

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Mary, Mother of God

January 1, 2014

Mary is called the Mother of God because she is the “mother of the divine redeemer.” She conceived, brought forth and nourished the Son of God here on earth. While she is subordinate to her Son, she is greater than all the saints.

Mary has a unique role to play in our history of salvation. Her consent without hesitation to accept God’s Will at the Annunciation has had a salutary influence on the whole human family. She brought Life to the whole human family. Since she is the Mother of the Son of God, Mother of the Church and our Mother who brings us to her Son, it is most fitting that we honor her in a special way.

Today, is an appropriate day to honor Mary as she stands first among all the saints, and brings forth the Great Peacemaker to the human family.

Blessing

Lord, Mary’s child, make us as a human family an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let us sow love.

Where there is injury, pardon.

Where there is doubt, faith.

Where there is darkness, light.

Where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console,

To be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love.

For it is giving that we receive.

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Epiphany of the Lord

January 5, 2014

On this feast of the Epiphany, we are reminded that God accepts those who approach God in simplicity of heart. St. Francis de Sales notes:

Many wonders accompanied the birth of the Savior. One was the appearance of the star that brought the Magi. They came with simplicity of heart to adore and render homage to our new King lying in the manger. Let us, likewise, love Our Savior in simplicity of heart, having but one aim and object in all we do. Simplicity is nothing else but a pure and simple act of charity which has only one end in view, and that is to obtain the love of God. The heart full of sacred love has no less love when it turns to external duties than when it prays. In such hearts, their silence and their speech, their action and their contemplation, their work and their rest equally sing God’s praises. They do all their deeds, great or small with great love. Such were

the lives of the saints.

We may ask, "How can we acquire God's love?" Some people think that a certain art is needed in acquiring sacred love. In fact there is no art other than to set ourselves to the work of loving God, which means applying ourselves to the practice of those things that are pleasing to God, in simplicity, without trouble or concern. Imitate the simple love of doves in their having only one mate, for whom alone they do everything, and whom alone they wish to please. Imitate them also in the simplicity with which they express and show their love. They are happy to rest quietly in each other's presence.

The true means of finding and acquiring holy love is to remain in Christ's presence. In this Presence, let us delight in the joy of experiencing many inspirations and affections because we belong exclusively to God. Like the Magi, let us come close to the crib of the Christ Child. Let us be rich in love for our Savior who desires to show us how to love.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Baptism of the Lord

January 12, 2014

Today we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus. This event marks the beginning of his ministry. St. Francis de Sales notes that God also calls us to service even with our flawed natures:

Our Savior's unfathomable ways of calling us to His service are so lovely and varied. When we have a firm and steadfast determination to want to serve God in the way and place where God calls us, we then have a true vocation.

While we are firm in our perseverance to serve God, we still commit faults. We may also hesitate in our resolve to use the means given us to serve God. We are all at the mercy of our feelings and emotions, subject to changes and ups and downs. We are not to worry if we sometimes experience feelings of distaste and discouragement in responding to our call to serve God. It is normal to experience these ups and downs. Even though we are not exceedingly virtuous, we are still fit for God's service. Yet, we must stand firm in the midst of changing moods. Some virtues for the most part can only be practiced amid difficulty. It is our will - not our feelings and emotions - that must judge the firmness and steadfastness of our commitment to love as God desires us to love. It is this struggle of the will to persevere that determines our commitment to serve God.

A good musician has the habit of testing the strings of his instrument from time to time to see if they need tightening or loosening in order to render the tone in perfect harmony. We too at times need to examine and consider all the affections of our soul to see if they are in tune with the wishes and commands of Our Savior. Let us strengthen our fervor, by reaffirming often our commitment to be God's children who are called to love divinely. Live courageously and faithfully to the original stirring of your heart to serve God, and you will be happy.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

January 19, 2014

In today's Gospel the testimony of John the Baptist proclaims that Jesus, the Son of God, comes to take away the sin of the world. St. Francis de Sales remarks:

John the Baptist accepted and proclaimed Jesus as the Son of God. Others refused to acknowledge Jesus as Savior. John the Baptist had great humility. The first step into humility is not to seek to be held or esteemed for what we are not. John the Baptist rejected the honors and titles offered him. He could have led others to himself but instead he recognized Jesus as the Redeemer and pointed others to Him.

Now success can be an excellent thing: if we enjoy and rejoice in it because it gives glory to God, who is the author of our accomplishments. Yet, success and ambition are both capable of seducing the human heart. Unfortunately, our human nature is all too anxious to attract whatever is to its advantage. People seek ways to erect idols and images that are regarded as gods among them. How many of us are greatly taken with worldly elegance, prestige, superiority, and personages? In this we act quite differently from John the Baptist. His spirit was far from that of our times. Walking in humility, he accepted the greatness of Our Lord, and recognized his dependence on the Son of God to guide him.

John the Baptist refused to be moved by pretense. A lover of truth, he suffered martyrdom. While we may not be called to martyrdom, we ought to have the courage to suffer and fight when small temptations present themselves. If we wish to enter the combat against evil, we must be armed with a humility that recognizes our dependence on God's greatness and goodness. If we wish to grow in divine love, let us begin by imitating John the Baptist in accepting the Master of truth and goodness into our hearts. And then, let us lead others to Our Savior: Light to all nations.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales, especially Sermons, L. Fiorelli, ed.)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

January 26, 2014

In today's Gospel Jesus calls several fishermen to come and follow Him. St. Francis de Sales comments on their calling, and also ours, to follow Our Savior:

When Our Savior tells His Apostles that He has chosen them, He makes no exception. Even Judas was called although he misused his freedom, and rejected the means God gave him. We can be sure that when God calls someone to embrace Christianity, to be single or married, to be a religious, priest or bishop, God gives each person all the necessary help to attain sanctity in his or her vocation.

Yet, even after their conversion, some of the Apostles were subject to some imperfections, like St. Peter who failed miserably by denying the Lord. Likewise, we see that it is impossible to overcome in a day all the bad habits acquired by caring poorly for our spiritual health. Nonetheless, Our Savior wants you to serve Him just as you are, both by prayer and by actions suited to your state and stage in life. Once you are convinced that you must serve God where you are, and go on doing what you are doing, have a tender affection for your state in life. Be of good heart; cultivate your vineyard with divine love.

As you set out on your daily tasks, place yourself in the hands of God, who desires to help you succeed in your affairs. Believe that God will do what is best for you, provided that, on your part, you employ a gentle diligence. Do not be surprised if the fruits of your labor are slow to appear. If you do the work of God patiently, your labor will not be in vain. Our Lord, who makes houses for the snails and turtles, will lead you well; let Him do it. We must walk faithfully in the way of our Lord, and remain in peace, as much in the

winter of sterility as in the autumn of fruitfulness. Walk joyously, then, in your vocation with confidence in Divine Providence.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Presentation of the Lord

February 2, 2014

In today's Gospel we experience Mary and Joseph presenting the infant Jesus, the son of God, in the Temple. St. Francis de Sales notes:

The Eastern Rite calls this feast the "Presentation of the Son of God in the Temple," because on this day Mary and Joseph went up to Jerusalem to present the only Son of God in the Temple of God. On this occasion, we encounter different types of persons found in the Church of God coming together. In the Temple, with Mary and Joseph, we find Simeon and Anna, a prophetess and widow, both good and faithful servants, and Our Lord, who is God and man. (Sermons 2:172-3)

On this day the Son of God is offered to His Father. This offering is beautifully represented with lighted candles to remind us of when Mary entered the Temple carrying in her arms her Son, who is Light of the world. Today when Christians carry lighted candles in their hands it is to testify that if it were possible they would carry Our Lord in their arms as did Mary and Simeon. (Sermons 2:173)

The glorious St. Simeon was very happy to carry the Savior in his arms. We can bear Him on our shoulders if we willingly endure and suffer with a good heart all that it pleases God to send us, however difficult and heavy be the charge and burden that God places upon our shoulder, like some saints. (Sermons, 2:187)

We can carry Our Savior in our arms as St. Simeon and Mary did. We do this when we endure with love the labors and pains He sends us, that is to say, when the love that we bear makes us find God's yoke easy and pleasing, so that we love these pains and labors, gather sweetness in the midst of bitterness. If we carry Him this way, He will, without doubt, Himself carry us. (Sermons, 2:188)

Oh, how happy we shall be if we allow ourselves to be carried by this dear Lord, and if we carry Him on our shoulders and in our arms, abandoning ourselves entirely to Him and letting Him lead us where He pleases! Leave yourselves, then, in the arms of His Divine Providence, submitting yourselves in what concerns His Law and disposing yourselves to endure all the pains and suffering that may come to you in this life. When you have done this you will find that the hardest and most painful things will be rendered sweet and agreeable to you, and you will share the happiness experienced by St. Simeon and Anna, the prophetess. Try only to imitate them in this life and you will bless the Savior and be blessed by Him in Heaven, together with these glorious saints. (Sermons, 2:188)

In imitating Simeon and Anna, we will be able to see beyond the vicissitudes of our present life and experience the reign of God in our midst.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 9, 2014

Today's readings remind us that we are the light of the world. For St. Francis de Sales, this means sharing our life in Christ with others in order to glorify God:

Just as Jesus enlightened the world with the radiance of His life, we too must do likewise with our lives. You ought to feel honored in being chosen for this mission. Consider the nobility and excellence of being human. You are endowed with the gift of understanding that knows this visible world and that there is a God, most good and most indescribable. You know there is an eternity. You also know what manner is best designed for living well in this visible world so that you may enjoy God for all eternity. Moreover, you have a most noble will that can love God and your neighbor. Look into your heart and behold how generous it is. God's love in you calls you to love others.

We can never love our neighbor too much, provided God's love holds first place in our heart. The image of God in all of us is our most powerful motive for loving each other. Loving our neighbor gives us the opportunity to do much for God. Do not say I am not virtuous enough or I have no talent to speak well. That does not matter. Go ahead. Do what you have to do. God will tell you what to say and do. If ever you have fear, say to yourself: "The Lord will provide." Our heart finds rest solely in God, who cares for us.

Do not worry that you are not producing the fruit you intend. You will only be asked if you have faithfully cultivated well these barren and arid lands. Others will have a more abundant life by the example you give them. Go, hence, in simplicity and filled with courage. Our Savior will be with you always as long as you work for God's glory. Just as the stars are hidden in the sunlight, so 'Our life is hidden in Christ with God.' Walking in God's Light, and sharing our abundance of God's love in us, we are light of the world.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales)

Salesian Sunday Reflection ***Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time*** ***February 16, 2014***

Today the Responsorial Psalm tells us to "Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord." St. Francis de Sales elaborates on this intention:

How do we "follow the law of the LORD" so as to live well? First, we must purify all our intentions as far as we can. We must make a firm purpose to use the day well for the intention of living as best we can in conformity with God's ways. Anticipate what tasks, transactions and occasions for serving God you may meet today. What temptations will you be exposed to, such as anger, self-centered love, or some other irregularities? Carefully prepare yourself to avoid, resist, and overcome whatever might hinder you from authentically living Jesus.

