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

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### The Holy Spirit

In order to know the will of God and to put it into practice, the first and most important intermediary is the Holy Spirit. He is the gift Jesus gave us at the end of his mission on earth, as he died on the cross: «He gave up his spirit». («The gift of the Spirit enabled the apostles to understand fully the truth which is completely revealed in the Son made man. Just as Christ constantly referred to his Father; so the Spirit refers to the Son. There cannot be any new revelation different from what has been given to us in Jesus Christ» (TOB Bible, 2590, note y).

Moreover, the Spirit continues the work of Christ through the other two intermediaries: «But when the Spirit of truth comes he will lead you to the complete truth» (Jn 16,13). His role is to open minds and hearts to the example and teachings which Jesus Christ has given us.

#### **(a) Inspirations**

Since the will of God is our sanctification, as St Paul reminded the Thessalonians (1 Th 4,8), God gives us his Spirit, as he had announced to the prophet Ezechial (Ez 36,27 and 37,14). What is referred to here is «inspiration» in the original meaning of the term. («Kind of breath from a supernatural being, supposed to bring advice or revelation to people; mystical state of the soul resulting from this supernatural impulse» (*Nouveau Petit Robert*, 1185).

And so the Founder, speaking of inspirations, says that «they are usually the light that God sheds on the soul to make known what is for its special well-being» (Collection p. 50). However, although the Spirit sheds light on the truths of the Gospel in the souls of people, most of these prefer the darkness to the light and they «know neither God's Spirit nor what this Spirit can inspire men to accomplish» (MD 44,3).

The Founder, in Meditation 96, uses the three Kings as models of listening to interior inspiration. On the basis of a sign they had seen, «enlightened by this bright star, but still more by the light of faith, they proceeded to announce a new

Sun of Justice in the very land where he was born, and the whole world was astonished by their declaration». They alone seem not to be surprised «for they had been enlightened by the true light, and as St Paul says, it is by faith alone that one goes to Jesus Christ». He concludes: «Owing to their fidelity to the divine inspiration, this day became for them a day of salvation» (Med 96,1). In this one point for meditation, we find all the elements which make up inspiration: perception of a sign (the star), enlightenment of faith (the eyes of faith), the departure of the Kings (prompt response) which leads them to Christ and salvation (the aim in view).

We should not be surprised to see the Founder drawing some practical conclusions from this for the everyday life of the Brothers. He asks each of them a question to make them look within themselves and assess how they respond to the inspirations of the Spirit: «Are we attentive to the inspirations we receive from God, and as prompt in following them as the Magi were in allowing themselves to be guided by a star?» He concludes: «The happiness and the very salvation of our soul often depends on our prompt acquiescence in the call of grace» (MD 96,1).

The Kings are not the only example the Founder proposes to the Brothers. He recalls that God favoured Samuel in the same way. Samuel «came back three times successively to listen to him when he heard his voice». There was St Paul also «who deserved to be completely converted, because he was first faithful to the voice of Jesus Christ who called him». He concludes: «This is what you too must do». Elsewhere, the Founder speaks of St Anthony who having heard in Church the following words: «If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have, give it to the poor, and you will have a treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me!» went immediately and put them into effect [...] persuaded that that was what God required of him. We should admire his promptitude in following the inspiration God gave him" (MD 97,1).

There are two main kinds of inspiration. The first can come during mental prayer (Cf. MF 78,1), or grace may urge a person to live more in accordance with the perfection of his state, or make a heroic effort to perform some special act of virtue (Cf. Med 123,1) or to leave behind the corruption of the world and to embrace the joys of the law of Christ (Cf. Med 182,1). Other inspirations can urge him to give up the world and give himself totally to God, to free himself of all created things, in order to give himself to God alone (Cf. MF 125,2), to detach himself totally from creatures in order to consecrate himself completely to God (Cf. MF 125,2). The Founder compares these inspirations to apparitions of St Michael because, as he says, they tend to give us «an interior relish for God, which leads us to seek him alone and to consecrate ourselves entirely to him as being alone worthy of our adoration and love. Indeed, if there is anything good to be found in creatures, it is only with reference to God, and because it comes from God and is a reflection of his perfections» (Med 125,3). These inspirations can be followed without any fear of illusion.

There is another sort of inspiration which needs to be accompanied by advice. Speaking of St Paul, who was struck by an extraordinary burst of light, but whom the Lord sent to Ananias in order to make his will known, De La Salle adds: «It is thus that God desires you to act when he inspires you to accomplish some good work» (MF 99,3). He continues his explanation: «By these inspirations he wishes to show you that he desires something from you which you are not doing, but he does not want you to act independently.

