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**LASALLIAN SPIRITUALITY:
A CHRISTIAN WAY FORWARD
— IV —**

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**2. A LIVING FAITH,
THE CHRISTIAN SPIRIT (continued)**

2.5. The Words of Jesus to nourish our faith.

The inspirational source which is always at our disposal, is the Word of God, especially the New Testament; an inspirational source which will increase our knowledge of Jesus, of his Father and of the Holy Spirit, and which will increase our faith in everyday life.

Our Christian spirit will be fuelled by the truths of Scripture, through its basic questioning and through its paradoxes of which Jesus holds the secret. It is there that La Salle sends us to draw out the spirit of Christianity. Spirit of Christianity and spirit of faith are one and the same. When you choose the spirit of faith, you choose a Christian life enlightened by faith. That is one of the major aspects of Lasallian spirituality. La Salle recognises you as one of his disciples if you are guided by faith, by “perspectives” of faith, by “motives” of faith, by judgements which are in agreement with God’s “criteria” in Scripture. If you have no faith, you are lacking an important, Christian dimension. You become rather worrying in the eyes of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. He is quite categorical on this point, and he takes Saint Paul’s expression: “*The just man lives by faith*” ... which is the same as saying: “The Christian (the one I recognise as such), lives by faith.” The one who does not enter the world of faith has not yet found the road which leads to God...

La Salle remains an exacting theologian. It is true that in reality he does not abandon a pastoral attitude which is capable of patience... But he is not a man who is inclined to compromise, to equivocation. I can imagine him saying in the words of André Frossard: “God is God, for God’s sake!” If he invites the Christian to a living faith, it is not in order to take away his hesitations,... it is to engage him fully.

For La Salle, a faith which is taken seriously can lead to the “sacrifice of everything, honour, health and life for the glory of God in imitation of Jesus Christ following this saying: «If anyone wants to be my disciple, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me»” (Mt 16, 24 in the Collection, CL 15, p. 155).

2.6. Spirit of faith, spirit of Christianity = Spirit of Jesus

La Salle has written at length on the spirit of Christianity, on the Christian spirit. He knew that “it happens in the head ...!” as the colloquial saying goes. That means that the values accepted by the mind direct our lives. If the habits of thought are marked by the Christian vision, then one’s way of life will be Christian. “It is the spirit of Jesus Christ which should guide all our actions to make them holy and agreeable to God”, and he quotes Saint Paul to tell us that “as we must live by the spirit of Jesus Christ, we must also conduct ourselves in all things by the same spirit” (Gal 5,5, and the Règles de la Bienséance, II).

We see appearing elsewhere the forthright reasoning of Saint John Baptist de La Salle the logician: “There would be little use in being enlightened by the light of faith if you did not live according to the spirit of Christianity”. Basically, he is telling us: there is no point in being satisfied to have insights about the faith, you must put them into practice. So an imperative such as: “Live your faith”, is something utterly Lasallian. To have the spirit of Christianity, is “to live according to the maxims or recommendations of the Gospel”. La Salle develops this theme clearly: “The main aim of faith is to do what you believe in, (to act according to faith), and that is what causes Saint James to say that faith is dead if it is not accompanied by good deeds. You believe, adds Saint James, that there is only one God; you are right; the devils believe that too, but man is justified by his deeds and not by faith alone” (Jam 2, 17, 19).

In the same breath, La Salle gives the profound secret of a sure faith: “*Be certain that the main conversion is one of the heart and without that, conversion of the mind is utterly sterile*” (MF 175. 3, on Saint Denis).

That is further than the idea mentioned above: “It happens in the head”. This time La Salle seems to be telling us: “It happens in the heart...!” He is probably correct. What do you think?

Faith is not simply a matter of the head, it must also be heartfelt, taken to heart. So La Salle is right to tell you, for example: “If you strive to increase your faith, let it be to increase the quality of your Christian commitment”. He uses 17th century vocabulary, but it is really the meaning and scope of his intentions when he writes: If you are concerned to increase your faith, let it be so as to increase your piety” (MF 175, 3). The

meaning of piety as understood here by La Salle, does not lie in sweet, little devotions, but in a committed life, a life which conforms to the Gospel.

La Salle does not falter and he doesn't expect to come up against Christians on the cheap. Would he otherwise be able to throw down challenges like the following: *“Are you ready, like the first Christians, to die in order to prove the greatness of your faith? Wouldn't you rather prefer to lose Heaven and the grace of God, to avoid suffering?”* (MF 84. 3).

We know that several of his spiritual sons, in Spain, Turon, Almeria, Bujedo, and in France did not hesitate to spill their blood for their faith. They were imbued with the teaching of faith of their guide. They are quite unusual situations. But daily life already confronts us to give our witness.

“How do you show that you have the spirit of Christianity?” La Salle asks again, anxious to awaken our sincerity. *“Be certain that to possess it your actions must not contradict the faith you profess and must be a keen expression, (a lively manifestation), of what is stated in the Gospel”* (MF 84 3).

With La Salle you are a man of faith... if you use the eyes of Jesus to look at things: Jesus said, *“The eye is the lamp of your body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body will be in the light”* (Mt 6, 22; Lk 15, 11.33). La Salle requires this look of faith on events, people, and things: *“Do not look upon anything but with the eyes of faith”* that is to say according to what God tells us by his Word, by Jesus.

We are aware that many people allow themselves to be swayed by the prevailing culture, by advertising slogans. From there, they take their criteria for judging. The Christian, in La Salle's eyes, takes his criteria from the Gospel, from Jesus' way of seeing.

Jesus was severe towards what he listed under the

expression “world”, meaning the minds which remain impervious to his message: profiteers, exploiters, the selfish, the proud and all those minds which are sons of the devil. The language of faith, the eyes of faith are excellent abrasives against the false values that the “world” offers to mankind. Faith refuses tinsel; faith wants to go for the genuine article.

La Salle also wants the one who lives by faith to be completely at the service of God. Such a one is at the service of no one else, knowing that God alone is worthy to be loved and served. Everything that this person does, is done “in view of God”, with the desire to collaborate in God's plan for them and the world. ***Faith makes a person co-operate with God's plan.***

Thirdly, La Salle wants us to be aware that God is active in this world, that God is present at every moment of our existence. You are this man and this woman of faith, when you read the thread of your existence, in the light of this action of God in your life. “Attribute everything to God”, rather as one reads in the poem about Job who declares: The Lord gave me everything, the Lord has taken everything away, blessed be his name”. Close to, we do not understand very well what is happening, but we are persuaded that ***God is acting in our lives*** as in the lives of all people who collaborate in his plan. God is at work in your life in a way that you possibly do not know. Why do you not learn to be aware of his presence even more?

That is how the Christian lives who has the spirit of Jesus and of Christianity. At the same time, he can be assured that in this way he is walking in the true Lasallian spirituality.

La Salle, as many spiritual directors of his time, wanted to underline faith as the fundamental virtue, a virtue which lays the basis of Christianity. If we adopt the spirituality proposed by La Salle, we will be inclined to put faith at the heart of our Christianity. To enlighten it and animate it. A faith-charity!