To follow the law of the Lord, first make a holy resolution to grow in the love Jesus exemplified. To prepare yourself to put this resolution into practice, ask our Savior to help you make the best use of the means available to you to grow in holy love, and serve Him. Admit that you alone cannot carry out your decision to avoid evil and do the good that God desires of you. Hold your heart in your hands, and offer it with your good desires to Our Savior. Ask Him to take your heart under His protection and strengthen it so to grow in His authentic love.

To follow the law of the Lord, train yourself to pray. Receive the sacraments often. As you perform the important tasks of your vocation, never forget to practice humility, gentleness, patience, and simplicity, virtues that grow like flowers at the foot of the Cross.

As you care for your family with all the diligence required, bring these souls to love God by infusing good inspirations into their hearts. Great opportunities to serve God rarely present themselves but little ones are frequent. As you carry out your responsibilities so that they give glory to God, all your activities, even eating, drinking, sleeping or recreation, will be done in the name of God, who leads you to authentic wholeness through Jesus Christ.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales)

Salesian Sunday Reflection
Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
February 23, 2014

In today's Gospel Jesus calls us to a higher love. Jesus calls us to forgive and love our enemies! Clearly, this is no small task. St. Francis de Sales stresses that perhaps the best way to be instruments of God's merciful, forgiving love is to first accept that same divine merciful and forgiving love ourselves.

Truly in no way must we lose heart. For even though we are weak, our weakness is not nearly as great as God's mercy toward us, who desire to respond to God's love. All of us are subject to some passion or changes and ups and downs. Do not worry about these feelings. Persevere in your call to holiness. In all good faith, you are trying to do all for God. It is God's merciful love that constantly transforms us, so let us do what we can.

First thing in the morning, prepare your heart to be at peace. Then take great care throughout the day to frequently call your heart back to that peace. And as it were, take your heart in your hand. If you happen to do something that you regret, do not be astonished or upset. Acknowledge your failing. Quietly place yourself before God, and try to regain your gentle composure. Say to your soul: "There we have made a mistake, but let's go on now and be more careful." Each time you fall do the same. No matter how frail and weak you feel, remember that the divine Craftsman delights in putting up magnificent buildings with badly twisted pieces of wood that are good for nothing.

When you are inwardly peaceful, don't miss an opportunity to perform as many acts of gentleness as you can—and as frequently as you can—no matter how small these acts may seem. For as our Lord says: "To the person who is faithful in little things, greater ones will be given."

Walk very simply along the way our Lord shows you. Don't worry. For if little chicks feel perfectly safe when they are under their mother's wings, how secure should the children of God feel under God's protection! God's merciful love is eternal.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales, esp. Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal: Letters of Spiritual Direction, J. Power, W. Wright, Eds. P).

Salesian Sunday Reflection
Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time
March 2, 2014

In the midst of our daily concerns Jesus challenges us in today's Gospel to do our level best to avoid being worried or anxious. Jesus invites us to have complete trust and confidence in him in the midst of the ups and downs, the losses and gains of everyday life. St. Francis de Sales offers his understanding of the basis for our having childlike trust in God:

The visible sun touches all things with its life-giving warmth, and like a universal lover, it gives them the vigor needed to grow. In the same way God's love animates the human heart. There is no person who can hide from God's love. God desires to love us and in turn desires our love.

It is God's eternal and faithful love that draws us to a faith-filled life. God is at the gate, not merely knocking, but calling to our soul and awakening it: "Come, arise, make haste." God even goes about crying in the street: "Return to me! Live!" Our divine Savior faithfully shows that his mercy surpasses his justice, and that his redemption is copious. He wishes all to be made whole and that none should perish. "I have loved you with an everlasting love and I will build you again." These are God's faithful words and by them God promises that when our Savior came into the world, He established a New Kingdom in his Church.

Yet, the Holy Spirit, a fountain of living water that flows into every part of our heart so as to spread God's love, has no wish to enter into us, unless it be with our heart's consent. We are never deprived of God's love, but we can deprive God's love of our cooperation. God never takes away our gifts. It is we who turn away our hearts from God. Thus we must be attentive to our advancement in the love we owe God. For the love that God brings to us will never be wanting. Let us respond to this divine love that the Spirit of Jesus desires to flood our hearts with. Then we will experience a new life in the Spirit that helps us to face the realities of life without inordinate worry or overwhelming anxiety.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

First Sunday of Lent

March 9, 2014

Today's Gospel focuses on the temptations of Christ. St. Francis de Sales notes: Our Lord did not seek temptation. Yet, He allowed the Spirit to lead Him into the desert to be tempted to show us how we ought to resist it. No one who comes to serve God can avoid temptations. But no one should seek temptation. Still, if the Spirit leads us to a place where we encounter it, we must have confidence in the Spirit to strengthen us.

As soon as you are conscious of being tempted, be like children when they see a bear out in the country. They immediately run into the arms of their father or mother, or at least call to them for help and protection. Turn in the same way to God, for we must not trust in our own strength or courage to overcome evil. If the temptation continues, turn your thoughts to some good, commendable activities. When good thoughts enter and find a place in your heart, they will drive away evil thoughts.

No matter what temptations may come to you, and no matter what pleasure accompanies them, as long as you refuse consent, they do not offend God. Let the enemies of our salvation stand continually at our heart's door so as to gain entrance. As long as this act of refusal remains in our heart, we may rest assured that divine love, the life of the soul, remains within us. Through continual prayer, the sacraments, and confidence in God, our strength will return and we will live a healthy and happy life.

Walk confidently, then, and remain in peace. Live well in gentleness, simplicity and humility. If you believe in God and the truth of God's word, nothing can harm you. Resolve not to sin, but do not be astonished or troubled when you do fall into sin. We must confide ourselves to the goodness of God who, for all that, does not love us less.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Second Sunday of Lent

March 16, 2014

This Sunday we climb Mount Tabor with Jesus. Here, we get a glimpse of the glory of Jesus, whose divine love is always transforming us. St. Francis de Sales notes: Jesus, through his Transfiguration, shows us a little spark of the eternal bliss that is awaiting us. Our Lord is transfigured to make us desire eternal happiness in its entirety.

Our gentle Savior wishes to make use of his divine attractions and inspirations to draw us to His most pure love. When God gives us faith, God speaks to our mind through inspirations. These first perceptions of God's love are poured into us through the Holy Spirit. In hearts that give their consent, God, little by little, gently strengthens the holy love that comes from these inspirations.

The disciples experienced such delight on Mount Tabor that they wanted to stay there. Let us also place all our affections on Our Savior and aspire to the happiness that God has prepared for us. God has given us all the necessary means to attain the happiness of eternal glory. We too are climbing Mount Tabor, since we are firmly resolved to serve Our Savior well, and to love His divine Goodness. Yet, as it often happens when we begin to grow in holiness, we find our affections are still entangled with useless loves. Don't be upset. It is an opportunity to practice virtue. You have a great desire for holiness. Nourish this desire and let it grow each day. If you stumble, cry out to Our Lord who desires your love, and will hold you by the hand. Without growing weary, let us climb Mount Tabor toward the heavenly vision our Savior gave us.

Walk joyously, then, among the difficulties of this passing life. Embrace all the challenges that you encounter along the path that God has marked out for you, and be at peace. Transformation is the true mark of a divine visitation. May you always desire it!

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Third Sunday of Lent

March 23, 2014

Today's readings speak to the catechumens. Moses experiences a deeper faith in God's Word. The Samaritan woman experiences a new life in Christ. St. Francis de Sales notes: There are two different lives represented in us: the "old life" and the "new life." In the "old life" we live according to the faults and infirmities we have contracted through our human condition and culture. We are like the eagle that drags its old feathers along the ground, unable to take flight. We must let go of the old life, 'burying it in the waters of holy baptism or penance' if we wish to enter into the "new life."

In the "new life" we live according to the love, favors, and will of our Savior. Our new life in Christ is salutary and redeems us. It is living, lively and life giving. It causes us to soar aloft for we are 'alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord'. Our new life is like the eagle also. Having shed its old feathers, the eagle takes on new ones. Grown young again, it flies off in its new powers. Alas, some tender souls newly born out of penitential ashes may have difficulty soaring about in the open air of sacred love. While they are living, animated and winged by love, they may still have habits that their old life left in them. While we remain in this world, we can be bent either by divine love or useless loves.

When we choose to pursue useless loves, we become hesitant to approach Our Lord. This is normal. If we

have offended a friend, we feel shame. But we must never live in shame. Our growth in divine love is such that an opening always remains for sudden assaults of other objects and apparent goods. We experience hesitancy in turning to God in our frailties so that we may cast ourselves even more into God's merciful arms. Let us have the courage then to discard the old life. Let us grow in confidence to live a new life in Christ Jesus, who desires to deepen our love so that we may be eternally loving.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Fourth Sunday of Lent

March 30, 2014

Today, Jesus reminds us that He is the world's Light that produces goodness, justice and truth. We are urged to live in His Light. St. Francis de Sales notes:

The human mind finds its entire satisfaction in discovering and knowing the truth of things. The greater the truth, the greater the delight. Yet, our human condition makes us skillful in the pursuit of honors, riches and power. Experience teaches us daily that these useless loves make us prone to turn from the truth, rather than consider the truth of God's love. God's love has us think on the truth of a Paradise filled with eternal happiness.

Our hearts are refreshed and energized with holy love as we accept in faith the truth of the teachings of Jesus. It is a sign of interior conversion when God's goodness gives us light to see our blindness. We come to know ourselves as children of the Light. When we remove the obstacles that stop us from loving God, we become capable of loving one another, as God desires us to love each other. A human flaw discovered is half healed, for we have received an insight that frees us of our blindness. Nonetheless, we must be patient at the sight of our faults. We must learn to acknowledge them calmly and without fuss. Nothing is more favorable to the growth of those "weeds" than our anxiety to get rid of them. Stay always on the road to holiness and these imperfections will grow weak.

