

**LASALLIAN SPIRITUALITY  
A CHRISTIAN JOURNEY  
— III —**

**Br. Gilles Beaudet**

**2. A LIVING FAITH,  
THE CHRISTIAN SPIRIT**

**2.1 “We know God through faith”  
(S.J.B. de La Salle, DA, preface)**

There are three virtues that characterise a Christian. Faith is the first. Like hope and charity, which complement it and are closely associated with it, faith has God as its object. It is said that these three virtues refer to God and are therefore theological because they speak of God and bring us into contact with him.

How does faith put us into contact with God? By being a supernatural light by whose help I firmly accept with my mind, heart and actions what the Church teaches me about God’s revelation. The Church has been given this power by God, and in the same way I accept what God teaches me about himself through his Word and by his Spirit.

De La Salle tells us this in his own words: *“Faith is a virtue and a supernatural light by which one firmly believes what the Church proposes one should believe about God”* (DA, preface, CL, 20).

De La Salle stresses also that not everyone has faith. He explains very briefly that *“it is God who gives these virtues of faith (hope and charity) and that of ourselves we can neither acquire nor deserve them, and not even practise them”*. That is why he is right to say that these virtues are “above nature”.

It is a well-known fact that nature tends to trust only what it can observe itself, what it can see, touch and hear. Nature, and I mean human nature, feels at ease only in the presence of what resembles it, and is of similar proportions. One could say that nature fears what is beyond it. Nature, also, sets the limits of our physical and psychic abilities, even if these limits are pushed ever further outwards as the centuries go by. This can be seen in new discoveries in genetics and in space exploration.

The dark side of nature continues to astound us. While on the one hand, man pushes back the frontiers of technology at

an astonishing rate, on the other, he continues to behave like a strange machine created for hatred, destruction, oppression and exploration. That, unfortunately, is the sad side of human nature when it deprives itself of supernatural influence.

Even when it comes to the supernatural, man’s nature leads him to create for himself substitutes for it by dabbling in extra-sensory perception, parapsychology, the “*new age*”. All these somewhat suspect activities hinder authentic supernatural action and ape it by their falsehood. In the days of Peter there were the magicians, and in the days of Jesus, the “workers of miracles” that John and Andrew, the “Sons of Thunder” wanted to strike down with thunderbolts. Jesus, however, told them to be patient, for he knew there would be false prophets and false teachers who would be wolves in lambs’ clothing. Jesus sends his closest disciples among the “wolves” and, in a general fashion, in fact, all his disciples, to be always like “lambs in the midst of wolves”. The supernatural would triumph in those that made room for it: “Have confidence, I have overcome the world”. It’s like saying: *“With me, you’ll win!”*

**2.2 Faith is being with Jesus**

To have faith is to be Jesus from beginning to end. To live one’s faith is to live one’s life in friendship with Jesus and under his gaze. That is also why faith is considered as the virtue par excellence of the Christian, without, however, lessening the value of hope and charity. These virtues are in fact inseparable. Faith, hope and charity are like the stalk, leaves and flower (with its perfume) of a plant, which mutually sustain one another. As faith increases, so hope and charity grow stronger. I think it is true to say that this process can start with any one of these three theological virtues.

John Baptist de La Salle does not think differently. He is well aware of the interaction of these three essential Christian virtues, when he writes: *“He always has great need of these three virtues...”* (preface) and *“It will be of little use for a Christian to have faith...if this faith is not animated by charity”* (DA, 89).

With his trust in logic and his tendency to organise his material, De La Salle goes on to say: *“Only two (of the three virtues) entail essential duties: these are faith and charity. These are the two virtues that make a true Christian. (Without them), he cannot lead a Christian life, be pleasing to God, nor ever be happy”* (Ibid).

Where does logic come into all this? It is to be found in the following equations: faith = knowing God; charity = loving God. Knowing and loving God summarises the life of a Christian. So, therefore, we can say that faith and charity also summarise the life of a Christian.

Lasallian spirituality calls upon the Christian first of all to keep alive the impetus of his baptism: it’s a question of identity. It calls upon him also to develop a living faith which will make him grow in his knowledge of God.

There is no question here of a notional faith, of the acceptance of abstract ideas. It is rather a question of setting out on a road on which we learn more and more about God and which reveals to us the face of God.

There is only one thing that can create in us a living faith, a faith “that makes its power felt through love” (Gal 5,6), and that is closeness to God. De La Salle says that “*faith gives us a strong attachment to the knowledge of Jesus Christ because eternal life consists in this*” (cf Jn 17,3); “*faith gives us a strong attachment to the love of God because whoever does not love him is cursed*” (1 Co 16,22); “*faith gives us a strong attachment to the imitation of Jesus because those chosen by God are intended to become true images of his Son*” (Rm 8,29); “*faith gives us an attachment to union with Jesus because our relation to Jesus is that of a branch to a vine, which dies when it is separated from it*” (Jn 15,4,6), (Collection, CL 15, p. 81).

