For Personal Reflection

?

1. How do I define courage?
2. How do I experience courage?
3. Would I describe myself as a courageous person?
4. Do I "take heart" when faced with challenging situations?
5. In what ways have I "lost" heart? What has discouraged me in the past? What may be discouraging me now?
6. In what ways might I need to become more courageous?

Further Reading

Francis de Sales. Introduction to the Devout Life. Various Editions.

St. Francis de Sales. Selected Letters. Elisabeth Stopp. Harper Brothers, 1960.

Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal: Letters of Spiritual Direction. Peronne Marie Thibert, VHM, Trans. Wendy M. Wright and Joseph Power, OSFS. Paulist Press. 1988.

De Sales

SPIRITUALITY SERVICES

"practical paths to holiness"

A Ministry of

OBLATES OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES · WILMINGTON–PHILADELPHIA ·

V·J

TENUI NEC DIMITTAM

Visit us on the Internet:

www.oblates.org/dss

Email us:

dss@oblates.org

Volume 5 **Number 13**

Salesian Perspectives is a series of pamphlets published by De Sales Spirituality Services. The series offers practical approaches to holiness based on the lives and legacies of St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane de Chantal. Subscription information is available by contacting De Sales Spirituality Services.

© 2005 by De Sales Spirituality Services. All rights reserved.

The Courage To Live...

SALESIAN PERSPECTIVES

...The Courage to Love

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines courage as "the state or quality of mind or spirit that enables one to face danger, fear or vicissitudes with self-possession, confidence, and resolution: bravery.

"Most days, however, it isn't the obvious problems that can dishearten us…"

Regardless of the state and stage of life in which we find ourselves, we know from personal — and often, painful — experience that our life has its share of dangers, fears and vicissitudes. To face these difficulties, trials, headaches and heartaches head on is to show courage. Literally, to take heart.

In broad strokes, there are three kinds of people who need courage to lead a life of devotion. (1) Those just beginning; (2) those making progress along the road; and (3) those who have but a few steps remaining on the journey. (*That should cover just about everybody!*)

For those just starting out, Francis de Sales offered this advice: "Although light is beautiful and pleasing to our eyes, it may nevertheless be blinding after we have been in the dark for a long time...It may well turn out that changing your way of life will cause you many problems...At first it will be hard for you to give up the glory that fools and scoffers brought you in the midst of your former vain pursuits. (Introduction, Part IV, Chapter 2)

To those whose tribulations have almost come to an end, Francis wrote: "Continue and persevere in this blessed enterprise of the devout life. Our days glide away; death is at the gate...I say to you, look up to heaven, and do not forfeit it for earth. Look down into hell, but do not cast yourself into it for the sake of fleeting things. Look upon Jesus Christ, and do not renounce him for all the world. And when the labors of a devout life seem too hard for you, sing with St. Francis of Assisi: Such are the joys that lure my sight. All pains grow sweet, all labors light." (Introduction, Part V, Chapter 18)

"In broad strokes, there are three kinds of people who need courage to lead a life of devotion."

Most of us are somewhere in the middle, up to our necks in the day-to-day challenges — some large, many small — a trying to live a happy, healthy and holy life. To us, and our companions, Francis writes: "Thanks to our savior, we are climbing Mount Tabor, since we are firmly resolved to serve Christ well and to love his divine Goodness. We must encourage one another in holy hope. Let us climb always, let us climb, without growing weary, toward this heavenly vision of our Savior. Little by little, let us leave behind us affections for the low things of earth and aspire to the happiness that has been prepared for us. (Letters of Spiritual Direction, page 163)

Francis sees a great paradox here. While troubles can indeed present obstacles to our growth in holiness, they can also be received as opportunities for growth: "Devotion should not only be generous, so as to not be dismayed by difficulties. In fact, difficulties should increase our courage, for, as the saying goes, those whose courage does not grow in the midst of troubles and contradictions is not very valiant." (Conferences, I, p. 11)

"Let us climb always, let us climb, without growing weary…"

To be sure, there are major troubles — death, divorce, disease, loss, betrayal — that can cause us to lose heart in our attempts to live life and share love to the fullest. Most days, however, it isn't the obvious problems that can dishearten us; rather, it's the sheer multitude of the smallest, almost imperceptible ones. The Russian writer Dostoyevsky once remarked: "Any idiot can handle a crisis. It's the day-to-day living that will wear you out." Francis de Sales would tell us: "Don't be ashamed to practice the ordinary, everyday actions that bring us to the love of God." (Introduction, Part V, Chapter 18)

Take courage. When it comes to doing what is right in the faces of difficulties, take heart...and share that heart with others.