

De Sales Discussions

Sermons of St. Francis de Sales For the Season of Lent

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De Sales

SPIRITUALITY SERVICES

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General Discussion Guidelines and Hints

A discussion is a group of people engaged in conversation. This is a natural human activity: an interesting, exciting and creative experience. Discussion is a shared pursuit of responsive understanding -- of yourself, others and the material under consideration.

The purpose of leaders is to be a catalyst. They are present to help everyone (1) make a thoughtful examination of the meaning of the material to be discussed and the problems it presents, (2) clarify their thinking and feeling about the problems, and (3) decide their individual response. It is not presumed that leaders necessarily know more about the subject under discussion, but that they are trained and prepared to lead this discussion and offer this special kind of assistance to the group.

Don't expect pre-packaged or 'right' answers. Neither the leader nor a member of the group will provide a conclusive answer at the end of the discussion. Each of you will try to find personally satisfying answers; your pursuit of answers may continue long after any particular discussion period ends. The discussion provides information and deepened understanding, but the real answers will be your personal response to life and the world.

What Happens Before the Discussion?

Read over the text selection at least once and preferably twice, first for general comprehension and second for attention to specifics. On the second reading, underline words and phrases you consider important, and make notes in the margins of anything you did not understand; questions you would like to ask your group, and examples or applications that occur to you; What important ideas does it convey? How? Do these ideas conflict with other ideas or feelings you have? Are problem situations presented? How would you behave in such situations? Why?

What can I do to participate well in the discussion?

- Be committed and involved in the group.
- Treat others in the group with support and respect, even if you disagree with their views.
- Express support and agreement with others when appropriate.
- Be mindful of your nonverbal communication and behavior when you are not speaking

- Stick to the point.
- Say it in the group (not before or after to a few friends).
- Respect the confidentiality of others' disclosures.
- Make the meetings. It's difficult to re-create the discussion experience for you, and the group suffers from your absence and input when you're not there.
- Stay on the subject. Speak about the text, your reactions and others' responses.
- Speak to the entire group, not just one person.
- Seek your own understanding. Don't accept another's view as your own unless it makes sense to you.
- Be sure you understand what another is saying. This is especially true when you disagree with him or her.

(Adapted from E. W. Flynn and J. F. La Faso, Group Discussion as Learning Process: a Source book. Paulist Press, 1972)

**A Discussion Group on the book
Sermons of St. Francis de Sales
For Lent
Preface**

1. What did de Sales value as the purpose for preaching?

2. How do I understand de Sales' method of preaching: "heart speaking to heart"?

3. How can I appreciate the thoughts of de Sales as he preached these sermons to the Sisters of the Visitation of Holy Mary?

**A Discussion Group on the book
Sermons of St. Francis de Sales
For Lent
Fasting**

1. What can make fasting a virtue?
2. How can I fast with my whole heart?
3. How can I fast through humility?
4. How can I fast by pleasing God alone?

**A Discussion Group on the book
Sermons of St. Francis de Sales
For Lent
Temptation**

1. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on seeking temptations?

2. How do I understand de Sales' thought: "No one who comes to serve God can avoid temptation?"

3. What were the weapons Jesus used to repulse the devil?

4. How do I understand the "fear of the slothful"?

5. How do I understand the “fear of children”?

6. How do I understand de Sales’ thoughts about expecting consolations in the spiritual life?

7. How do I understand the “fear of the weak”?

8. How do I understand de Sales’ rule: “No one will be so holy in this life as not to be always subject to committing some imperfection or other”?

9. How do I understand “the vain hopes and expectations” of those who aspire to perfection?

10. How do I understand spiritual avarice?

11. How do I understand enjoying consolations in God and not in myself?

12. Why should I fear neither the temptations nor the tempter?

13. (Note 6) How does this note help me to appreciate de Sales' preaching?

