

Salesian Seminar



Sermons of St. Francis de Sales On Our Lady

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© 1985 Tan Books and Publishers

Published by



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
On Our Lady***

Session 1:

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1602)

1. How do I understand de Sales' reference to the two great lights: Jesus and Mary?

2. Why would Mary outlive her Son?

3. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on Mary's with Jesus?

4. How do I understand de Sales' words: "Our Lady died of the death of her Son?"

5. How do I understand de Sales' thought: "Love desired the death should enter into our Lord"?

6. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on the Assumption of Mary?

7. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts about Mary's dependence on Jesus for her happiness?

8. How do I understand the honor the church pays to Mary?

9. How does de Sales understand the words of Mary at Cana (“Do whatever my Son tells you”)?

10. How can I honor Mary best?

**A Discussion Group on the book
Sermons of St. Francis de Sales
On Our Lady
Our Lady of the Snow (1617)**

1. How do I understand de Sales' thought: "From devotion to Our Lord immediately follows devotion to His most holy Mother"?

2. How do I understand "affective" and "effective" love?

3. What strikes me as I hear de Sales speak about Mary bearing all Christians in Jesus?

4. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts about the perfection of religious life?

5. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts about the "whiteness of snow" and religious life?

6. How do I understand the "obedience of snow" and religious life?

7. How do understand the "fruitfulness of snow" and religious life?

5. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on the Lord leading us two ways during our life-pilgrimage?

6. How do I understand the Lord's giving himself to us totally and his desire for us to give ourselves totally to him?

7. How might I apply the thoughts of de Sales to my vocation in life?

**A Discussion Group on the book
*Sermons of St. Francis de Sales
On Our Lady***

Session 2:

The Visitation (1618)

1. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on why Mary leaves immediately to visit her cousin Elizabeth?

2. How do I understand Mary's "ardent charity and most profound humility in visiting Elizabeth?

3. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on the Incarnation transforming Mary's charity (love)?

4. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on Mary's humility?

5. How do I understand Mary's traveling "with haste"?

6. How do I understand the blessings that accompanied Mary as she entered the home?

7. How do I understand de Sales' application of the graces of the Visitation to Holy Communion?

8. How can I apply the thoughts of de Sales to my life?

**A Discussion Group on the book
Sermons of St. Francis de Sales
On Our Lady
Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1618)**

1. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts about Mary as a "Martha" in her receiving Jesus?

2. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts about Mary as a "Mary" in her receiving Jesus?

3. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on Martha's anxiety in serving Jesus?

4. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on the death of Mary?

5. How do I understand de Sales' thought: "Make our life correspond to the death we desire"?

6. How do I understand the virtues de Sales recommends for living as we desire to die?

7. How can I free myself of anxiety in the practice of virtue?

8. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on Mary's Assumption?

**A Discussion Group on the book
Sermons of St. Francis de Sales
On Our Lady
Presentation of Our Lady in the Temple (1619)**

1. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on the response of Jesus: "Rather, blest are they who hear, who pay attention to, the word of God and keep it"?

2. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on Mary's obedience to the word of God?

3. How do I understand de Sales' reflections on Mary's giving herself totally to God?

4. How do I receive de Sales' words about giving our heart as it is to God?

5. What is the benefit of renewing our resolutions to serve God faithfully?

6. How do I do "the will of my Heavenly Father"?

**A Discussion Group on the book
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Session 3:

Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1620)

1. How well do I act on what I speak?

2. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on the humility of Jesus and Mary coming to the Temple for purification?

3. How can I practice the advice de Sales gives on the virtue of humility?

4. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on the obedience of Jesus and Mary coming to the Temple?

5. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on prayer: "One thing is necessary to pray well – to have Our Lord in our arms"?

6. How do I understand de Sales' conditions to pray well, using the example of Simeon?

7. How do I understand de Sales' thought on adjusting our will to God's?

8. How do I understand his thoughts on "living in expectation of our own perfection"?

9. How do I understand his thought on “full reverence before God”?

10. How do I understand his thought on “making room within ourselves for the Holy Spirit”?

11. How will I prepare myself to pray well?

**A Discussion Group on the book
Sermons of St. Francis de Sales
On Our Lady
The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1620)**

1. How do I understand de Sales' thought: "Christian perfection is nothing other than a renunciation of the world, the flesh, and self-will?"

