

De Sales Discussions

Sermons of St. Francis de Sales For Advent and Christmas

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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 Advent and Christmas
Sermon 1: Pages 1 - 19**

1. Did John the Baptist know Jesus was the Messiah?

2. How do I understand why God asks questions of people?

3. Why does Francis de Sales believe that John sent his disciples to question Jesus?

4. Related to question #3: How can I apply these reasons to my own life?

5. How do I understand Jesus' response to John's disciples?

6. How might I be "friend"?

7. How might I be “lame”?

8. How might I be “a leper”?

9. How might I be “deaf”?

10. How might I be “poor”?

11. How might I be “scandalized” in Jesus?

12. How do I understand Jesus’ remarks about John after his disciples leave?

13. How might I be “a reed”?

14. How can I benefit from Francis de Sales’ reflection on St. Ambrose?

4. What do I find worthy of imitating in John's response to their questions?

5. How does Francis de Sales link John's denials to confession of sin?

6. How are charity and humility linked?

7. How can I better practice humility as John did?

**A Discussion Group on the book
Sermons of St. Francis de Sales
For Advent and Christmas
Sermon 3: Pages 35 - 49**

1. How does God's word come into my heart?
2. How does Francis de Sales understand the interaction between preacher and listener?
3. Why do people not profit from the word of God?
4. What does Francis de Sales present as the greatest torment of the damned?

5. How do I understand the mystery of God's forgiveness of sins?

6. How do I understand the wonder of the Incarnation?

7. How can I apply David's experience of God's forgiveness in my life?

8. What is the best preparation for the Lord's coming among us?

9. What are the "valleys" in my life that need to be filled with hope?

10. How can I develop a more "even" disposition?

11. (Notes) What does Francis de Sales mean by "penitence"?

**A Discussion Group on the book
Sermons of St. Francis de Sales
For Advent and Christmas
Sermon 4: Pages 50 - 62**

1. How can the vigil of Christmas prepare me to celebrate the feast?

2. How am I humbled by the mystery of the Incarnation?

3. How do I understand the mystery of the Incarnation?

4. How do I understand de Sales' application of the "manna" to the Incarnate Jesus?

5. How am I like the shepherds spoken to by the angels?

6. How do I understand "wrapped in swaddling clothes"?

7. What can I learn from visiting the Divine Babe in the manger?

8. What gift can I give the Infant?

**A Discussion Group on the book
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For Advent and Christmas
Sermon 5: Pages 63 - 66**

1. How does de Sales suggest I prepare my intellect?

2. How does he suggest I prepare my will?

3. How do I understand de Sales' reflection on the community of the Holy Family?

**A Discussion Group on the book
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Sermon 6: Pages 67 - 81**

1. How do I understand the Incarnation as a work of the Trinity?

2. How do I understand the Incarnation – the hypostatic union?

3. What is the great wonder of the Incarnation?

4. How does the image of the sponge help me to understand the Incarnation?

5. Why did the Incarnation happen?

6. What can I learn from the Incarnation?

**A Discussion Group on the book
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Sermon 7: Pages 82 - 86**

1. God intended to create the world for the Incarnation of His Son, the Eternal Word. What does this mean for me at this point in my life??

2. How does the Incarnation reveal the goodness of God?

3. Francis de Sales died three days after preaching this sermon. Do you have any thoughts, feelings or observations about that fact?

**A Discussion Group on the book
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Sermon 8: Pages 87 - 102**

1. What is the meaning of circumcision in the old Law?
2. Do I understand the point of spiritual circumcision, not incision?
3. In what ways might I need to experience circumcision of one kind or another?

4. Do I understand the difference between spontaneous emotions and passions that lead to sin?

5. Do I understand that “circumcision” has to do with the consequences of feelings, not the feelings themselves?

6. What is de Sales’ point about circumcision at the hands of another?

7. Am I open to this manner or kind of circumcision?

8. How do I understand the connection between the name of Jesus and the shedding of his blood?

9. How can I best say the name of Jesus at this point in my life?

**A Discussion Group on the book
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Sermon 9: Pages 103 - 118**

1. What does the change of water into wine at Cana signify at the beginning of Jesus' ministry?

2. Why does Francis de Sales link the events at Cana to the Last Supper?

3. How does Francis de Sales explain Jesus' presence at the wedding?

4. How do I understand Mary's request of Jesus?

5. How does Francis de Sales suggest we pray for our needs?

6. How do I understand Francis de Sales' thought on humility and love of God?

7. How do I understand Jesus' response to Mary?

8. How can I apply this Gospel incident to my own life?

Evaluation
A Discussion Group on the book
Sermons of St. Francis de Sales
For Advent and Christmas

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 _____