When you receive these heavenly lights, he wishes you to have recourse to your Directors and Superiors, to whom he is careful to make known what is expected of us, and whom he has appointed to direct us. Never trust to your own lights, or even to those which seem to come from God. Make everything known to those who direct you, and submit yourself to their judgment» (MF 99,3). Spiritual directors teach that personal inspirations should be submitted to obedience.

### (b) Fidelity to inspirations

The Founder insists on various occasions on the need to be faithful to the inspirations of the Spirit: «Let us be careful to respond to them faithfully, for to this fidelity God usually attaches an abundance of grace which he gives only in so far as we do what he asks of us» (MF 141,1). «God sends us his holy inspirations only to see if we are prompt in receiving them, and in accomplishing with exactitude his divine will» (ibid). Elsewhere he writes: «The best way to be beloved of Jesus is to be greatly attached to him, to leave everything without hesitation for his sake, to do everything he commands and everything he inspires as soon as we hear his voice» (MF 78,1). Referring to St Anthony's promptness, he asks: «Are we as faithful as St Anthony in heeding the inspirations of God, and do we accomplish as promptly what grace solicits us to do?» (MF 97,1).

In the Directory for giving an account of one's conduct to Brother Superior, the Founder asks the Brother if «he has had some inspirations, what they were, and if he was faithful to them» (RD 1,4). He evidently received all sorts of answers, as can be seen from his letter to Brother Denis: «One thing you must especially aim at is to be faithful to the inspirations that come to you when they lead you to overcome yourself; that is a sign that they come from God» (Letter 5, to Br Denis). In another letter he writes: «You realise, my very dear Brother, how important it is to follow the inspirations that come to you from God [...] So those inspirations that God gives us are to be valued, and he grants his graces only insofar as we are faithful in following them» (Letter 85). To Brother Robert he writes: «Listen to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit and not so much to your dislikes and difficulties» (Letter 45). Finally, he writes to a woman religious: «You may be sure that you will not make progress in the way of love except insofar as you are faithful not to harden your heart to the inspirations of grace [...] Take care not to harden your heart, for this could bring about his withdrawal from you, perhaps, forever» (Letter 114).

In the meditation for the feast of St Anselm, De La Salle begins by speaking of St Anselm's fidelity to the inspiration he received from God to become a religious, and then he asks his Brothers: «Are you faithful to the inspirations

which God sends out?» Then he continues: «Always consult your Superiors before acting on such inspirations, so that they may judge whether they really come from God. Thus you will be able to take all the necessary measures to render these inspirations beneficial» (MF 115,2).

The Founder does not fail to warn his Brothers about infidelity to the inspirations of God. Basing himself on the Gospel story of the healing of the deaf mute, he speaks of the deaf Brothers that can be found in community: «The first are those who do not heed the inspirations of God, when these urge them to be faithful in keeping their Rule, which is, however, the only means of maintaining them in the grace of their state, or when these inspirations urge them to perform some special practice of devotion which God asks of them» (MD 64,1). «Not being faithful to inspirations is what St Paul calls extinguishing the Spirit in us, and we may say that it is equivalent to resisting the Holy Spirit, and of offering him great offence» (Collection p. 50). «When we are not faithful to his inspirations, God ceases to give them to us, seeing that they remain useless» (Ibid). Elsewhere he writes: «God withdraws his grace, leaving us to ourselves and to our own weakness. Then, being deprived of the grace of our state, we can no longer maintain ourselves in it» (MF 78,1). He concludes: «How long shall we resist the light of grace which urges us to leave all for God? When shall we learn that true happiness, even here below, can be found in him alone?» (MF 169,1).

We can see, on the one hand, the importance that the Founder attaches to the action of the Spirit in souls and, on the other, the zeal with which he urges the Brothers to remain attentive so that they can hear, accept and carry out the inspirations of the Spirit and, if the need arose, to check their authenticity by consulting their Director or Superior. He told them: «Compare what you do purely through obedience with what you do through your own impulse, and look upon the former as the work of God and the latter as the labour of man» (MD 57,2).

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In addition to this interior intermediary, which we have just seen, the Founder speaks of two others, which are exterior, and which also can enable us to make the orders and the will of God the Rule of our life. These are submission to the Rule and to the Superior «with a view to obeying God and accomplishing his will» (Collection p.36). It is important to keep this fundamental motivation in mind [...] otherwise we can distort the thinking of the Founder by concentrating only on the means and forgetting the aim pursued: this could make us consider regularity and obedience as a form of childishness or lack of maturity. •