Our Savior held us in his hand and guided our life when we did not want to be completely His. Since we now desire ardently only to do God's will, don't you think He desires to protect His little lambs that strayed from the gentle Shepherd? Faithfully focus, then, on nourishing God's gift of conversion with awe and confidence. Let us make God's grace effective in our lives by persevering in our holy resolutions and good desires. We then will live in the Light of Christ, producing truth, justice and goodness.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Fifth Sunday of Lent

April 6, 2014

Today Jesus, as He raises Lazarus from the dead, urges us to live and believe in Him. St. Francis de Sales expands on what it means to live in the Spirit of Jesus:

Jesus desires to give life to those who are dead to attest to God's love for us. He speaks to those who are deadened by sin to affirm that all can hear the voice of God through the Spirit. The Spirit gently awakens us to a new human life. No matter how weakened our hearts may be by sin, the Spirit strengthens them with an invigorating and enlivening holy love. The Holy Spirit is like a fountain of living water that flows into every

part of our hearts so as to spread its divine love there.

All our affections follow love. In love we desire, rejoice, hope and despair, fear, hate, avoid things, feel sad, grow angry, and exult. Love is the foundation of our life lived in the Spirit of Jesus. When divine love reigns in our hearts, it transforms all other affections we have chosen so that we may live, walk, and work in the Spirit of Jesus. The Spirit has no wish to enter our hearts without our permission. The Spirit will flood us with divine love only with our cooperation. So what must we do to nourish a spirit where the Spirit of Jesus can dwell? When reason guides our appetites, feelings and emotions, we are then living in the “spirit.” We live in the ‘flesh’ when our appetites, feelings and emotions determine our actions. Let us unambiguously choose a life in the spirit.

If a sick man takes only part of his required medicine, it partly heals him. So also with divine love, to the extent we consent to embrace it, the Spirit floods us with sacred love. Thus we must not only receive God’s love at our heart’s door, but also into our heart’s consent. We must nurture this love guided by holy reason and wisdom. When steeped with the love of the Spirit, our hearts produce sacred actions that tend toward immortal glory. Let us consent to a new human life in the Spirit of Jesus who raises us to eternal glory.

(Adapted from the Treatise on the Love of God)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Palm/Passion Sunday

April 13, 2014

Today we walk with Jesus to Mount Calvary. We experience His self-giving love for us as He dies on the Cross. We too are called to imitate Him. St. Francis de Sales notes:

Contrary to the wisdom of the culture, true Christians who are seeking holiness, place all their perfection in the folly of the Cross. All the saints became wise in their folly to follow Jesus. They suffered contempt and humiliations that came from the culturally wise. Yet, they washed their feet and their hands in the sacred waters of forgiveness. We too must cleanse our works and affections so as to give glory to God.

Like the saints, we too must go to Mount Calvary with Our Lord and endure labors and persecutions. When exterior or interior troubles overtake you, take your good resolutions, and like a mother, who rescues her child from danger, put them in our Lord’s wounds, asking Him to protect both you and them. Wait there in the sacred shelter until the storm has passed. With God’s help you will make great progress. As Jesus shows us, to be able to sin is not power, but powerlessness. Even the persecutions of Jesus’ enemies were not powerful enough to destroy Our Savior’s incomparable solid and constant love for all. Such ought to be our love for one another: firm, ardent, solid and persevering.

When we consent to love divinely by letting go of our own willfulness, we are like migrating birds. We migrate from a winter world where one meets cold and icy hearts, to springtime where God’s love is the sun that gives warmth to the human heart. This Sacred Fire fills us with a self-giving love that is infinite. This love never says: “Enough is sufficient.” Our Savior loved us with a love so ardent and persevering, that death could not cool His love. Divine love is stronger than death. May we remain at the foot of Our Savior’s Cross so as to be nourished by His self-giving love that we are called to imitate.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales, especially Sermons)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Easter Sunday

April 20, 2014

Today we experience Jesus' victory over death. What joy in knowing that God's love is stronger than death! St. Francis de Sales notes:

The resurrection of Jesus adorns us with a new life of glory. The Heart of our gentle Savior was so aflame with desire for our salvation that He generously shared with us His glory. In His redemption, Our Savior's love, stronger than death, overflows, melts our hearts, and transforms us. In coming into this world, He raised our nature higher than all the angels, and when transformed, He makes us so like Himself that we may even say we resemble God. In becoming one of us, Our Savior took on our likeness and gave us His.

Consider the nature God has given to you. It is the highest in this visible world. It is capable of eternal life and of being perfectly united to God. How do we nurture this union? We must begin by loving the divine resemblance of the Creator first in ourselves, then in others. When Mary Magdalene came to the tomb she didn't recognize our Savior because He was dressed as a gardener. She didn't see Him in the form that she wanted to see Him in. Isn't it our Lord in gardener's clothes that we encounter in the ordinary trials that we daily face? Let us open the door of our heart so our Savior may saturate our hearts with divine love. Then we can begin to serve the Gardener as He desires.

Our Savior wishes to plant in our garden many flowers, but to His liking. It is for us to cultivate our souls well, and faithfully attend to them. When spring comes it renews itself with flowers that bring us joy. A day will come when we too will rise to a life of eternal joy. Let us fervently aspire to this most delightful Paradise. Let us travel on to that blessed land that is promised to us, putting away all that leads us astray or delays us on this journey. Let us walk then in the garden of the risen Jesus. It is a day to rejoice!

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales, especially the Introduction to the Devout Life).

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Second Sunday of Easter

April 27, 2014

Today as Jesus appears to His Disciples after His resurrection, we experience Him in His glorious immortal body. St. Francis de Sales notes:

Alas how the faith of Jesus' Apostles is shaken after His crucifixion! Assembled in a room with closed doors, they are filled with fear. Then Jesus enters, stands in their midst, and greets them: *Peace be with you*. Showing them the signs and marks of the reconciliation of humanity with God, He says *see my hands and my side*. Why does He do this? To bolster their vacillating faith. Without the presence of our Savior, they felt timid and lacked strength. Such is the case when one is without God. They were afraid. Like a ship tossed in a storm without a pilot, such was this poor boat. Our Lord appears to his disciples to bring relief to their fear.

What joy and celebration the Apostles experience when they see their Master in their midst. Jesus affirms their vacillating faith, assures their daunting hope and illumines their sacred love of God. Faith, hope, and holy love are necessary while we remain on earth. In heaven only holy love lives on. Especially with his Disciples during these days after his resurrection, and particularly in the apparition recounted today, Our Savior only does one thing: teach us that it is necessary to believe, to hope and to love.

He comes to bring safety in this place besieged of fear. He takes our miseries and ennobles them. Do you have need of strength? Here are my hands. Do you have need of a heart? Here is mine. His power gently gives us power. A living faith knows its power. Vivified by holy love, a living faith serves God as a faithful servant. May we be rooted in faith, joyful hope and fervent in holy love, in which we will rejoice for all eternity.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Third Sunday of Easter

May 4, 2014

Today, two of Jesus' disciples experience the dawning of faith in the risen Jesus as they meet Him on the road to Emmaus. St Francis de Sales notes:

Jesus, appearing as a pilgrim, encounters two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus. He questions them about their conversation on His resurrection but they do not recognize Him. After they confess the doubt they are experiencing concerning His Resurrection, Jesus is able to instruct and enlighten them with His words. Then as Jesus breaks bread with them, they recognize their risen Savior and believe in Him.

It is a very good sign when a person listens willingly to the divine word. We are in continual communication with God, who never ceases to speak to our hearts through inspirations and sacred movements. God gives to each of us the inspirations needed to live, work, and preserve our life in the spirit.

When God gives us faith, God enters into our soul and pleasantly proposes what we must believe through inspiration. Yet our soul amid obscurity and darkness only gets a glimpse of those truths. It is like the earth when covered with fog. We can't see the sun, but we see a little of the sun's light. This obscure light of faith enters into our spirit, and step by step brings us to love the beauty of God's truth in Jesus Christ, and believe in it.

Faith is the best friend of our human spirit. Faith assures us of God's infinite goodness and thus gives us sufficient reason to love God with all our power. We must nurture well what we hear inwardly and outwardly of the divine word so that it strengthens us. Be devoted then to the word of God whether you hear it in familiar conversation with spiritual friends or in sermons. Be like the disciples. With joy, let the words of Our Savior nourish your heart as a precious hope-filled healing ointment.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Fourth Sunday of Easter

May 11, 2014

Today we experience Jesus as the Good Shepherd. He invites us to hear His voice so that we "might have life and have it in abundance." St. Francis de Sales notes:

Our Good Shepherd gathers us all around Himself to keep us always under His protection. He tenderly nourishes us with His love. So loving is God's hand as it handles our heart, bringing it strength without depriving us of freedom. Those who hear well His voice never lack holy inspirations in order to live life in

abundance and to fulfill in a holy way their responsibilities.

To hear well we must listen. To hear the word of God, we must first be attentive to it by having an open heart. To listen to God's word we must learn it well and carry out what we are taught. When manna fell from Heaven, the Hebrews rose each morning to collect it before sunrise. They ate and swallowed it so as to be nourished and strengthened. We too must digest well God's word to make it part of our own being.

Thus, each day nourish yourself with a little spiritual reading that affirms God's word and sends you on your way to your everlasting welfare. Let the word of God that you hear, speak to you throughout the day. Put that into practice and leave the rest to Our Savior, who nurtures your true needs. If we are to have life in abundance eternally, we must hear the voice of Our Shepherd, who guides us if only we let Him.

Since we easily mismanage ourselves, Our Shepherd wants to teach us how to have life in abundance through loving His voice rather than the voice of strangers, who easily lead us astray. True love is when we live in light of Our Savior's love, rather than the selfish loves that the culture stresses. How happy we will be if we remain in the Shepherd's presence, faithfully listening to and living His voice!

(Adapted from the Sermons of St. Francis de Sales, L. Fiorelli, Ed.)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 18, 2014

Today Jesus implores us to believe in Him. He is the life-giving Truth who gives us strength to do great works. St. Francis de Sales notes:

There is nothing stronger than truth. To live in truth is to lead a life entirely conformed to simple faith. So great is the strength of faith that it fears nothing. People indeed have this strength of faith. Yet, because we do not always realize that this is in us, we often fear and become weak. The strength of faith consists partly in knowing its power that says we can do everything in God who strengthens us. Our strength of faith has us acknowledge the truth of our goodness and dignity as persons who are capable of being united to God, who is Truth. Our faith in being united to God sustains us amidst so many great weaknesses, and gives us strength to become authentic persons.

The aim of Christian authenticity is to transcend our own self-centered spirit and find our true spirit in Christ. Our Lord came into this world to give us life. Yet, as long as we live, we will have some self-seeking interests that deny us His life-giving way. Little by little, let us leave our affections of these lesser things and aspire to the happiness that God desires for us. The greater fervor we have in letting go of lesser loves, the more God's love can do great works in us. The more we let go of our selfish desires and yield to God's desire for us, the more our human spirit will be free from interior restlessness.

