

De Sales

SPIRITUALITY CENTER

"Two Kinds of Love"



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St. Francis de Sales is a Doctor of the Church. Because of his extensive writings on the love of God and the love of neighbor, he is also known by many as the "Doctor of Love."

There must be as many definitions of love as there have ever been people...and then some. Francis de Sales had his own: "To put it clearly and precisely, love is simply the movement, outpouring and progress of the heart toward the good." (Treatise, Book I, Pt. 7)

In the Salesian world, the language of love is, above all else, the language of the heart.

"The heart is the vital core of the entire personality. It is there, through the heart, that one comes to know and love God, for it is especially by virtue of the heart that humankind can be said to be made in the divine image and likeness...The heart is a living, ceaselessly pulsing organ which in one movement draws in God's goodness and life and, in another, breathes forth God's praise." (Letters of Spiritual Direction, p. 57)

The heart is the place in which love is both conceived and grows. The heart is the place in which we become enamored of the good and pursue the good. Herein we come to discover that

there are two kinds of love, or, put another way, two ways of experiencing the one love.

"We have two principal ways of exercising our love for God; the first is affective, and the second, effective.

By *affective* love "we have affection for God and for the things that God loves." By *effective* love, "we serve God and do what God ordains." (Treatise, Book 6, Chapter 1)

Francis illustrates how these two kinds of love interact with each other by employing the image—and the experience—of the expansion and contraction of the human heart.

"The first joins us to God's goodness; the second enables us to fulfill God's will. The first fills us with complacency, benevolence, and spiritual impulses, desires, aspiration, and fervors, and causes us to use the sacred infusions and minglings of our spirit with that of God. The second pours into us the solid resolution, firm courage, and inviolable obedience required to carry out the ordinances of God's will, and to suffer, accept, approve and embrace all that comes from God's good pleasure. The first enables us to find pleasure in God; the second makes us pleasing to God. By the first love we conceive; by

the second love we give birth. By the first love we place God upon our heart like a banner of love around which all our affections are ranged; by the second love we place God upon our arm, as a sword of dilection whereby we accomplish all victorious exploits." (Ibid)

We nurture affective love primarily through prayer. In prayer we reinforce our affection for God and the things of God. "Truly," wrote St. Francis de Sales, "the chief exercise of prayer is to speak to God and to hear God speak in the depths of the heart...Eye speaks to eye, and heart speaks to heart, and no one understands what passes between them except the sacred lovers who speak." (Ibid)

Of course, this affection for God and things of God cannot remain in the heart. This affective love must spill out into our minds, attitudes and actions. Affective love must be transformed and translated into effective love, that is, the practice of virtue. The practice of virtue, in turn, deepens that affective love: doing what is good deepens our attraction for the good.

Desire for the good. Pursuing the good. Divine love consists of both. How does our love measure up?

