

Sunday Salesian 2006 Archive

Mary, Mother of God (January 1, 2006)

Readings Num 6: 22-27 Ps 67: 2-3, 5-6, 8 Gal 4: 4-7 Lk 2: 16-21

Suggested Emphasis

"Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart."

Salesian Perspective

"Look at Mary in all the circumstances of her life. In her room at Nazareth she shows her modesty in that she is her candor in wanting to be instructed and in asking a question, her submission, her humility in calling herself a handmaid. Look at her in Bethlehem: she lives simply and in poverty, she listens to the shepherds as though they learned doctors. Look at her in the company of the kings: she does not try to make any long speeches. Look at her time of her purification: she goes to the temple in order to conform to church customs. In going to Egypt and in she is simply obeying Joseph. She does not consider she is wasting time when she goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth act of loving courtesy. She looks for Our Lord not only in joy but also in tears. She has compassion on the poor, confusion of those who invited her to the wedding, meeting their needs. She is at the foot of the cross, full of humility, lowliness, virtue, never drawing any attention to herself in the exercise of these qualities." (Stopp, Selected Letters 159)

When Mary agreed to be the mother of Jesus, she got much more than she bargained for. Her "yes" to God's invitation to be the mother of the Messiah forever changed the course of her life. But as Francis de Sales observed, she constantly reaffirmed that "yes" as she experienced God's will for her son, God's will for her husband and God's will for her times, bad times and all the times in between, she fully embraced the various circumstances in which she found

We, too, are called to give birth to Jesus. While not a physical birthing, this call is no less challenging or demanding as it was for Mary.

As we see in the life of Mary, giving birth to Jesus is not a one time event: it is a life-long process. Saying "yes" to birth to Jesus is about being faithful to God's will for us and others, one day, one hour, one moment at a time throughout our lives. Giving birth to Jesus is about fully and deeply embracing the responsibilities, events and circumstances of our state and stage of life in which we find ourselves. It's about rolling with the punches while remaining convinced of God's love and care for us.

Mary is a powerful reminder that giving birth to Jesus brings more than its share of inconveniences, headaches and heartaches. However, Mary is likewise a powerful reminder of how one person's fidelity to God's will can change the world for the better.

Forever.

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Epiphany of the Lord (January 8, 2006)

Readings Is 60: 1-6 Ps 72: 2, 7-8, 10-13 Eph 3: 2-3a, 5-6 Mt 2: 1-12

Suggested Emphasis

"Raise your eyes and look about you."

Salesian Perspective

The story of the astrologers captures the imagination. It is the story of people on a great quest.

These astrologers were captivated by what they saw. Their imagination was riveted by the appearance of an extra star. They left all that was ordinary and familiar, traveling great distances with the hope of experiencing more of an inspiring light.

You and I are called to pursue the light we know as Jesus Christ. However, unlike the astrologers, this quest does not require us to forsake what is familiar or to travel great distances. No, we are to look for this light right in our own backyards.

Francis de Sales wrote: "God is in everything and everywhere; there is no place or thing in this world in which God is not truly present. This truth is intellectually known to everyone, but not everyone is attentive to or conscious of it." At an even deeper level to this truth: "God is not only in the place where you are," wrote St. Francis de Sales, "but God is very specially present in your heart and in the very core of your spirit...Considering this truth you should awake in your heart a deep reverence for God who is so intimately present there." (Introduction to the Devout Life, Part II, Chapter 1)

We are called to recognize the light that is Christ shining in the state and stage of life in which we find ourselves. We are called to recognize the light that is Christ in the circumstances, the responsibilities and the relationships of our everyday life. We are called to recognize the light that is Christ in the success and setbacks of daily living. We are called to recognize the light that is Christ in the most ordinary and seemingly insignificant experiences across the street, in the car, across the dinner table.

Raise your eyes and look about you. See in yourself and in one another the presence of a God who illumines and even the hardest of hearts. Recognize the opportunities imbedded in each and every present moment to be stars of truth, stars of reconciliation, stars of forgiveness, stars of peace. See that the quest of drawing closer to God and one another does not consist in discovering new lands, but in seeing the land in which we live - and the people in that land with new eyes. It is not about traveling great distances, but being more present to people and events closer to home.