Bees are restless while they are without a queen. We too are restless until we give birth to Our Savior in our hearts. Let us remain very near to this sacred Savior who gathers us all around Himself so as to keep us always under His most holy protection. He is like the queen bee that cares so much for her swarm she never leaves her hive without being surrounded by all her little people. Great is the confidence that Our Redeemer wants us to place in His care for us. All who trust in Him always reap the fruits of this confidence. Imitating His truthful, life-giving way has us do great works indeed!

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 25, 2014

Today's readings remind us that to love Jesus is to keep His word and to think, feel and act in accordance with His word. St. Francis de Sales stresses that we learn to keep His word and live Jesus through a life of prayer and virtue.

Prayer places our mind in the brilliance of God's light and exposes our will to the warmth of God's love. Prayer is a stream of holy water that makes the plants of our good desires grow green and flourish. Each day set aside some time to meditate. If possible meditate early in the morning, when your mind is less distracted and fresher after a night's rest. To live Jesus, ask God to help you to pray from your heart.

When you meditate on Jesus' life, you will learn his ways and form your actions after the pattern of his life. Gradually accustom yourself to pass with ease and tranquility from prayer to your various duties even though your duties appear far different from the affections you received in prayer. The lawyer must be able to pass from prayer to pleading cases, the merchant to commerce, and the parent to the care of children. Out of our meditation experience must flow our daily actions, which involve a life of virtue.

Each person must practice in a special manner the virtues needed for the kind of life he or she is called to. In practicing the virtues we should prefer the one most conformable to our duties rather than the one most agreeable to our taste. As a rule comets seem bigger than stars because comets are closer to us. Hence, comets seem bigger to us. Similarly, we esteem certain virtues merely because they appear greater to us. Yet, we must choose the virtues needed to counteract our habitual failings and weaknesses so as to advance in holy love. For instance, if assaulted by anger practice gentleness, no matter how small this virtuous act may seem. True virtue has no limits. If we act out of reverence for God and in good faith, God will raise us up to heights that are truly great so that we may live Jesus even when we suffer for doing what is good.

Of course, the Good News in today's Gospel is that we are not on our own – we are not left to our own devices – in our attempts to Live + Jesus. We have Christ's promise of the help, the guidance and the companionship of the Holy Spirit!

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

The Ascension of the Lord

June 1, 2014

Today we experience Jesus in His risen body ascending into the fullness of God's kingdom. St. Francis de Sales notes:

The mystery of the Ascension astounds us. If we understand the Ascension, the most abundant treasure of Jesus' gifts will be given to us. His body, no longer physical but spiritual, penetrates the heavens and is present in the Eucharist. He gives Himself to all those who wish to receive and embrace Him. In a hidden way, He is transforming all.

God's love is continually divinizing our humanity. Our life of divine love places an obligation on us to love our bodies properly. They constitute part of us as a human person, and will share in eternal happiness. We as Christians must love our bodies as living images of our incarnate Savior. We must also love this divine

image in each other.

When we begin to live a life “hidden in God with Jesus Christ,” we live out of our true interior self. We live a new life of divine love. Our selfish loves are in the service of divine love. How did we achieve this? Strong sunlight causes the light of the stars to disappear. Similarly, when we set up a stronger affection for imperishable, eternal things, we extinguish our inordinate love of ephemeral things. The stronger more powerful fire of God’s love extinguishes our excessive love of lesser things.

Jesus’ Resurrection-Ascension empowers us to live this new life of holy love that is contrary to all the opinions and rules of our materialistically oriented culture. Christ’s love is the wellspring of our love. Nothing urges on a person’s heart so much as love. Let us walk joyously among the difficulties of this passing life, since all is perfected and brought to perfection in the eternal beatitude of Heaven. Then Our Savior will glorify us with His splendor, for we loved all things, not for ourselves, but for the glory of God.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Pentecost

June 8, 2014

Today we read of Jesus giving His Spirit to the disciples. They are given the power to continue His saving mission for the whole human family. St. Francis de Sales notes:

The Holy Spirit is like a fountain of living water that flows into our hearts so as to spread divine love in us. Divine love is something infinitely more than all other forms of love. The love that the Spirit gives empowers us to serve God. Our works that flow from the Spirit’s love are vigorous and virtuous, and grow like the mustard seed. It is a wonderful thing that this Divine Spirit does not hesitate to dwell in us.

Still the Holy Spirit has no wish to enter into us unless it is with our free consent. God asks first for our heart. To the extent we open our heart to God’s love, so God continues to increase sacred love in us. Our Savior has promised that if you take the trouble to row your boat, He will lead you to another place full of life. He desires infinitely that you take the oar in hand and row. He makes every effort to make you do it. He commands, excites, and goads us. If we wish to sail on the little boat of the Church amidst the bitter waters of this world, He will lead us to eternal life. Yet, He refuses to lead us there without our help because by nature, we are made to be His cooperators.

It is not enough to feel an inspiration from God. We must give it our consent. Even if we give just a little of our consent to it, what happiness results! The divine inspiration, given to us by the Spirit, catches hold of us, mingles its action with our consent, animates our feeble movements, and enlivens our frail cooperation. God’s loving inspirations leave us complete freedom to follow or reject them. Yet, God’s love makes water flow from rocks, and makes persecutors into preachers. Let us do then what lies in our power to do. Let the Holy Spirit direct our actions and affections to forgiveness, which leads to our spiritual wholeness. Then we may spread the Good News to those we encounter each day.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

The Most Holy Trinity

June 15, 2014

Today we celebrate the Trinity, the three Persons in One God. St. Francis de Sales notes:

The love of the Three Persons in the Trinity overflows into creation and especially the human family. Humanity was united to the person of God the Son so that humanity might eternally enjoy the treasures of His infinite glory. Only in and through Christ are we able to participate in the Trinity's union of pure love.

Our Savior does not call us to the identical union of the Three Persons, but we ought to be united together as purely and perfectly as possible. When we respond to His call, our Redeemer so completely transforms us into His image. It almost seems as if there is no longer any difference between Him and us. He repairs us all equally. Without exception He makes us like Himself. Through the strength of His sacred love, He succeeded in forgetting Himself but not His creatures. How great was the flame of love that burned in the heart of our gentle Savior! We too are capable of such heart-felt love.

Jesus spoke of our union of hearts in daring terms. The quality of our love for one another must be similar to that of the love of the Three Persons. This seems too good to be true. Yet, it is impossible to love God and not love the image of God in our neighbor. Our Savior loves us so dearly that He makes us His adopted children. We too must show that we are truly His children, by loving one another dearly in all goodness of heart.

The children of this culture, who live only for their material treasures, are all separated from one another because their hearts are in different places. But the children of God, have their hearts 'where their treasure is'. Having but one treasure that is the same God, they are always joined and united together. How much at peace and free we will be if our love for one another reflects the overflowing love of the Trinity!

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales, especially, The Sermons of St. Francis de Sales, L. Fiorelli, ed.)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Body & Blood of Christ

June 22, 2014

Today we celebrate the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Here are some of St. Francis de Sales thoughts on the Eucharist.

So that we might intimately be united with God's goodness, Jesus instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist. Our Savior desires us to be united to Him by a union so strong and close that we are marked with His features. In receiving the Eucharist our Lord carries us and does in us works altogether performed by Him. Whoever turns to the Eucharist frequently, and in a holy manner, builds up his or her spiritual health. If fruits that are tender and most subject to decay, such as strawberries, can easily be preserved a whole year in sugar and honey, it is no wonder that our hearts, no matter how frail and weak, are preserved by the spiritually real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

After you have received our Lord in the Eucharist, talk with Him about your inmost concerns. Reflect that He is within you and has come there for your happiness. Make Him as welcome as you possibly can. Conduct yourself in such a manner that by your actions all may know that God is with you.

Receive the Eucharist often. Two kinds of people ought to receive the Eucharist often: the strong and the weak. The strong, lest they become weak, and the weak that they may become strong. The sick that they may be cured, those in good health, that they may not fall sick. Persons who are involved in many worldly affairs need it. Those who labor much and are heavily burdened need to eat solid food and often.

In the Eucharist our Savior advances, strengthens and nourishes us with His self-giving love. Since Christ gives Himself totally to us in this Divine Sacrament, ought we not to give ourselves totally to Him, who is at once both Gift and Giver?

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales)

Salesian Sunday Reflection
Saints Peter and Paul: Apostles
June 29, 2014

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Apostles, Peter and Paul. Today's readings remind us of the cost of discipleship. To become a disciple of Jesus is to grow in God's love. This process of growing in God's love takes faithfulness. St. Francis de Sales notes:

To truly serve God we must come to serve God purely for love of God's will. Sometimes we have no comfort in being loving. We toil without pleasure since we see neither the good of our labor nor the satisfaction of those for whom we labor. We are like deaf singers. We do not hear our own voices and cannot enjoy the delightful melody of our song.

At times like this, we must show unconquerable faithfulness to our Savior. In the midst of interior trials we don't always experience our love for God. The night before St. Peter was to be martyred, an angel came into his prison, awoke Peter, made him rise and dress. The angel then led Peter into the city and left him in full freedom. Peter, awake from the start, thought he imagined these events. His mind could not grasp the greatness of what happened to him. He finally realized that an angel had rescued him.

So it is with a soul that is burdened with interior trials. It does many good things as in a dream. It hardly knows the good deeds that have actually taken place. We have the power to believe, to hope in, and to love God, yet we do not always have the strength to see clearly if we do. What are we to do in this state? We can only place ourselves in God's hands as did St. Peter and Paul. While they died a physical martyrdom, we die a martyrdom of love. Our willfulness is always being martyred as we persevere in serving God through holy love. Like the first Disciples of Jesus, are we not capable of paying the cost of being a disciple of Jesus, whose love is stronger than death?

(Adapted from St. Francis de Sales, Treatise on the Love of God)

Salesian Sunday Reflection
14th Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 6, 2014

Today's Gospel speaks of our need to be gentle and humble of heart. St. Francis de Sales notes:

Take care that gentleness and humility are found within your heart. Little by little, bring your quick mind around to being patient, gentle, humble, and affable in the midst of the pettiness, childishness and imperfections of others. Humility and gentleness are true and good when they preserve us from the inflammation and swelling that injuries usually cause in our hearts.

One of the best exercises in gentleness that we can perform is in ourselves. Reason requires that we must be displeased and sorry whenever we commit a fault. Yet when we do so, we must refrain from bitter, gloomy, spiteful and emotional displeasure with ourselves. We correct ourselves much better by calm, steady

repentance than by harshness. These fits of anger against ourselves spring from our self-centered love that is disturbed and upset at seeing it is imperfect. If I had seriously committed a fault, I would correct my heart in a reasonable, compassionate way and say: “Alas my poor heart, here we are, fallen into the pit we were so firmly resolved to avoid! Well, we must get up again and leave it forever. Let us start out again on the way by trusting in God. God will help us and we will do better.”

