For Personal Reflection

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1. What is my "philosophy of life?"
2. How does that philosophy impact my life?
3. How does that philosophy get expressed to others in my life?
4. Do I have a dream for living my life? What is my dream for myself? What is my dream for others?
5. How clearly am I aware of my dream in the give and take of daily life?
6. How often do I take/make the time to determine how faithful I am pursuing my dream?
7. How well do I renew—and nourish—my dream?

Further Reading

Pursuing Wellness, Finding Spirituality by Richard J. Gilmartin. 1997 Twenty-Third Publication: Mystic, CT.

Introduction to the Devout Life. St. Francis de Sales. Translated by John K. Ryan. Image Books, Doubleday. 1989.

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Naming And Nourishing

SALESIAN PERSPECTIVES

Your Dream

The term "spirituality" has legions of meanings and definitions. An almost countless combinations of research, articles and books have been published on the subject. And while a significant number of Americans claim that they are not particularly religious, polls and surveys repeatedly demonstrate that "spirituality" is important to most Americans.

For our purpose here, let us simply describe "spirituality" as a way of looking at—and living—life.

"Jesus embodies the fullness of the dream to which all of us are called: The Kingdom of God."

In his book Pursuing Wellness, Finding Spirituality, Richard Gilmartin writes: "Our primary spiritual need is to have a philosophy of life that gives meaning and purpose to our existence, and helps us transcend narrow self-interest. In this, we have a sense of belonging to something larger than ourselves. This philosophy of life also becomes and integrating source when it operates as the principle around which we order our lives. To say someone is "well-integrated" implies that they have principles, values, or philosophies that determine how they live and express themselves."

If the notion of a "philosophy of life" leaves you a little cold, consider another way that Gilmartin attempts to describe spirituality: "How we conceptualize meaning and purpose can also become the foundation for a dream that guides our life. Although we may lose it along the way, each of us has a dream that becomes the central theme of our life drama; it is the beginning of the plot by which we live out the decades. If we are into or beyond the middle stage of life we can look back and see how our drama is unfolding. We can see how our life has been following along a pathway, and how both conscious decisions and serendipitous events fostered our movement along that pathway."

Francis de Sales offers us a particular spirituality. Francis de Sales offers us a particular dream for living a God-centered (and other-centered) life. His "philosophy of life" is no mere intellectual exercise; rather, it is a way of looking at life which originates in—and transforms—the human heart.

"When we lose our dream, our life gets off track; we feel discontent, malaise, or a sense of being stuck in our life…"

We know it as living a "life of devotion." This philosophy presupposes "love of God, and hence it is simply true love of God. Inasmuch as divine love adorns the soul, it is called grace, which makes us pleasing to the Divine Majesty. Inasmuch as it strengthens us to do good, it is called charity. When it has reached a degree of perfection at which it not only makes us do good but also to do this carefully, frequently and promptly, it is called devotion...arousing us to do quickly and lovingly as many good works as possible, both those commanded and those merely counseled or inspired." (Intro, Part 1 Chapter 1)

Francis' dream is that each and every one of us (in ways that fit the state and stage of life in which we find ourselves) not only walk but run, even leap forward "in the way of God's commandments." To live this dream, he adds, is "the delight of delights." (Intro, Part I, Chapter 2)

Gilmartin suggests that as important as our dream is, it is surprisingly easy to lose it: "When we lose our dream, our life gets off track; we feel discontent, malaise, or a sense of being endlessly stuck in our life...If we reconnect to our dream, understanding its relation to what gives our life meaning and purpose, we experience a revitalization, a renewal of purpose in our life's journey."

"A 'philosophy of life' is no mere intellectual exercise; it is something that transforms the human heart…"

So important then, in the opinion of St. Francis, that it is not only important to know—and seize—your dream, but to take the time to examine how faithfully you are living it: "Every morning and evening a person who really takes care of his or her heart...must often reflect on the heart's condition (*Editor: and the dream it pursues*) in order to reform and improve it." (Intro, Part V, Chapter 1)

Jesus embodies the fullness of the dream to which all of us are called: The Kingdom of God. We most effectively embody the dream of "Living Jesus" to the extent that we pursue that in ways that fit the state and stage of life in which we find ourselves, as well as making the time each day to determine how faithful we are to that dream.