

Salesian Seminar



Sermons of St. Francis de Sales On Prayer

Translated by Nuns of the Visitation
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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 Prayer***

Session 1

Introduction

1. What in Dom Mackey's Introduction to the Sermons of St. Francis de Sales did I find valuable or informative?

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Session 2

The Goal of Prayer

1. Why is prayer useful and necessary in life?

2. How do I understand de Sales' thought: "prayer is imperfect in which one is aware that he is praying"?

3. How do I understand de Sales' ideas about thoughts, study, meditation and contemplation?

4. How can de Sales' thoughts on the goal of prayer help my praying?

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Session 3

The Spirit of Prayer

1. What are the three conditions de Sales mentions for praying well?

2. How do I acknowledge that I am “little” in my prayer?

3. How do I acknowledge that I am “great in hope” in my prayer?

4. How do I acknowledge that I am “grafted onto to Jesus Christ crucified” in my prayer?

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Session 4

The Kinds of Prayer

1. How do I understand that the Holy Spirit moves a sinner to penitence?

2. What are the spiritual goods necessary for our salvation God desires to give us?

3. How do I understand the differences between spiritual goods that are necessary for salvation and other spiritual goods?

4. How do I understand the danger of asking God for tender feelings in my prayer?

5. How do I understand de Sales' thoughts on the "Our Father"?

6. How do I practice "vital prayer"?

7. Why does de Sales recommend certain vocal prayers rather than others?

8. What is the value of “community prayer”?

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Session 5

The Heart of Prayer

1. What have I learned from de Sales' thoughts on "direct" and "indirect" prayer?

2. How do I understand the reverence of posture at prayer?

3. How do I understand de Sales' thought: "the posture which affords the best attention is the most suitable" for personal praying?

4. How do I understand de Sales' idea of the importance of the "highest point of the soul"?

5. How do I understand “meditation”?

6. How do I understand “contemplation”?

7. How do I understand the value of “ejaculations” (aspirations) in mental prayer?

8. How can I better practice looking at the Lord “with one eye” as I go about the tasks of my day?

Evaluation
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On Prayer

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 _____