When you are inwardly peaceful, perform as many acts of gentleness as you can, no matter how small and do all you can to develop a spirit of compassion. As long as reason rules and peaceably chastises, corrects, and warns, even though firmly and exactly, everyone loves and approves it. If we find ourselves aroused to anger we must call for God’s help like the apostles when the wind and the storm tossed them about. This life is only a journey to the happy life to come. We must march as companions united in gentleness, peace and love.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales, especially, J. Power & W. Wright, Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal, Paulist Press.

Salesian Sunday Reflection

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 13, 2014

In today’s Gospel, Jesus tells us that if we understand His word with our heart, it will bear abundant fruit. St. Francis de Sales expands on this thought:

God’s word is so powerful and efficacious that it gives life to those in need. What a good sign it is for a Christian to take pleasure in listening to God’s word, and to belong totally to God! Those who come to abandon all to God without any reserve are like the sunflower that is not content with turning its flowers, leaves and stem toward the sun, but by some hidden wonder, it also turns its underground root. To love God completely means we love God who commands, and we love the thing commanded.

Jesus, who died for love of us, wants us to listen to His word so as to make it our own. After we have listened attentively to the Word of God, let us open our hearts and be receptive to understanding what we hear. Understanding well God’s word helps us to keep it. Our actions ought to be congruent with our words. That is, the carrying out of our good resolutions ought to immediately follow our words. Let us implore the Divine mercy to strengthen us to make effective what our heart desires and approves.

Our Lord makes it very clear that His word is effective in us when we embrace His will for us. This does not mean that we feel “good” or “holy” in doing God’s will. What matters is that we hold in reverence God’s word and keep to the intention of profiting from it. Divine Goodness is satisfied with this. God is content with little, and focuses on the intentions in our heart, not our feelings. However, those, who listen to the word of God with a particular attention and desire for it, speak of the victories over themselves and their weaknesses. Our entire good consists in accepting the truth of Our Savior’s word. Let us persevere in living that truth so we may have life in abundance.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 20, 2014

In today's readings we are reminded how God's justice and mercy work together to care for the human family. St. Francis de Sales notes:

God is Goodness itself. This infinite goodness of God has two hands: one is mercy, the other is justice. Justice and mercy can only thrive where there is goodness. God uses mercy to have us embrace what is good. Justice uproots whatever prevents us from experiencing the effects of God's goodness. It makes us shun evil.

Those who have a true desire to serve our Lord and flee from evil should not torment themselves with the thought of death or divine judgment. The holy fear of those who love God is a filial reverence for God. They fear displeasing God simply because God is their most kind and loving father. A good child does not obey his father because of his power to punish or disinherit him, but simply because he is his loving and caring father. Holy fear strengthens our human spirit. It is full of confidence in the goodness of God. God's mercy, seeing that we are clothed in "flesh, a wind" that comes and goes, never casts us into total ruin. Our Savior's infinite mercy always bends towards us.

When sinners are most hardened in sin and are living as if there is no God, it is then that our Savior allows them to find His heart full of pity and kind mercy towards them. David, though he offended God, was always nourished in the Heart of leniency and divine mercy. Let us reflect how from eternity God's goodness tenderly cherished us and provided for us all the means to progress in sacred love. Now God provides us the opportunity to do the good that presents itself and to persevere in the present trial that is upon us. The greatness of God's mercy shines forth in the awe-inspiring deeds of Jesus. What a great reason to anchor our hope and confidence completely in God's mercy!

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales)

Salesian Sunday Reflection ***17th Sunday in Ordinary Time*** ***July 27, 2014***

In today's Gospel Jesus tells us that the Kingdom of heaven is worth pursuing at any cost. St. Francis de Sales gives us some practical advice on how to keep advancing in our pursuit of the Kingdom:

All we have to do is nothing more than what we are doing: adore the lovable providence of God, and throw ourselves into God's arms and keeping. Oh, how blessed are they who choose to place themselves in God's hands! To renew and conform ourselves to this choice, we merely need to say that we love only God and love all else for the love of God. This continual aspiration is very helpful in applying all our works to love; it is especially useful for our ordinary little actions in everyday tasks. The tasks required for each person's calling increase divine love, and gild a work of holiness.

Let us be like the valiant woman of the Old Testament. "She puts her hand to strong, generous, and exalted things and yet does not disdain to spin and turn the spindle." Put your hands to strong things, by training yourself in prayer and meditation, receiving the sacraments, bringing souls to love God and infusing good inspirations into their hearts. Perform important works according to your vocation. But never forget your spinning and spindle. That is, practice those little virtues of simplicity, patience, humility and gentleness that grow like flowers when we do little deeds with great love.

The nightingale has no less love for its song when it pauses than when it sings. Similarly, the devout heart has no less love when it turns to external duties than when it prays. In such hearts their silence and their

speech, their work and their rest equally sing with joy-filled love. Their daily prayer life overflows into their daily actions. They seek the Kingdom of God at all cost and it is revealed to them.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales especially his Treatise on the Love of God).

Salesian Sunday Reflection

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 3, 2014

In today's Gospel we experience Jesus using his power to heal and nourish others. We are called to use our gifts to love and care for others. St. Francis de Sales expands on this:

We must love much to help others progress in holiness. Faith, hope and love form the basis of a generous heart. Generosity makes us trust in God's goodness in us. Generosity has us proclaim that we can do anything in God who strengthens us. If commanded by God, a heart that is humble and generous can work miracles. While it is vigilant lest it fall, a heart that has confidence in God gives birth to a generous spirit. In simplicity of heart, a generous spirit sets to work with confidence that God will not fail to give it the power to realize its undertakings.

A generous heart does not rely on its own strength to undertake its tasks. It relies on the gifts God gives it. Thus, we must give great value to the gifts God has given us. They ought to be acknowledged, respected and honored, and used for God's glory. There are some people who have a false humility that prevents them from seeing the good in themselves. True humility is generous and reduces what is false in us. Falseness demeans us and prevents us from esteeming our inherent excellence. Falseness does not wish us to consider the excellence of God in us. We must see that it is pride to refuse the graces God desires to give us. God's gifts obligate us to accept them.

Through esteeming God, the author of our excellence, we come to esteem the hidden spiritual gifts in ourselves and in our neighbor. Our love of self and others has its source in God's love as exemplified in Jesus. Our Savior always preferred us to Himself and does so each time He nourishes us in the Eucharist. Similarly, He wants us to nurture our gifts by using them to love and serve Him with all our heart and all our power.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales, especially, Spiritual Conferences, I. Caneiro, Ed.)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 10, 2014

In today's Gospel Jesus challenges us to take the risk of following Him with ever deeper faith as we are tossed about in the storm of life. St. Francis de Sales speaks similarly:

When fearfully faced with tempests and earthquakes, we make acts of faith and hope. Yet, there is another kind of fear where we find everything difficult and trying. We think more of future difficulties than what we have to do at present. Rise and do not be frightened by the day's work. It is natural that the night is for rest and the day for work.

Let us do three simple things, and we shall have peace. Let us have a very pure intention of seeking, in all things, the honor and glory of God. Then let us do the little we can toward this end. Finally, let us leave to

God the care of all the rest. I have seen few people make progress without experiencing trials, so you must be patient. After the squall, God will send the calm. Children are afraid when they are out of their mother's arms. They feel nothing can harm them if they are holding her hand. Hold God's hand and God will protect you from all, for you are armored with truth and faith.

If you lack courage, be like Peter and cry out, "Lord save me!" Then resume your journey quietly. Often we think we have lost peace because we are afflicted. Yet we have not lost it if we remain totally dependent on God's will, and in no way abandon our responsibilities. Let us carry out our tasks courageously, and you will see that with God's help we will go beyond the reaches of the world, beyond its limits. Trust then in God, and all things will be rendered easy, although at first they may frighten you a little.

Our Lord is called Prince of Peace in the Scriptures. Where He is absolute master, He holds everything in peace. To be at peace in the midst of warfare, to live serenely amid trials: this, indeed, is to imitate the "Prince of Peace."

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales, especially Sermons, ed. L. Fiorelli).

Salesian Sunday Reflection
Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
August 15, 2014

Today, we celebrate the Assumption of Mary. St. Francis de Sales notes:

Holy Tradition teaches us that Mary died and was assumed into heaven in her glorified body. Mary ascended for the honor of her Son and to arouse great holiness in us. She dedicated all of her actions so as to give glory to her Son. Mary also desires that all of our actions glorify her Son.

After her Son's death, the Mother of Jesus was a reliable witness to the truth of His human nature, as well as a light for the faithful who were in deep affliction. With what devotion she must have loved her holy body, as it was the living source of our Savior's body. Yet to serve God better, she too had to rest her weary body so as to restore her strength. Assuredly taking care of our bodies is a most excellent act of charity. As the great St. Augustine said, God's holy love in us places an obligation upon us to love our bodies properly, since they are necessary for good works, constitute part of our person, and will share in eternal happiness.

Indeed, a Christian must love his or her body as a living image of their incarnate Savior, as having issued with him from the same stock, and consequently belonging to him in parentage and blood. Like Mary, we must know our human excellence so as to glorify God through the gifts that God places in us. At the General Resurrection, our mortal bodies will become immortal, and remade like that of Our Lord.

Mary asks us to have her Son reign in our heart. Let us examine the affections of our heart to see that they are in tune, so that like Mary, we can sing of the great things God is doing in us. In all dangers, in all tempests, "Look at this star of the sea, invoke her." With her favor your ship will arrive at port without disaster and without shipwreck.

(Adapted from Sermons of St. Francis de Sales, L. Fiorelli, Ed.)

Salesian Sunday Reflection
20th Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 17, 2014

In today's Gospel we experience the Canaanite woman's deep faith in Jesus. St. Francis de Sales expands on her confident and persevering response of faith in Jesus.

If God gives us no indication of hearing our prayers or of promptly answering them, we lose courage. We cannot persevere in prayer. We quit it completely, then and there. This is not the case with the Canaanite woman. Our Lord at first was paying no attention to her prayer. Since He did not respond to her, He seemed to do her an injustice. Nonetheless, the woman persevered in crying out after Him, even after the apostles told Him to send her away.

She had great confidence when she made her request amidst squalls and tempests that ordinarily shake one's certainty. Like the Canaanite woman we ought to have firm confidence in Our Savior's power and will, particularly in tribulations. Will God, who makes houses for the snails and turtles, not have care and mercy for you, a child of God? Such confidence always accompanies attentive faith.