Follow the light that is Jesus Christ. Let his light - and yours - shine on all those you meet...not just once in a lifetime but every moment of life.

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Baptism of the Lord (January 9, 2006)

Readings Num 6: 22-27 Ps 67: 2-3, 5-6, 8 Gal 4: 4-7 Lk 2: 16-21

Suggested Emphasis

"I the Lord have called you for the victory of justice."

"Those of any nation who...act uprightly are acceptable to God."

Salesian Perspective

The account of Jesus' baptism ends with the sound of a voice from heaven, saying "This is my beloved son. My favor rests on him."

Why does God's favor rest upon Jesus? Because Jesus is Son of Justice. Jesus measures by God's standards in giving others their due.

Isaiah tells us that God has called us, like Christ, "for the victory of justice" and, in the Acts of the Apostles, to "act uprightly." In everyday terms, what does it mean to work for God's justice, to act uprightly?

Consider the opposite of acting justly and uprightly: "We condemn every little thing in our neighbor and excuse ourselves of important things. We want to sell very high but to buy at bargain prices. We demand that the right be done in another's house but that mercy and generosity be granted to ours. We like to have things that we say take the good part but we are tender and touchy about what others say." (Introduction to the Devout Life, Part III, Chapter 10) "In its heart, injustice is about living a double standard, measuring the world with two weights: one to weigh everything to one's own advantage, and another to weigh everything to the disadvantage of others."

What makes our acts of injustice so difficult to identify is that they are seldom big; rather, they are frequent and easy to overlook. Writes St. Francis de Sales: "Self love can lead us and direct us into countless small yet dangerous acts of injustice and iniquity. Because they are little we are not on guard against them and because there are many of them they are sure to cause us - and others - great injury."

Francis de Sales writes that just and upright people are, in short, reasonable people. They do not live a double standard. They are people of integrity. They follow the Golden Rule, treating others as they themselves would wish to be treated. They are not expecting of others that which they themselves refuse to practice. Just and upright people measure the world only one weight: the love of God. "Be just and reasonable in your neighbor's place and your neighbor in yours," Francis. "Live a generous, noble, courteous, royal, just and reasonable heart."

To the extent that we do this with one another each and every day, we grow as the "beloved sons and daughters of God." God's favor will rest on us, as we make real the promise of God's justice to others.

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2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (January 15, 2006)

Readings 1 Sm 3: 3b-10, 19 Ps 40: 2, 4, 7-10 1 Cor 6: 13c-15a, 17-20 Jn 1: 35-42

Suggested Emphasis

"What are you looking for?"

Salesian Perspective

What are you looking for?

Are you looking for the best in life?

Are you looking for the worst in life?

Are you looking for meaning and purpose in life?

Are you looking to just get by in life?

Are you looking for a God who is always present to you?

Are you looking for a God found only in special places or once-in-a-lifetime events?

Are you looking for peace?

Are you looking for division?

Are you looking for reconciliation?

Are you looking for alienation?

Are you looking for hope?

Are you looking for despair?

Are you looking for light?

Are you looking for darkness?

Why are these questions - and so many others like them - so important?

We generally tend to more easily or quickly see those things for which we are looking.
We frequently fail to see or recognize those things for which we are not looking.

The Salesian tradition challenges us to look for our common dignity and destiny as sons and daughters of God. The Salesian tradition challenges us to look for our unique roles in God's plan of salvation. The Salesian tradition challenges us to look for God in every event, circumstance and relationship of everyday life. The Salesian tradition challenges us to look for daily opportunities to serve one another in simple, practical and ordinary ways. The Salesian tradition challenges us to look for ways to make real here on earth something of the justice, truth, reconciliation, freedom and peace promised to us forever in heaven. The Salesian tradition challenges us to look for a God who calls us by name, who knows us, who cherishes us, who pursues us, who forgives us, who strengthens us...and who calls us to do the same for another.

So, at this point in your life, what are you, in fact, looking for?

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3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (January 22, 2006)

Readings Jon 3: 1-5, 10 Ps 25: 4-9 1 Cor 7: 29-31 Mk 1: 14-20

Suggested Emphasis

"The world as we know it is passing away."