**A Discussion Group on the book
Sermons of St. Francis de Sales
For Lent
Faith**

1. How does de Sales present faith?

2. How do I embrace the beauty and truth found in God?

3. How do I understand “faith cannot be greater for some truths than for others”?

4. How do I understand “dying or dead” faith vs. “living” faith?

5. How would I contrast “vigilant” faith with “dormant” faith?

6. How do the four cardinal virtues operate with faith?

7. How do I understand “attentive” faith?

8. How do I understand the prayer of the Canaanite woman as “confident”?
“persevering”? “patient”? “humble”?

9. How can I imitate the humility of the Canaanite woman in my own life?

**A Discussion Group on the book
Sermons of St. Francis de Sales
For Lent
Eternal Happiness**

1. Do I understand the point of the parable used by St. Gregory the Great?
2. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts about the soul, separated from the body, seeing, hearing, understanding?
3. How do I understand de Sales' thought that the soul is aware and can act in heaven?
4. How does de Sales' thought of conversation in heaven strike me?

5. How might I converse with my guardian angel?

6. What does de Sales believe will be the subject of our heavenly conversations?

7. What will I say to Jesus whose lovable Heart will be most evident?

8. How do I understand the happiness of seeing the Trinity face to face?

9. How do I imagine the conversation between the Trinity and me?

10. How have these thoughts spoken to my heart?

**A Discussion Group on the book
Sermons of St. Francis de Sales
For Lent
Election and Reprobation**

1. How do I understand “God always gives sufficient grace to whoever is willing to receive it”?

2. How do I understand de Sales’ reflections on the rich man and Lazarus?

3. How do I understand de Sales’ thoughts on Judas and Matthias?

4. How do I understand de Sales’ caution that there is no vocation that is exempt from the possibility of falling into sin?

5. How do I understand the two kinds of avarice?

6. How can I apply de Sales' distinction: using riches and adoring riches?

7. How do I understand de Sales' warning: "Whoever does not advance, must of necessity, go back"?

8. How do I understand de Sales' advice to use grace to subject our natural inclinations to reason?

9. How do I understand that the College of the Apostles did not end when the last apostle died?

6. How do I understand the command to love one another as a new commandment?

7. How did the Incarnation affect the commandment to love one another?

8. What should be the extent of my love for others?

9. How does the Eucharist help me to grow in love for others?

**A Discussion Group on the book
Sermons of St. Francis de Sales
For Lent
Proper Conduct in Illness**

1. How do I understand celibacy in following the Lord?
2. How do I understand the Communion of Saints?
3. How do I understand de Sales' concern about using my imagination in mediation on the Scriptures?
4. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on Peter's sick mother-in-law and the virtues she practices?

5. How can I appreciate the virtue of resignation in sickness (putting myself trustfully in the hands of my caregivers)?

6. How do I understand de Sales' admonition: submit yourself to God's justice and God's mercy?

7. How were sick people at de Sales' time much like sick people in our own time?

8. How might I benefit from the sick woman's example of meekness and resignation?

9. How do I understand her virtue of service once she is cured?

10. How do I understand de Sales' general rule: "Ask for nothing and refuse nothing"?

**A Discussion Group on the book
Sermons of St. Francis de Sales
For Lent
God's Spiritual Providence**

1. How do I understand Jesus' words to St. Catherine of Siena: "Think of Me, and I will think of you"?

2. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts about the multitude that followed Jesus?

3. How can I appreciate de Sales' words: "We must be faithful, but without anxiety or eagerness; we must use the means that are given to us according to our vocation, and then remain in peace concerning all the rest?"

4. How do I understand: God wants us to use the ordinary means to perfection?

5. How do I understand: “Let us not expect God to work miracles to guide us to perfection”?

6. How do I understand that “humility must be the foundation of a great generosity”?

7. How do I understand: we ought neither to seek nor desire anything but what is simply necessary?

8. How do I understand: Frequently lay our good will before our Lord; let us place it in His hands and He will renew it as often as is necessary that we may have enough for our whole mortal life?