Attentive faith is what the Canaanite woman had. She stood among Jesus' listeners, carefully observing Him. Her faith was great, not only because she was so attentive to what she had heard spoken about Him. But she also decided to believe what others said of Him. We make our faith in God livelier by reflecting attentively on the mysteries of our Savior. These reflections make our heart desire the innumerable virtues of Jesus.

Perseverance is a virtue that flows from a faith attentive to the mysteries that Scripture and Tradition teach us. Our happiness is grounded on perseverance. If Our Lord seems not to hear us, it is to compel us to cry out louder and to draw us closer to God who gives us our power to persevere. Courage then! Like the Canaanite woman, let us walk faithfully with confidence in the way of our Savior and we will eternally be happy.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales, especially Sermons, ed. L. Fiorelli).

Salesian Sunday Reflection ***21st Sunday in Ordinary Time*** ***August 24, 2014***

In today's Gospel we experience Peter firmly identifying Jesus as the "Christ, the Son of the living God." St. Francis de Sales has much to say about St. Peter:

God does not always choose the holiest to govern and to serve in His Church. Our Lord chose Peter as Chief of the Apostles even though he was subject to many imperfections. Peter, filled with much zeal, was apt to be impetuous. While he followed our Savior with his whole heart, he stumbled many times after his initial calling.

He boasted that he would never abandon Our Lord. Yet, he found himself cursing Him and saying that he never knew Him. That pierced our Lord's heart!

Yet, Our Lord did not reject Peter, since He was sure that St. Peter had a strong and constant determination to correct himself. Peter ought to have relied on Our Lord's power than to trust in the fervor that he felt. Peter's natural disposition to cater to his feelings and desires was in part the cause of his lapses. When we experience certain lapses in our on-going conversion, we must not abandon our quest for holiness. Like Peter, let us have a strong and constant determination to take the measures needed to correct ourselves. Then we too will receive special favors and blessings on earth and in heaven.

What a great reason to anchor our hope and confidence completely in Our Lord! For even after spending one's life in horrible crimes and iniquities, one can find forgiveness when one returns to the Source of our

Redemption, Christ. We must not listen to the voice that tells us that our faults are unpardonable. We must say boldly that our God died for all. No matter how ungodly one is, he or she will find redemption in our Savior. Let us consider with what patience our divine Savior awaits those who reject Him. Then like Peter, we may say, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” our Redeemer.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales)

Salesian Sunday Reflection
22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 31, 2014

In today’s Gospel Jesus challenges us to lose our life in order to find it. St. Francis de Sales speaks of losing our life so as to find it in Christ through a change of heart.

To lose our life in this sense is to let go of our unhealthy, self-centered loves. That may cause us to suffer. Yet, we must not be disturbed at our imperfections, for holiness consists in letting go of them. How can we abandon them unless we see and overcome them? Our victory consists in being conscious of them and not consenting to them.

As long as we live, we will feel the stirrings of anger and attachments. They ought not to surprise us, for these emotions of the heart are spontaneous natural inclinations. It is not these that we wish to uproot. Holiness does not consist in feeling nothing! What we need to uproot are those actions that are consequences of these emotions, like those murmurings that dissipate our energy, and that we willingly nurture in our heart for days.

To the extent that our beloved Jesus lives in your heart your whole being will be turned away from a culture that has so often deceived you. Dead to your old life, you will find a new life in Christ. The stars do not stop shining in the sun’s presence. Rather the sunlight is so bright that they are hidden within the sunlight. So, too, we no longer live by ourselves when we live Jesus, for our life is hidden in Christ with God.

Whoever wins your heart has won you wholly. While our heart is the source of our actions, it must be instructed on how it ought to act. If you live Jesus in your heart, you will soon live Him in all your outward ways. As if holding your heart, soul, and will in your own hands, dedicate and consecrate them to God. Little by little as we change the orientation of our heart, we find our true life in living Jesus. We come to love what God loves. Then, like Mary, we can say, “My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord!”

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales)

Salesian Sunday Reflection
23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 7, 2014

Today’s Gospel challenges us to love one another in light of “fraternal correction,” a concept lost in our culture. St. Francis de Sales speaks of it in light of true friendship:

It often happens that when we have high regard for friends, we can absorb their imperfections. Certainly we must love our friends in spite of their faults. Yet, true friendship requires us to share the true good, not evil. Thus, just as gold diggers leave the sand on the bank and take the gold they find, so also those who share in a true friendship ought to remove the sand of its imperfections, and not let this sand get into their souls.

True friendship can live only on true virtue. It comes from God, leads to God and its bond endures eternally in God. It is a weak friendship that passively watches our friends take the wrong path: to let them perish rather than to courageously help them with the lance of correction. Genuine, living friendships cannot continue in the midst of vice. If it is only a passing vice, a true friendship will put it to flight by correction.

When we correct with compassion rather than anger, repentance will sink in far deeper and penetrate more effectively. Nothing so quickly calms down an angry elephant as the sight of a little lamb. When reason brings along rage, it is feared rather than loved. But reason without anger peaceably chastises, corrects, and warns, even though it might be severe and exact. A father's gentle, loving rebuke has far greater power to correct a child than rage and passion.

Blessed are they who speak only to give "fraternal correction" in a spirit of sacred love and profound humility! More blessed are those who are ready to receive it with a gentle, peaceful and tranquil heart! In being humble, faithful and courageous, they have already made great progress, and will arrive at the highest degree of Christian holiness.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales, especially, Introduction to the Devout Life).

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Exultation of the Holy Cross

September 14, 2014

Today we celebrate the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Christ's victory over death on a cross reveals the radiance of God's pure love for us. St. Francis de Sales notes:

Out of Jesus' death on the cross comes eternal life. Our Savior's death purchased for us a life of eternal glory. The world does not understand this wondrous paradox of our Savior's Cross. His death was an excess of love that was eternally life giving to us.

On the cross, Jesus showed us how to save ourselves through holy love. Nothing urges on a person's heart so much as love. Like a loving nurse, Jesus tenderly nourished us on the cross with an incomprehensible love. He wanted to make us understand that the love He bore us was undiminished by his suffering.

On the cross, Jesus also wanted to teach us how our heart ought to be toward our neighbor. Seeing the ignorance and weakness of those who tormented Him, He forgave them on the cross. A prayer of forgiveness is a sacrifice. It is the sacrifice of our lips and our heart that we present to God as much for our neighbor as for ourselves.

On the cross, Jesus fed us with his own flesh and blood. God sent Jesus to heal our human brokenness. Indeed, He died with a holy joy for our cure, although it cost Him His life. He forgot Himself but not His creatures. Let us not be frightened or give up in our struggle to overcome evil with holy love and truth as Jesus did. Let us firmly and faithfully pursue the course that Jesus traveled first and the saints after Him.

We ought to consecrate every moment of our life to the divine love of our Redeemer's Cross. That is, to his glory we must bring home all our works, actions, thoughts and affections. Then, we too will be alive to God in Christ Jesus, whose victorious and exalted Cross we celebrate today.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales, especially his Treatise on the Love of God; Sermons, L. Fiorelli, ed.)

Salesian Sunday Reflection
25th Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 21, 2014

In today's Gospel, Jesus talks to us about the Kingdom of heaven, where God's generous mercy and goodness far exceeds our concept of justice. St. Francis de Sales notes:

When there is absolutely no human good to hope for, it is precisely then that God's awe-inspiring mercy shines forth and surpasses God's justice. God's ways are not our ways. God would sooner work miracles than leave us without help. For this reason our Savior came to redeem us and deliver us from the tyranny of sin. The heart of our Savior is wholly filled with mercy and kindness for the human family.

God's providence is wiser than what we are. We imagine we would feel better if we were on another ship. That may be, but only if we change ourselves! There is a real temptation to become dissatisfied and depressed about the world we have to live in. Truly we must not lose heart. God will never abandon us. It is we who abandon God.

If you are troubled you never want to leave God. An ounce of virtue practiced in adversity is worth more than a thousand pounds exercised in prosperity. We may be weak but our weakness is not nearly as great as God's mercy toward those who desire to love God, and place all their hope in God. The problem is that all the nooks and corners of our hearts are cluttered with thousands of desires that prevent our Savior from giving us the gifts that He desires to shower on us.

We ought to be like the mariner who, in steering his vessel, always keeps his eye on the needle of the compass. We must keep our eyes open to correct our desires and have only one, that of pleasing God. Let our Lord reign in our hearts, as He desires. Then let us remain at peace, without hurry or fear in our hearts, and go on our little way. So long as we mean well and hold to our desire to love God, we are on the right track.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales)

Salesian Sunday Reflection
26th Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 28, 2014

In today's Gospel Jesus tells us that if we believe in and live His teachings we will enter the kingdom of God. Francis de Sales notes:

Jesus comes to teach us what we ought to do to love divinely. He confounds a culture that leads us to pursue false goals, a culture that never ceases to say, "How happy are the wealthy!" For Jesus, the blessed are they who conduct themselves in this life with trust in God. They will win perpetual peace and tranquility. They hear the word of God, keep it and profit by it.

There are two reasons why people do not profit from the word of God. First, they may indeed hear it and be interiorly moved by it. Yet, they postpone acting on it until tomorrow. Our life is the today in which we are living. Who can promise themselves a tomorrow? Our life consists in this present moment in which we are living. We can only assure ourselves of this moment that we now enjoy however brief it may be.

Second, some people have a great deal of knowledge. They amass all sorts of spiritual advice and information, but never put it into practice. We only learn well the teachings of Jesus when they become a

part of our daily living. To live Jesus, we must allow ourselves to let go of our disordered emotions, habits, and affections.

We need to transform our emotions and affections so that they help us to become a divinely loving person. We do this by letting go of all that is not of God in us. To let go of our vices, we must practice the virtues opposed to the vice that we desire to abandon. For instance, if our anger is disordered, then we must practice gentleness and patience. Do not trouble yourself with anything else, except to follow Jesus' teachings. Trust in the goodness of God, who will surely provide all that you need to enter the kingdom of God.

(Adapted from the Sermons of St. Francis de Sales, L. Fiorelli, Ed.)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 5, 2014

In today's Gospel Jesus tells us that the Kingdom of God will be given to those who live the Lord's way of truth and sacred love. St. Francis de Sales expands on this:

How happy we shall be if we love this divine Goodness that has prepared such favors and blessings for us! God became one of us so that we might become like God. Our Savior gave us His life not only to heal the sick, work miracles, and teach us what we must do to have a life-giving, healthy life. He also used his entire life choosing to shape His cross by enduring insults from those for whom He was doing so much good. He chose to give up His life for His people who rejected Him.