"This is the time of fulfillment. The reign of God is at hand."

"Reform your lives and believe in the Good News!"

Salesian Perspective

"The world as we know it is passing away."

Francis de Sales wrote: "God preserves this great world amid constant change, wherein day turns into night, night into day, spring into summer, summer into autumn, autumn into winter and winter into spring. One day is never perfect another: some are cloudy, some rainy, some dry and some windy. Such variety gives great beauty to the universe."

Every person, every generation needs to come to grips with the fact that our lives are always changing. No matter how good things may have been in former times, or how good they may be right now, there is always more yet to come. Our sense of security of "what is" needs to be open to the uncertainty of "what may come."

Put another way, we need to constantly reform, refashion and renew our lives.

This goes against our grain. It's so easy to cling to what we know. It's so easy to believe that we've learned all we can learn. It's easy to think that there aren't any more ways in which we can grow. We are tempted to say that we know enough and have grown enough.

Jesus invites us to believe in the Good News, that is, to believe in the power of God's constant, unchanging love and to learn more about God, ourselves and one another. Jesus calls us to believe that the willingness to reform ourselves (with the help of the Holy Spirit) can help us to experience in the changing circumstances, events and relationships of our daily lives more of the justice, the freedom, the reconciliation and the peace that will be unchanging in heaven.

Be willing to change. Be willing to grow. Be willing to learn. Be willing to reform. Be willing to be transformed that the power of the Reign of God can help you to be more of who and how God calls you to be. Turn away more convincingly from what is evil. Embrace more deeply what is good. In words and example, challenge and encourage another to do the same.

While the world as we know it is passing away, Jesus promises us that the best is yet to come. Together, you can make the best of what is yet to come a reality in our own day by recognizing the opportunities that God provides and every present moment our reformation, our transformation and our growth.

Believe in this Good News! Pass it on to others!

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4th Sunday in Ordinary Time (January 29, 2006)

Readings Dt 18: 15-20 Ps 95: 1-2, 6-7, 7-9 1 Cor 7: 32-35 Mk 1: 21-28

Suggested Emphasis

"I should like you to be free of all worries."

Salesian Perspective

"I should like you to be free of all worries."

Where do we sign up?

We can certainly appreciate Saint Paul's prayer this Sunday that we should "be free of all worries." Don't we all wish we could be free of all worries? The truth is that all of us worry. There are things, situations and relationships at which we worry everyday. In some cases, we should worry if we didn't worry!

Worry is a part of life. Worry challenges us to respond to something in our lives that needs attention, to respond to something that needs to be addressed, to respond to something that needs to be examined and, where possible, a remedy or, at least, improved. Of course, we also know from experience that many of the things for which we rely upon the actions of others...including God.

The problem is that worry can turn into anxiety. While worry is usually focused upon specific issues, concerns, events, anxiety is a free-floating emotion that can cripple our ability to deal with the challenges of life. "Anxiety, the greatest evil that can befall the soul, sin excepted," writes St. Francis de Sales. "Anxiety arises from an inordinate desire to be freed from the evil we experience or to acquire the good for which we hope. Yet, there is nothing which so aggravates the evil or impedes the good as anxiety"

Francis de Sales suggests that we should monitor our anxiety levels: "Consider whether your heart is under your control or if it has escaped from your hands to entangle itself in some inordinate attachment of love, hatred, envy, avarice, weariness or joy. If it has wandered, go after it and bring it back quite gently to the presence of God."

Of course, prevention is the best cure. "When you experience the beginning of anxiety, entrust yourself to God. Do nothing of what your desire urges you until the anxiety has passed away completely, unless it is something that must be postponed. In such a case you must restrain and control the course of your desire with a gentle and peaceful control. Above all, act reasonably, not emotionally."

May God preserve us from anxiety. May we center ourselves in the heart of a loving God as we embrace our day.

downs and everything in between. May God help us in our efforts to prevent moments of worry from becoming life.

