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**LASALLIAN SPIRITUALITY  
A CHRISTIAN JOURNEY  
— II —**

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**1. KEEPING THE IMPETUS  
OF ONE'S BAPTISM ALIVE (continued)**

There is, of course, the risk of being satisfied with external signs. This is obviously not what De La Salle wants. He insists that behind every external sign there should be a personal conviction. He does not, however, praise the value of hidden virtue to the extent of dispensing himself from the need to give visible signs that reveal his profound faith. De La Salle urges his readers to follow the great examples of history and show their faith by the sign of the cross. For his examples, he turns to Tertullian, Jerome, Cyril and Ambrose. He does not forget to stress the importance of joining personal conviction to the external sign: *“the sign of the cross should not be made out of habit or for form’s sake: it should be made with faith, respect and with a truly interior devotion”* (Da, *ibid*).

It may be thought that there is nothing particularly striking that makes it worth talking about making the sign of the cross. And yet, have we not all come across groups using signs, badges and passwords in order to recognise their members? What is more, the sign of the cross is a summary of the whole creed: it recalls obviously the death of Christ, but also his resurrection. It recalls the mysteries of the creation, Incarnation, and the coming of the Spirit. The sign of the cross is a summary of our faith and a way of praising God that is intensely concentrated. This is surely the sign par excellence of the baptised Christian. As Christ said to his Apostles: “Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28,19). And so, we should not forget the close link between the sign of the cross and that of the baptised Christian, even if our Christian life is far from consisting solely in making this external and visible sign.

**1.4 Son of God, brother of Jesus: where, how, why?**

Jesus wanted baptism to produce extraordinary changes in us, his creatures.

Baptism removes original sin in us, and all other sins committed before baptism, if this is received after the age of reason has been reached.

Baptism makes us children of God, members of the Church and of the mystical body of Christ, and living temples of the Holy Spirit.

These are truths that De La Salle reminds us about. He refers also to the great dignity conferred on Christians: *“The grace of God communicated by baptism makes us children of God. This grace makes us share in the holiness that is God’s nature. By giving it to us he adopts us as his children. He also gives us a guarantee that, if we keep it, we shall be heirs to his glory in Heaven.*

*“When we receive baptism, we have the happiness also of becoming children of the Church. It is then that we acquire the right to share in all its riches and, in particular, to apply to ourselves the merits of Jesus Christ by the use of the sacraments. All Christians share in them according to the degree that God’s love and grace live in them.*

At the same time as Satan is driven from the soul by baptism, so the Holy Spirit takes possession of it: we become the temples of the Holy Spirit.

*We receive also the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and baptism unites us to him in a way that is so special and intimate that, as soon as we receive it, God looks upon us as members of [the mystical body] of his Son made Man”* (Da, p. 213).

These are very great truths. They are also perhaps so familiar that they no longer affect us as strongly as they should. We need to take in fully the extent of our human misery and observe the sordid actions of some people, in order to realise the distance that separates the benefits brought to me by baptism from the baser instincts, which still struggle to gain the upper hand in man, and which St Paul calls “the old man with his vices and desires”. He refers to the same thing when he speaks of the “old leaven”: “Purify yourself of the old leaven...so as to become a new paste”. A baptised person is like someone who has risen from the dead, who has been given a new life. This is the image St Paul uses to give us an idea of the greatness of baptism. Death/baptism - Resurrection/new life. This has been a part of Catholic teaching since the days of the Apostles. It remains valid today as a way of showing us the consequences of our baptism.

Baptism is a liturgy or an *initiation rite*. That is to say, it is a rite of admission into a society, the society of the Church. If the person baptised is an adult, the reception of the sacrament is preceded by a period of serious preparation. He has to study the truths of the Catholic faith, consider deeply the reasons for the step he is taking, and to make a personal commitment to live a life based on the practice of Gospel values.

This personal commitment is important. De La Salle stresses it with an insistence that is surprising in the monolithic France of the 17th century. This holy priest reminds of a basic truth: *“One can be a Christian only by free choice”*. He does so in order to show that, if a person belongs to the Church founded by Jesus Christ, it is because he wants to, by the grace of God.

*“One can be a Christian only by free choice”* (Da, p. 228). *De La Salle then adds: “God does not force anyone to be one”* (Da, p. 229).

We find ourselves now in the land of the “freedom of the children of God” spoken of by St Paul. Now that we are fully aware of what baptism means for us, we accept it freely. Now is the time, in a manner of speaking, to “return to my mother’s womb”, to go back to the source of my baptism, and freely to make a commitment to renounce the devil and all his deceits, and to set out along the path traced out by God.

This will not be easy, however. There will be many invitations to stray from it. But the grace of my baptism gives me confidence in the strength of the Holy Spirit who supports me. When I was baptised, I was anointed with oil. This was meant to be a powerfully symbolic act. Oil is absorbed by the skin, it strengthens the body, it cures certain wounds. Just as in former times, athletes rubbed oil into their skins to prepare themselves for the fight, so the oil that anointed me represents my preparation for the fight to keep Christ as the sole master of my life and, as De La

Salle says, *“to prepare us to fight strenuously against the enemies of our salvation”* (Da. p. 224).

## CONCLUSION

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To become aware of one’s identity is the first requirement in order to assert oneself and to develop. This is a law that De La Salle applies to Christian life. To follow the teachings of St John Baptist de La Salle is first and foremost to follow the teachings of the Christian faith. St La Salle devoted his whole life and energy helping young people and adults to learn how “to become true disciples of Jesus Christ”. It is through baptism that one begins to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. It is through it that we must become fully aware of the deep-seated Christianity we must develop within us.

The starting point of Lasallian spirituality, both for the Christian and the religious, is the fact that their lives are deeply rooted in their baptism. This is something the Founder reminded his Brothers about when he spoke to them about the pupils they had to teach: “By baptism, these children are, like you, consecrated to the Most Blessed Trinity” (Med. 46, 3). And so it is that, as far as the fruits of their baptism are concerned - a baptism that incorporates them into the Church as the People of God - both Brothers and lay people are following the same spiritual path. •