To live in our world, and live contrary to the cultural values that stress material things, selfish ambition and power is to go against the current of the river of this life. Yet, we can let go of these disordered passions by practicing interior gentleness, simplicity, humility, and above all, sacred love. To let go of all that is not of God in us is to strive to live an authentic human life of truth and holy love. As no human can live this way without God's help, such a life is a continual going out of ourselves to embrace God's goodness for us. The person who chooses God's divine love lives beyond his or her selfish desires: They no longer live for themselves, but in and for their Savior.

Bees are first larvae but forsake this stage to become flying bees. We do the same. If we live a graced life, we live a new loftier human life than the life we lived before we accepted God's love. Our new life is in God with Jesus Christ who gives it. This new life of heavenly love vivifies and animates our soul. With God's help then, we are capable of using our life to walk in the way of this divine love. As God's most dear children, we are able to generously produce the fruit of truth and holy love found in God's Kingdom.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales, especially Sermons, L. Fiorelli, Ed.)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 12, 2014

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us that those who respond to God's abundance of graces will enter the Kingdom of God. St. Francis de Sales expands on our response:

God's supreme goodness poured forth an abundance of graces over the entire human family. God wills that all be saved through the knowledge of the truth that our Savior came to give us the fire of holy love, and

desired that it be kindled in our hearts.

How ardently God desires our love! God does so by filling us with divine love. God, the sun of justice, sends abundant beams of inspirations upon us, warms our hearts with blessings, and touches each of us with the allurements of holy love. It is God's inspiration that warms our will, helps and reinforces our will, and moves it so gently that the will desires to turn and glide freely toward the good found in God's inspiration.

God cast into your heart holy inspirations, and you received them. You cooperated with God's inspirations by giving your consent to them. The movement of your will freely followed upon that of heavenly grace. God continued to strengthen your heart by various movements, until at length God infused into it holy love as your living and perfect health. Yet, you were free to accept or reject this divine goodness.

It was said that a little fish had the power to stop a ship sailing over the high seas. Yet, this fish had no power to make the ship set sail. So it is with our free will. When the favorable wind of God's grace fills our soul, we can freely choose to refuse or consent to it. Yet, when our spirit sails along and makes a prosperous voyage, it is not we who cause the wind of inspiration to come to us. It is God who gives movement to the ship, our heart. We merely receive and consent to the wind coming from heaven. Blessed are they who respond to God's word in the depths of their hearts, the Kingdom of God is theirs!

(Adapted from St. Francis de Sales, Treatise on the Love of God)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 19, 2014

Today's Gospel tells us to give to God what belongs to God and to give to the state what belongs to the state. St. Francis de Sales notes that in order to enjoy a just state we must obey those to whom God gives authority to govern. Yet he stresses more "what belongs to God" in light of "obedience of love":

We have a natural desire to love God that tells us we belong to God. We are like deer marked with the initials of their owner who lets them free to roam in the forest. Yet, all know to whom the deer belong. We too are free, and our natural inclination to love God lets our friends and enemies know that we still belong to God, who desires us to be united through "obedience of love."

This obedience of love consecrates our heart to God's love and service. Jesus is the model. Allowing God to shape and form us, we place all our desires in God's hands. Such obedience has no need to be roused up by threats or rewards, by commandment or law. It goes ahead of all such things when it gives itself to God. It begins to do with love all that leads to the union of our heart with God. It undertakes this journey in simplicity.

Sometimes our Lord urges us to run with full speed in the tasks required of us. Then God makes us stop in mid career, when strongest in our course. While we must do everything to bring God's work to a successful end, we must peacefully embrace the outcome. It is our part to plant and water carefully, but the increase belongs only to God.

Nonetheless, as a tender mother leads her little children, and helps and holds them up as long as she sees a need for it, so also our Savior carries us and holds our hand in unbearable hardships. Let us then enjoy a serenity of heart by embracing this obedience of love that unites us to God to whom we belong.

(Adapted from the works of St. Francis de Sales, esp. Treatise on the Love of God)

Salesian Sunday Reflection
30th Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 26, 2014

In today's Gospel Jesus tells us to love God and neighbor. These two commandments are the foundation of Christian Spirituality and permeate the writings of St. Francis de Sales:

To show us more vividly how ardent God's desire is for our love, God demands that love from us in wonderful terms: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all of your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment." We often think that God is so great and we are so little that we are incapable of loving God. So as not to be discouraged and turn away from God's love, we are told that we are highly capable of loving God with all our strength, even after sin.

To love God above all else means we need to place God above all our idols, for our heart runs after many material things and spiritual consolations. As soon as we have obtained them, it seems that we have to do it all over again. Nothing can ever satisfy our heart. God wills that our heart not find a place of permanent rest in our idols. Then our heart is free to return to God from whom it comes. Bees can only rest upon flowers in bloom. So it is with our heart. Our heart finds rest solely in God's love. Why then do we detain our heart's desire for God's love, and pursue other loves?

The Commandment to love God is higher than the Commandment to love the neighbor. But our nature offers greater resistance to the love of neighbor. Yet, when we trust in our Savior's love, we can be more courageous in loving the image of God that is frequently veiled from us in our neighbor. We come to recognize the resemblance of the Creator in each other. For, the pure love of God is to love what is of God in all creatures. Let us then imitate Jesus, who taught us more through His works than His words, how to love our God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and our neighbor as we do our own self.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales, especially Treatise on the Love of God).

Salesian Sunday Reflection
All Souls
November 2, 2014

Today we celebrate the Feast of All Souls. In today's Gospel, we experience Jesus revealing that we are made for eternal life. St. Francis de Sales notes:

From the heights of heaven, Jesus Christ mercifully looks down upon you and graciously invites you there. He says, "Come, dear soul, and find everlasting rest in my bountiful arms. I have prepared undying delight for you in the abundance of my love."

Consider the nobility and excellence of your soul. Our soul is spiritual and immortal. It resides in the whole body. It understands; it wills freely. It is capable of knowing, of reasoning, of judging, and of having virtue. In all this it resembles God, who placed you in this world to give you grace and glory. You ask, "How shall my soul, from now on, be wholly subject to God who has effected so many wonders and graces in me?"

As bees remain only among living flowers, so also our hearts find rest solely in God. God does not will that our heart find a place of rest. Just like the dove that went out from Noah's ark only to return to him, so we must return to God, who has ordered us to acquire holy virtues. True virtue goes ever forward to God. Yet, we ought not be troubled at finding ourselves always beginners in the exercise of virtue. The greatest boon

for our souls is that in this fleeting life, they can still grow without limit in their love of God.

Let us do everything to acquire holy virtues, but if we find our progress in holiness wanting, let us remain in peace, and diligently strive to do better in the future. It is for us to cultivate our souls well, and we must faithfully attend to them. But as for plentiful crops, that is for God to give. Go forward then to eternity. Put away anything that leads you astray or delays you on the journey. Remind your soul that it is worthy of eternity. Fill your soul with courage, and thank God who made you for so exalted an end.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales, especially the Introduction to the Devout Life.)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Dedication of the Lateran Basilica

November 9, 2014

Today we give special attention to the Lateran Basilica in Rome. This basilica is the official seat of the Holy Father as Bishop of Rome. The Roman emperor Constantine (274-337 AD), who converted to Christianity, built this church. To show our unity with Rome, we have celebrated the dedication of the Lateran Basilica since the 12th century.

Today's readings stress how a church building must be dedicated to serving God. St. Francis de Sales notes:

While God is everywhere and in all time, why would God, at certain times, not want to have certain consecrated places, where Our Savior can be honored? It is the place where the Body of Christ is reserved. We are indeed able to say, "Truly the Lord is here."

As the people of God, we are 'living stones' that make up the Church and become 'God's building'. We are temples of God, and the Spirit of God lives in us. Our good works are highly valued because they come from the Holy Spirit. Through divine love, the Spirit does these works in us, for us, and with us. We co-work with the Spirit. The works of good Christians are of such great worth that heaven is given in return for them.

Let us unceasingly work to prepare the Church on earth for its heavenly glory. The fervor of our sacred love for one another is the bond that unites us in the 'House of God'. All that is not of God weakens the human spirit, and stands in the way of dedicating our hearts to God with the holiness of our lives. The Church is a house strewn with flowers of martyrs and holy people, invincible in their constancy and love.

Like these Christians who came before us, let us dedicate our hearts to serving God. Let us allow the Holy Spirit to flood our hearts with divine love, so that the Spirit may work in and through us, and make us 'living stones' of God's work on earth.

(Adapted from Salesian writings, especially St. Francis de Sales, Oeuvre: Sermons.)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 16, 2014

In today's Gospel Jesus tells us that it is just as important and useful to serve Him faithfully with one talent or many. Here are some Salesian thoughts on using our talents:

What went wrong with the servant who buried his one talent? He wasted much time examining his ability to

do his Master's work. Focusing on his own lack of talents became an obstacle to faithfully perform the task asked of him. He was clinging to a false sense of security. He feared taking the risk that a spiritual journey demands.

In orienting our talents to serve God, we need to be patient with everyone, but first of all with ourselves. Like most of the saints, it will take us years to free ourselves of our selfish desires, including our desire for false security. Gradually though, we discard our disordered affections, and open ourselves to what God desires for us. We are then free to perform our everyday activities with the confidence that we are doing God's will. Our true security and happiness is in God—who provides us with all that is necessary to establish the reign of God in the midst of our daily tasks.

Jesus tells us that those with one talent are just as useful and important as those with many talents in doing God's work. The bees give us a good example. Some gather honey, some watch over the hive and others keep it clean. But they all eat the same honey. We too, the strong and the weak, work together in Christ. Faithful servants do all they know to be pleasing to God, who fills their emptiness. They reveal their divine potential for union with God through their everyday tasks. They recognize that God reigns in the midst of their daily activities. Happy are they who use their talents to establish God's love in their midst. God will never let them be unfruitful! Even if they do only a little for God, God will shower abundant blessings on them in this life and in the next.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales, especially Treatise on the Love of God).

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Christ the King

November 23, 2014

Celebrating Christ as King, while popular in the Church, only became part of the liturgical calendar in 1925. St. Francis de Sales speaks of Jesus as King:

Jesus as a king was called to be our Savior. He desired that others should share in the glory of being leaders, especially his blessed Mother. Our Blessed Lady asks us to have her Son as King of our hearts so that He might reign in us. His commandments are good and very useful because they give goodness to those who otherwise would lack it, and increase goodness in those who would be good even if not commanded to be so.

Thus, Jesus made God's goodness abound more than evilness. Jesus' reign is truly salutary when it touches our miseries and makes them worthy of divine love. When the Holy Spirit pours divine love into our hearts, we are restored to health and empowered to share in our Savior's work: to bring God's love and care to those in our midst.

