shall consider first how each of these three intermediaries helps us to discern the will of God, and secondly, how we should respond to this invitation from God.

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