We note how, every now and then, De La Salle stresses the positive side of faith which enables us “*to be pleasing to God and to be happy*”. It is to be hoped that these promises will be kept when we remain faithful to the calls of our faith.

### 2.3 No happiness without faith?

Why wouldn't we be happy without faith? Because, to a certain degree, we would be unaware of the supernatural gifts and love that God was offering us. We would let slip the opportunity to live at a certain level of human existence that non-believers do not aspire to. In a certain way, we would be willingly excluding ourselves from “Paradise”, seen as the place of total happiness. We would be like the man in the Gospel with a pearl hidden in a field, but unlike him, we wouldn't know it was there, and we wouldn't be able to guess where it was, nor find it, nor buy it...

Faith, on the other hand, puts us into the situation of a man who, having found a pearl of great price in a field, hastens to buy the field to make sure the treasure becomes his, and he dedicates his whole life and possessions to achieve his aim.

Faith opens the for us the door of Mysteries which are a stumbling block and an obstacle for souls incapable of faith. Faith “delivers God up to us” who are poor by nature.

Faith brings God's infinite splendour to enlighten our darkness. The great truth about God which is communicated to us through the teachings of the faith is the wonderful mystery of the three persons in one God; it is the mystery of the Son of God, the Word made flesh, who became man and who died on the cross to redeem us from sin and save us from eternal loss; it the assurance of eternal happiness in the presence of God, and of an eternal absence of God's presence if we refuse him our love. In a word, faith brings us the great Mystery of Love in the person of Jesus, which is manifested in a variety of ways.

### 2.4 A faith that sets the heart beating

It is the heart that lives by faith and which beats with faith. Is our faith such that it makes our heart beat, in the same way as happiness does? For me, the heartbeats of our faith are what De La Salle calls acts of faith. On the surface, an “act of faith” is a bit like “fast food”. Fundamentally, however, an act of faith is a heartbeat when some aspect of

God's face is revealed to us.

We recognise De La Salle easily when he says: “We should not be satisfied with producing or formulating speculative or abstract acts of faith, that is, acts about truths that are simply believed”. Acts of faith are not made in the same way as we recite theorems, De La Salle seems to say. Such recitation is not enough: faith calls for personal involvement.

*“It is necessary to make frequent acts of faith that are practical, that is, about truths that we have to practise. This means that our faith must remain alive and become part of our everyday lives”.*

De La Salle, always the teacher, goes on to give us examples: “*When we find it difficult to forgive our enemies, it is good to say: My Saviour Jesus Christ, I firmly believe not only that we must forgive our enemies, but also that we must love them, pray to God for them and do good to them, because this is what you have told us and taught us in the Gospel*”.

*“When we are tempted against purity, it is good to say: My God, I believe that the impure will not possess the Kingdom of God, because this is something you taught us through St Paul”.*

Where are the heartbeats in these acts of faith? Well, in the examples quoted above, they are lost a little in the formulaic syntax. However, De La Salle also says: “*It is not necessary for these (acts) to be said out loud. It is enough for the heart to conceive them, since it is to God that we direct them, and because it is (with the heart that we speak to God)*” (DA p.7).

This is the kind of faith that puts us in the presence of God. It is also a faith that is expressed by heartbeats. Isn't it marvellous? For De La Salle, the habit of letting our hearts express their faith frequently is a way of **making us grow in a living faith**. In this way, we have a Christian heart that is richly nourished by faith, because that faith constantly flows through it.

Let us hear De La Salle's own words: “*These sorts of acts of faith (which come from the heart) which are made from time to time, are very useful and help us greatly to keep our faith, love God, value these virtues and increase them in ourselves*” (DA p.7).

Should this surprise us? Not really, because we know that physical fitness, for example, is the result of repeated exercise. It is sufficient to transpose this principle into our life of faith to see that it applies there also.

There is no need to list here all the truths we have to believe with theological (or divine) faith, that is, the written truths God has revealed to his Church, and those that come from Apostolic tradition and have been handed down through the ages. In this connection, we need only refer to the **Catechism of the Catholic Church** (1993) to keep ourselves up to date (*see especially N51 - 184*).

Our faith, as it develops, must be enlightened by the Church, the only true representative of Jesus, who has entrusted it with the mission of “confirming” and sustaining the faith of the faithful. The Church is a subject that is very dear to John Baptist de La Salle. We shall come to that another time. •