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**LASALLIAN SPIRITUALITY
A CHRISTIAN JOURNEY
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I like to think of the spirituality proposed by Saint John Baptist de La Salle as a coherent body of counsels for Christian living. One cannot look upon De La Salle simply as an educator and confine him to the classroom. He certainly was an educator, but he was more than that. It is too easily forgotten that, throughout his life, De La Salle remained a priest consecrated to the glory of God. There is perhaps not enough stress on the fact that Lasallian spirituality is above all one that “seeks to form true disciples of Jesus Christ”. In order to see Lasallian spirituality in all its breadth one cannot limit it to the spirituality he offers his Brothers: one has to include also the plan he proposes to Catholic adults to enable them to lead a truly Christian life. Lasallian spirituality offers a complete blueprint for Christian living. I should like to begin by speaking of the first element of this plan: keeping the impetus of one’s baptism alive.

1. KEEPING THE IMPETUS OF ONE’S BAPTISM ALIVE

1.1. Keeping the impetus of one’s baptism alive.

1.1 The argument based on common sense. Knowing who I am.

De La Salle is a man who thinks. He usually uses logical arguments and has recourse to common sense. This may seem to be a rather cold approach, but it is all the more solid as a consequence.

De La Salle tells the Christian straightforwardly: *“You cannot belong to a religion without knowing what its implications are for you. You would not sign a contract without knowing what advantages it offered you and what obligations it imposed. You are a*

believer: can you say what that implies for you? You are a Catholic: it is normal for you to find out how to behave like one. If you are logical, you will not be satisfied to be a Catholic only in name. You will want to become more and more worthy of the name which makes you a very special person in the eyes of God.”

Where does De La Salle say all that? Right at the very beginning of his famous work *“The Duties of a Christian towards God and the means of accomplishing them”* [DA].

This is what he says:

*“To belong to a profession [in the way a person belongs to an association or is an accountant] and not to know what it is;
not to know even what the name signifies [that of the profession] and what it involves;
not to know the basic obligations of one’s profession, [this state] seems completely opposed to common sense and sound reason..”* (DA, Preface ii).

Baptism, which you received at the request of your parents, who loved you very much, gave you a place in God’s family and in the Catholic Church founded on the Apostles. What effect has this had on your life up till now? What effect does it have on you now? Can you say that you have been sufficiently conscious of all this? In this connection, De La Salle speaks plainly to the Christian: *“[There are Christians who] are Christians without knowing what it is to be one. Very few take the trouble to be instructed in what is needed in order to live well [as Christians]”* (DA, Preface).

Clearly De La Salle is describing the situation prevalent in his own day. Is not our own situation somewhat similar?

It is strange how we like finding out information about lots of things, and yet we take for granted that we are Catholics, and make very little effort to learn what this dimension of our life implies for us. It is probably a good thing for a saint like De La Salle to challenge us forcefully about this.

1.2 My adult point of view

De La Salle invites us to look at the path we have taken with adult eyes. There are many adults who should follow some sort of refresher course on their baptism in order to understand and appreciate it more. This is much more useful than letting yourself be told all kinds of nonsense by the first guru you meet, who tells you immediately “to be born again” and accept Christ in your heart in order to be saved. But you’ve already been totally saved, Old Man! You were redeemed by Christ well before you ever asked to be,

and well before all those incoherent Gospel pedlars came into this world.

God was the first to love us, before all the preachers in the world. Jesus redeemed us all. The Catholic baptism you received made you for ever and ever a Son of God. By the very fact it happened it was a success. If you are 16 years old, then your baptism into the Catholic faith has been successful and perfect for the last 16 years. If you are 50, then you became a Son of God 50 years ago. You are saved, but perhaps you haven't lived as if you were saved. Be born again? Come on! It's already happened for you. You were reborn of water and the Holy Spirit through the baptism the Church gave you. Jesus himself wanted it to happen in this way. There is nothing more to be done here. His Church, his only true representative, was there to serve you in the name of Jesus himself.

It's marvellous to see that De La Salle bases himself on Jesus' words to Nicodemus when he wishes to speak of the effects of baptism: baptism makes us Christians, it makes us saved. De La Salle goes on to say: *"It is baptism that confers on us the status of being "saved". That is why Jesus clearly says in the Gospel that if a person is not born again of water and the Holy Spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven"* (DA, p. 211).

What remains for you to do is to look at the way you live as a baptised and saved person with the eyes of an adult. You're the one involved in this and all the decisions are yours. Who can help you to look at things a bit more closely? De La Salle is a doctor of theology. During his lifetime he was as fervent and committed a priest as the Curé d'Ars or Don Bosco in the 19th century, or Cardinal Léger and Fr. Popieluszko, the priest martyr in Poland, in ours, or as any other apostle you know.

Baptism is important but it is not everything. It's not enough to have your membership card to be a better member of your association. De La Salle insists: *"To belong to the true religion [let's call a spade a spade] it is necessary to be a Catholic, to believe in God, in Jesus Christ and in all he has taught us himself or through his Church. It is necessary also to make a public declaration of one's beliefs."*

Is that enough? De La Salle goes even further: *"It is necessary likewise to be animated by the Spirit of Our*

Lord and to lead a life modelled on his own and on his teachings which we find in the Gospel and throughout the New Testament (DA, Preface iv).

1.3 Taking responsibility for myself

In a word, it's not easy to live out one's baptism. Personal commitment is called for. De La Salle invites us to go beyond the kind of religion that is very personal and practised in secret. He seems to think along the same lines as Jesus that "you don't light a candle to put it under a bushel". We are not surprised to hear him tell us, with a touch of psychological insight: *"People do not normally realise what they think till they express their thoughts in words"* (DA, Preface, p. v).

Nowadays, people freely express their opinions through the various media outlets. Why should Christians be timid and afraid to declare what they are? Louis Veuillot wanted Catholics "to be proud of admitting" their faith. Am I going to be one of those Christians who are afraid to state their convictions openly? If so, I would be far indeed from De La Salle's daring and zeal. He encourages us to give external signs of our religious convictions, not through a superficial desire to get ourselves noticed, but because, as he says: *"There must be some exterior signs that distinguish Catholic Christians from those who are not"* (Ibid).

The external signs of our faith that we are talking about here are going to mass, receiving the sacraments, listening to the Word of God in church, attending prayer services, observing practices recommended by the Church. Here too, De La Salle appeals to the common sense of his reader: *"It is difficult for a person not to belong to a group, and even more so to a religion, if exteriorly he does what the others [in the group] do, and does not dispense himself from doing things which cannot be done without much effort."*

This approach reflects that of Pascal in the 17th century who recommended people to behave as if they were believers in order to become believers. This is basically what psychologists speak of when they say "ideas lead to actions" or "you become what you think". •