2. How does de Sales' thought on Mary passing through childhood, marriage and widowhood strike me?

3. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on Mary's "renunciation of world" at her birth?

4. How does de Sales' offer Mary's renunciation as an example for those entering religious life?

5. How do I understand de Sales' thought: "God bestows His gifts, absolutely, without any revocation or recall"?

6. How am I dealing with de Sales' thoughts on Mary?

7. How did the infant Mary practice "renunciation of the flesh"?

8. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on the renunciations of St. Nicholas of Tolentino when he advises: "He should be admired rather than imitated"?

9. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on "self-renunciation" and Mary?

10. How do I understand de Sales' reflections on the Cross as the example of self-renunciation?

5. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on Mary being the "Ark of the Covenant"?

6. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on listening to inspirations and then following them?

7. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on dedicating myself completely to following inspirations?

8. How do I understand the two fundamental conditions for obedience to God's will?

9. How can I use de Sales' recommendation to renew ourselves often (see note 13)?

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Session 4:

The Annunciation (1621)

1. How do I understand de Sales' use of the Song of Songs to describe the Incarnation?

2. How do I appreciate "that God alone can give true satisfaction to our hearts"?

3. How do I understand that "the human heart is a singer infinitely loved by God"?

4. How do I understand the withdrawal of a religious into her heart to prepare a place for the Lord?

5. How does de Sales call Mary's virginity "fruitful"?

6. How do I appreciate Mary's being troubled by the appearance of the angel as a man?

7. How do I appreciate Mary's humility at the message of the angel?

8. How do I understand Mary's drawing others to practice virginity as she did?

9. How do I appreciate the difference in practice of women and men religious?

10. Why is the call to religious life a call to Calvary and not Mount Tabor?

11. How do I understand: “Love never says: ‘Enough, sufficient’ ”?

12. How do I appreciate de Sales’ image of the Church as a flower garden?

**A Discussion Group on the book
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On Our Lady
The Visitation (1621)**

1. How do I appreciate the three unions in Mary: Divine and human natures, maternity and virginity, charity and humility?

2. How do I appreciate charity and humility in Mary in the Annunciation?

3. How do I understand Mary's love for God leading her to visit Elizabeth?

4. How do I understand Mary's humility in her visit to Elizabeth?

5. How do I understand de Sales' thought that Mary's humility regained what was lost by Eve's pride?

6. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on "sufficiency" and holiness?

7. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on idle conversation?

8. How would I imagine the conversation of Mary and Elizabeth?

9. How do I understand the virtues practiced by Elizabeth?

10. How do I understand the intercession of Mary and the saints?

11. How can I become a “relative” of Mary?

12. How do I understand that divine visitation is accompanied by personal transformation?

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Session 5:

The Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1622)

1. How do I understand the three names for the feast day?
2. How do I appreciate de Sales' thoughts on carrying a lighted candle in procession on this feast?
3. How can I appreciate de Sales' thoughts on the candle and the Incarnation?
4. How do I appreciate de Sales' thoughts on the union of God and man in Jesus?

5. How do I appreciate de Sales' thoughts on the fall of Adam and Eve?

6. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on disliking commands as the leading temptation to disobedience?

7. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on loving the one who commands, as well as what is commanded?

8. How do I appreciate the need to achieve and the commands of God through the Church?

9. Would I choose to carry the Lord in my arms or be carried by the Lord in his arms?

10. Why is the example of St. Ignatius used by de Sales?

11. How can I leave myself entirely in the arms of Divine Providence?

3. How does de Sales explain Mary's conception without original sin?

4. How does de Sales encourage devotion to Mary?

5. How do I listen to Mary when she tells me: "Do whatever my Son tells you"?

Evaluation
A Discussion Group on the book
Sermons of St. Francis de Sales
On Our Lady

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 _____