Since our Lord repaired us all equally, and wants all to share in spreading His Kingdom, we too must love in our neighbor what truly represents to us the sacred Person of our Master. We are not to love in our neighbor what is contrary to this sacred image. Let us walk then as Jesus Christ walked. He gave His life not only to heal the sick, to work miracles and to teach us what we ought to do to be divinely human. He also taught us how to give our life, as He lovingly did, for those who would take it from us.

How happy we are when we choose Jesus as our leader, who gives us unparalleled peace and calm if we follow Him. May we remain faithful to our King's desires, so we might begin in this life what, with the help of God's love, we shall do eternally in Heaven: Live in glory with Jesus, who in overcoming evil with good, is the true King.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales, especially, Sermons, L. Fiorelli, Ed.).

Salesian Sunday Reflection

First Sunday of Advent

November 30, 2014

Today is the First Sunday of Advent. The readings remind us to be aware of our need for Christ who strengthens us until the end. St. Francis de Sales constantly stress the importance of living Jesus so that we may become fully human. But to live Jesus calls for the spirit of liberty. In a letter to Jane de Chantal he writes:

It is clear what God's will is regarding the commandments and the duties of our vocation. However, there are many other things I am not obliged to do either by the general commandments of God or by the duties of my own vocation. With these it is necessary to consider carefully in liberty of spirit what would tend to the greatest glory of God. I said "liberty of spirit" because this needs to be done without pressure or anxiety. If it is not a matter of great importance, then we should not invest a great concern in it, but after a little thought decide. And if later the action or decision doesn't seem good, I must in no way blame or bother myself about it, but rather trust in God and laugh at myself.

Do all through love, nothing through constraint. Love obedience more than you fear disobedience. I want you to have a liberty of spirit that excludes constraints, scruples and anxiety, not the kind that excludes obedience (this is freedom of the flesh). If you really love obedience and docility, I'd like to think that when some legitimate or charitable cause takes you away from your religious exercises, this would be for you another form of obedience. And your love would make up for whatever you have to omit in your religious practice. In all things a holy liberty and freedom must reign and we must have no other law or coercion than that of love. Whether love invites us to make something for the poor or for the rich, it does all things well and is equally pleasing to our Lord.

(Joseph Power, OSFS & Wendy M. Wright, Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Second Sunday of Advent

December 7, 2014

In today's Gospel we experience "A voice in the desert" crying out to us to make straight God's paths. St. Francis de Sales tells us how to do this:

Roads that twist and turn only weary and mislead travelers. To make straight God's path in our hearts, we must have as our only goal to please God. We ought to be like the mariner who, in steering his vessel, always keeps his eye on the needle of the compass. We too must have our eyes fixed on acquiring an even disposition, the most pleasing virtue in the spiritual life. We need to consistently lead our feelings, emotions and inclinations to God's love, which transforms them so that we possess an even disposition.

When our heart struggles constantly between our love of God and our self-centered love, we find ourselves in a state of fear, anxiety and confusion. The sight of our great faults can bring with it a certain unhealthy fear that unnerves the heart and often leads to discouragement. For this reason, throughout our whole life we must exercise ourselves in trusting God, and confiding ourselves to the goodness of God, who loves us.

Yet, a holy fear leads us to take proper means to avoid trouble. Holy fear and hope ought never to be without

one another. Hope encourages us to expect holy enjoyment in God's supreme goodness. God uses both of these virtues to work spiritual cures in us.

Our life contains many tortuous paths that can be put right only by a change of heart. When we orient our heart towards God's love, we experience true self-love. When divine love reigns in our hearts, it tames all other loves. Divine love subjects all our natural emotions and affections to God's plan and service. All one's movements are at rest in this holy love. Those who have an abundance of sacred love have hearts full of confidence and hope, for they are on the straight path to wholeness in God.

(Adapted from the writing of St. Francis de Sales, especially, Sermons, L. Fiorelli, Ed.)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Third Sunday of Advent

December 14, 2014

Today's Gospel speaks of John the Baptist. St. Francis de Sales unfolds aspects of John's character that we could all start to develop in our hearts during Advent:

John the Baptist dwelt in the desert like a rock, immovable in the midst of all the waves and tempests of tribulation. We, on the other hand, change according to time and season. When the weather is fine, nothing can equal our joy. But when adversity storms in on us, we become disheartened. We sometimes get upset even for the littlest thing that is contrary to our liking. As a result, our peace of soul cannot be restored until long after we have had to use many "healing ointments." In short, we are spiritually fickle, not knowing what we want. One minute we are light-hearted. The next minute we are harsh and bitter. We are reeds, tossed about in every direction by every mood and humor.

John the Baptist tells us that we need to even out these ways for Our Savior's coming, our path to wholeness. All the saints to a degree did this but none perfectly. In each of them something marred the perfection of their equanimity of spirit. This was true even for John the Baptist. Yet, we must become disciples of John the Baptist. We must look into our actions, reforming those that are not of good intentions and perfecting those that are. Our goal is to act with only one intention: conforming ourselves to the true image of God in us. For the reason why Jesus came, was to show us our true self in God.

We must remember God's grace is never lacking, and if we are faithful in cooperating with the first grace God gives us, we will receive many more. For this reason in Holy Scripture, God recommends us to be faithful in following our good impulses, insights and inspirations. When we do this the greatness of God's infinite mercy will surely shine through.

(Adapted from L. Fiorelli, ed., Sermons of St. Francis de Sales, V.4)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 21, 2014

In today's Gospel we experience Mary's openness to God's will for her. St. Francis has many thoughts on being open to God's love, which is God's will in our life:

Mary's greatest gift was her absolute openness to God's love. God speaks to us through inspirations and the inner stirrings of our heart. We must be open to willingly accept the inspirations it may please God to send

us. By inspirations we mean all those interior desires, acts of regret, thoughts and affections God places in our hearts to awaken and attract us to authentic virtues, holy love, and good resolutions. In short everything that sends us on our way to our everlasting welfare. Any thought that causes us anxiety and fear must be let go, as they do not come from God who is Prince of Peace.

When a good inspiration comes, receive it as an ambassador sent by a leader of a nation. Approach it simply and gently. Listen calmly to God's proposal. Think of the love it inspires in you, and cherish it. Nurture your good desire and keep it alive by sleeping in the arms of God's providence. That is, give your inspiration complete, loving and permanent consent by peacefully accepting it, and trusting that God will give you the love you need to fulfill it. In this way, God will be pleased with your good will. Sometimes when God asks us to do some good work, all God really wants is our willingness to do the work, and not the accomplishment. While Jesus established the Kingdom on earth, He left work for His Apostles and future generations to help Him bring it to completion.

However, before you consent to and act on inspirations that are important or unusual, always consult your spiritual adviser to affirm whether they are true or false. Once the consent is given, you must hasten to put the inspiration into practice. The fruit of our practice is true virtue that keeps us continually open, like Mary, to God's infinite love.

(Francis de Sales, Introduction...; Power & Wright, Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal)

Salesian Sunday Reflection

Vigil of Christmas

December 24, 2011

This evening is the vigil of Christmas and we ponder on the mystery of the birth of Jesus, Our Lord and Savior. St. Francis de Sales offer us some thoughts on the nativity:

If someone intends to build a house or a palace, he must first consider for whom the dwelling is intended. He will obviously use different plans depending upon the social status of the person. So it was with the Divine Builder. God built the world for the Incarnation of the Son. Divine wisdom foresaw from all eternity that the Word would assume our nature in coming to earth. To accomplish this task, God chose a woman, the most holy Virgin Mary, who brought forth Our Savior.

In the Incarnation, God made us see what the human mind could hardly have imagined or understood. So great was God's love for humanity that in becoming human, God desired to fill us with divinity. God wished to crown us with divine goodness and dignity. God wanted us to be children of God, for we are formed in God's image.

Our Savior came into this world to teach us what we need to do to preserve in ourselves this divine resemblance of God. Oh, how earnestly we ought to summon up our courage to live according to what we are. Our Savior came so that we may have life to the fullest. He was wholly filled with mercy and kindness for the human family.

Often when the most hardened souls have reached the point of living as if there were no God, Our Savior allows them to find His Heart full of pity and kind mercy toward them. All, who know this, experience some feeling of gratitude for it. Let us let go of all that is not of God in our house. When we open our hearts to God's love, we bring to birth the Christ Child in our hearts so as to establish God's kingdom on earth.

(Adapted from the writings of St. Francis de Sales)

Salesian Sunday Reflection
Feast of the Holy Family
December 28, 2014

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family. We tend to forget that the First Family of the Christian Church had their trials too, as St. Francis de Sales notes:

We are often upset because things don't succeed the way we want them to. What we desire was not found even in the family of our Lord. Think of the difficulties and changes, joys and sorrow found in the Holy Family. Mary received news that she would conceive of the Holy Spirit a Son, our Lord and Savior. What joy this was for her! Shortly afterward Joseph, seeing that she was with child and knowing that it was not by him, was plunged into distress! Mary was in grief, seeing her dear Joseph was about to leave her. When this storm passed, they experienced great joy. There was also joy in their hearts when the shepherds and Magi came.

However, a little later, the angel of the Lord said to Joseph in a dream, "Take the child and His mother and flee into Egypt." Without doubt Mary and Joseph were troubled by this command. But was Joseph's response: "Why do I have to go at night? Couldn't this journey wait till the morning? I have neither horse nor money." If we had been in Joseph's place, would we not have made a thousand excuses? Whereas he promptly did all that the angel commanded. The peace and serenity of mind of Mary and Joseph shows their constant openness to do God's will amid all the unexpected events that befell them.

We too, when we meet similar problems in our lives, must repeat over and over again to ourselves, so as the better to impress the truth on our minds, that no disturbance of events must ever carry away our hearts and minds into unevenness of temper. Like the Holy Family, God will guide us on our way no matter how difficult it may be.

(Adapted from St. Francis de Sales, Serenity of Heart: Bearing the Troubles of This Life, Sophia Press)

Salesian Sunday Reflection
Feast of the Holy Family
December 30, 2014

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family. We tend to forget that the First Family of the Christian Church had their trials too, as St. Francis de Sales notes:

We are often upset because things don't succeed the way we want them to. What we desire was not found even in the family of our Lord. Think of the difficulties and changes, joys and sorrow found in the Holy Family. Mary received news that she would conceive of the Holy Spirit a Son, our Lord and Savior. What joy this was for her! Shortly afterward Joseph, seeing that she was with child and knowing that it was not by him, was plunged into distress! Mary was in grief, seeing her dear Joseph was about to leave her. When this storm passed, they experienced great joy. There was also joy in their hearts when the shepherds and Magi came.

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