



De Sales

SPIRITUALITY SERVICES

"practical paths to holiness"



"Half-empty, or Half-full?"

Am I an optimist, or a pessimist? Is life generally pleasant for me, or painful? Am I basically happy, or sad?

Is the glass half full, or is the glass half empty?

Our answers to these questions (and to others like them) are important. Our fundamental beliefs and attitudes have a tremendous impact on how we perceive life. When we view life positively, we tend to focus on what is right or good. When we view life negatively, we tend to focus on what is wrong or evil.

On any given day we usually see only what we choose to believe. Knowing whether we are "half empty" or "half full" people isn't merely some exercise in rhetorical speculation. No, far from it. Ultimately, such knowledge is a matter of life and death.

Volumes of research clearly indicate that people who are basically optimistic are much more effective and successful in dealing with the realities and challenges of life—joyful, painful and everything else in between—than those people whose attitudes are basically pessimistic.

This is true in every dimension of life: physical, psychological, emotional, social and spiritual.

What does it mean to be an

optimistic or "half full" person? The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines optimism as "a tendency to expect the best possible outcome or dwell on the most helpful aspects of a situation."

Francis de Sales was clearly a "half full" person. In considering whether human beings are basically good or basically evil, for example, Francis de Sales had this to say: "Consider the nature God has given us. It is the highest in this visible world. It is capable of eternal life and of being perfectly united to God's Divine Majesty." (Introduction to the Devout Life, Part One, Chapter 9)

The "Gentleman Saint" was not naïve. As Thomas Green cites in his book Come Down Zacchaeus, Francis de Sales recognized the tragedy of sin. He acknowledged the allure of temptation. He knew the experiences of suffering, pain, loss and injustice. He saw the possibility of human fear and blindness. That is why, as Green observed, "Francis stressed the importance of a good guide and of a well-balanced program of spiritual discipline." (p. 64)

But more importantly, Francis proclaimed the greater truth of God's creative power, the greater reality of God's redeeming love,

the greater possibility of God's inspiring hope. Thomas Green wrote: "God is truly here for those who have eyes to see. For God, everything is possible. This is the faith foundation of the good sense and joyous hope so prominent in Francis de Sales." (*ibid*)

Francis de Sales certainly "dwells on the most helpful aspects of the situation" that we call life, doesn't he?

However, as the cross of Calvary starkly demonstrates, sometimes optimism isn't enough. We need something deeper, something more fundamental and something more enduring.

Half-full/God-filled people need hope. Perhaps the best definition of this virtue comes from Vaclav Havel who, while imprisoned in a Czech prison, wrote: "Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well. Rather, hope is the certainty that comes from the belief that things make sense—that life is full of purpose—regardless of the results."

Half empty, or half full? Devoid of meaning, or full of purpose? Dragged down by what is wrong, or encouraged by what is right?

How's that glass of yours looking today?