For Personal Reflection

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1. How often do I think about God's gift of salvation in my life?
2. How does this unearned gift impact my faith? I personal is my faith in so great a gift?
3. How does this gift impact hope? For what do I hope? How do I work to make real the things for which I hope?
4. Francis de Sales says that hope is the mother of desire. What are the things I desire for myself and for others? How do my desires impact my thoughts, feelings, attitudes and, most importantly, my actions?
5. Simply put: what are the ordinary ways that I can say "thank you" to God every day for bestowing upon me so great a gift as the life, love and passion of his Son?

Further Reading

Pulpit and Pew: A Study in Salesian Preaching. Vincent Kerns, MSFS. S.F. S. Printing School. India: Visakhapatnam, 1976.

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Receiving Christ's Gift...

SALESIAN PERSPECTIVES

And Using It!

In a sermon preached on the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, St. Francis de Sales said: "It is a consoling truth that Jesus Christ, our Lord and Master, paid fully, and in strict justice, the penalty due to our sins. And not our sins alone, but those of the whole world. This was the claim of our apostle, St. Paul: as our fault was amplified, grace has been more amply bestowed than ever; that so, where guilt held its reign of death, justifying grace should reign instead."

"But Francis de Sales is very clear: while we may have done nothing to deserve it, God, indeed, clearly expects us to do something with it!"

Francis de Sales illustrated his point with the following image: "A man in love pays little attention to cost or effort if his young lady sets her heart on an unusual ring. His singular thought is to make her happy. This was our Lord's reaction to the Father's love for the human family. Giving no thought to cost or effort, he paid a price for our ransom that neither ourselves nor the angels are worth, that was greater than the whole world's sins required. A great price was paid in ransom for you, said St. Paul; too great, in comparison to the goods purchased."

Christ's life, passion, death and resurrection: all of these—and so much more— are an unconditional expression of God's enduring love for us. But Francis de Sales is very clear: while we may have done nothing to deserve it, God, indeed, clearly expects us to do something with it! "Our Lord gave his life for us: his death paid the price of our ransom, but that price was paid in vain unless we cooperate with it."

In a style with which we have become so familiar, Francis de Sales outlines a three-fold approach to making good use of so great a gift!

"While Christ's blood purchased our happiness, we shall never enjoy it without faith. Faith will be reckoned virtue in us if we believe in God as having raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead…"

"The *first* step for us is faith. Nobody experiences God's presence until he or she has learned to believe that God exists, and that God rewards those who try to find him. While Christ's blood purchased our happiness, we shall never enjoy it without faith: it is a great blessing: faith will be reckoned virtue in us if we believe in God as having raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead: handed over to death for our sins, and raised to life for our justification."

While faith is the foundation of cooperating with the great gift of our redemption, faith must lead to a second step or level: hope. "This is our *second* step toward God's favor. First faith, then hope., but a hope that it active. Notice that I say active: merely longing for something will not carry us into heaven." (See Volume 3, Number 13, of Salesian Perspectives for a more detailed consideration of the Salesian understanding of hope.) "No, desires without deeds are not enough; a lively hope will lead me to consider what it is that I can do! If we know how much God has done for us—if we believe in the sufferings our Lord endured for us—it is impossible for us to be devoid of a lively, active hope."

Faith and hope leads to desire, "our *third* step on the way to God. Whatever is the focus of our hope should become the focus of our desire." Put another way, Francis de Sales claims that hope is the mother of desire.

For what should we desire? Eternal life? "We should not be human, if we did not long for eternal life. This thought should provide us with a motive for action—the thought of eternity, a constant spur along the road of life.

"No, desires without deeds are not enough; a lively hope will lead me to consider what it is that I can do!"

Francis illustrates the power of desire this way. "Suppose some physician discovered a drug that would guarantee us fifty years of life: wouldn't we besiege him for it, give him whatever he asked? If fifty years of life means so much to us, what of eternal life?"

Eternal life—this unconditional gift of God of God's love for us—"is the motive guaranteed to move all but the hardest of hearts. Eternal life was the motive of David's prayer: now and ever to do your will is my heart's aim.

May we accept this gift completely...and choose to use it thoroughly!