**A Discussion Group on the book
Sermons of St. Francis de Sales
For Lent
Proper Fear of Death**

1. How do I understand that the goodness of God shows itself in God's mercy and justice?

2. How do I understand de Sales' thought about Jesus' touching the litter?

3. How do I understand the power of God's word?

4. How do I fear death?

5. How do I understand: “We must neither desire nor ask for death, nor refuse it when it comes”?

6. How do I understand de Sales’ thoughts on Job’s suffering?

7. How do I understand de Sales’ explanation of the ancient Fathers’ teaching: “We ought to fear death without fearing it”?

8. How do I understand: “To die well we must live well”?

9. How do I understand de Sales’ suggestion that we take the thought of death sometime each day?

**A Discussion Group on the book
Sermons of St. Francis de Sales
For Lent
Hearing the Word of God**

1. How do I understand de Sales' example of openness to receive God's word from anyone?

2. How do I understand attentiveness to "truth" and not "vanity"?

3. How do I understand the relationship between "truth" and "love"?

4. How do I appreciate the humility of Jesus?

5. What do I learn from de Sales' thoughts on the teachings of the Beatitudes and my own actions?

6. How do I prepare myself to hear the word of God?

7. How do I understand de Sales' thought on distractions when hearing the word of God (see note 7)?

8. How do I understand de Sales' distinction between the preacher and the word of God?

5. How do I understand Jesus' choice of an ass to enter Jerusalem to show His love for humility?

6. How do I understand Jesus' choice of an ass to show his love for patience?

7. How do I understand Jesus' choice of an ass to show his love for obedience?

8. How can I use Jesus' word: "the Lord needs them"?

9. How did Jesus "turn the world upside down" by his entry into Jerusalem?
What does Jesus' example say to me?

**A Discussion Group on the book
Sermons of St. Francis de Sales
For Lent
The Passion of Our Lord and What it Means**

1. How does de Sales understand the inscription Pilate place on the Cross of Jesus?

2. How do I understand the symbolism of Moses' bronze serpent in light of Jesus' death?

3. How do I understand Jesus' death on the Cross as God showing us how much he loves us?

4. How can I benefit from considering Jesus' passion and cross?

5. How do I understand de Sales' thought that the divine Person of Jesus gave his human their great value?

6. How do I understand de Sales' thought on the three kinds of life humans have?

7. How do I understand God's eagerness to reveal His Son's vocation?

8. How do I understand de Sales' image of Jesus: "the divine oriole attached to the tree of the Cross to save and deliver us from the serious jaundice of sin?"

9. How do I understand Jesus' prayer for those who crucified him?

10. How do I understand the difference between Peter's sin and Judas' sin?

11. How do I understand the difference between the two thieves?

12. How does the Cross of Jesus offer us hope?

13. How do I understand Jesus' words to his mother beneath the Cross?

14. How do I understand Jesus' cry: "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me"?

15. How do I understand Jesus' words: "I thirst"?

16. How do I understand: "one must obey equally in great and little things"?

17. How do I understand staying nailed to the Cross of my vocation?

18. How do I understand Jesus' words: "All is finished"?

19. How do I understand de Sales' comment: This word ("Father, into Your hands I entrust My Spirit") contains all Christian perfection?

20. How can I practice abandonment into the hands of my heavenly Father?

21. What would I like to say to God at the moment of my death?

Evaluation
A Discussion Group on the book
Sermons of St. Francis de Sales
For Lent

1. In broad strokes, my experience of this discussion program was

Poor 2 Good 4 Excellent

2. What I learned during this discussion series was...

Not useful 2 Useful 4 Very Useful

3. During this discussion program, I really liked...

4. I would have enjoyed the discussion program more if...

5. Would you like to see a program like this to continue? If so, what Salesian topics or works would you like to explore?

6. Would you suggest any changes to the time, duration, and frequency of the discussion group?

Your Name _____ Date _____

Name of Parish/School/Ministry _____