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5th Sunday in Ordinary Time (February 5, 2006)

Readings Jb 7: 1-4, 6-7 Ps 147: 1-6 1 Cor 9: 16-19, 22-23 Mk 1: 29-39

Suggested Emphasis

"Is not our life on earth drudgery?"

Salesian Perspective

Let's face it. Try as we might to always look at the bright side of life, each and every one of us have times in our when we would answer Job's question with a resounding "yes."

The burdens of life are real. Setbacks in life are painful. Headaches - and heartache - are a part of being human. to be honest. We need to name and address those areas of our lives in which we feel weighed down and burdene However, wallowing in or dwelling upon the negative can be far more dangerous and debilitating to our spiritual, emotional, psychological, social and mental health than the troubles themselves.

Francis de Sales observed that dwelling on the burdens of life "upsets the soul, arouses inordinate fears, creates for prayer, stupefies and oppresses the brain, deprives the mind of prudence, resolution, judgment and courage, destroys its strength. In a word, such sorrow is like a severe winter that spoils all the beauty of the country and v all the animals. It takes away all sweetness from the soul and renders it disabled."

What is the best remedy for melancholy, for the temptation to focus only on what is wrong, what is broken, what painful? The combination of prayer, good works, and good friends.

Prayer - "Prayer is a sovereign remedy for it lifts up the soul to God who is our joy and consolation."

Good works - "By means of sorrow the evil one tries to make us weary of doing what is good, but if he sees that give up on doing good, then he will stop troubling us."

Good friends - "Humbly and sincerely reveal to another all the feelings, affections and suggestions that proceed your sadness. Try to talk to spiritual friends frequently and spend time with them as much as you possibly can d period" of dryness.

St. Francis de Sales claimed "the evil one is pleased with sadness and melancholy because he himself is sad and melancholy and will be so for all eternity. Hence, Satan desires that everyone should be like himself." Hence the expression misery loves company.

In the face of life's burdens and difficulties let's do our level best to deprive the evil one of our company and wa company prayerful, positive and proactive people.

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6th Sunday in Ordinary Time (February 12, 2006)

Readings Lv 13: 1-2, 44-46 Ps 32: 1-2, 5, 11 1 Cor 10: 31-11: 1 Mk 1: 40-45

Suggested Emphasis

"They shall declare themselves unclean. They shall dwell apart, making their abode outside the camp."

"Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, "Be cured."

Salesian Perspective

St. Francis de Sales wrote in his Introduction to the Devout Life: "There is scarcely anyone without some imperfection" (Part 3, Chapter 22)

We have a pretty good handle on the imperfections, vices, idiosyncrasies and even the sins of those with whom we play, we neighbor and we live each day.

Most days we overlook them. Some days we put up with them. Other days, we might even make excuses for them. Occasionally, we dwell on - maybe even magnify - them.

Sometimes it is necessary to draw attention to things in other people that blemish their potential for happiness, holiness and holiness. Sometimes we need to take the risk to name the sins, the faults and the wounds in others that prevent them from being more of who God calls them to be. Sometimes we need to reflect back to others those social, spiritual, psychological or relational sores that rob them of their full citizenship as sons and daughters of the living, loving and saving God.

The Scriptures contrast two very different methods for doing this. One approach draws attention to others' sins and isolates them, ostracizes them or distances them from the community. The other approach - Jesus' approach - is to draw them even more closely into the life of the community, to create a space in which the "unclean" can experience healing, strength, and a new lease on life.

Ask yourself the question: When you do draw attention to the imperfections, the warts, the blemishes of others, how do you do it? To distance yourself from them? To embarrass them? To humiliate them? Or, are you reaching out, reaching to the heart of others? Is your goal to create a space of truth in which they can experience healing, forgiveness, reconciliation and strength? Do you intend it as an opportunity for a new beginning?

A footnote worth considering: before ever calling attention to the imperfections, the sins or the blemishes of others, we must take that most important of first steps.

Be clear and unambiguous about our own sin and weakness. Be clear and unambiguous about our own need for forgiveness. Be clear about our own need for friends who will not only sometimes tell us what we want to hear about ourselves, but who will consistently have the courage to tell us what we need to hear about ourselves.

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7th Sunday in Ordinary Time (February 19, 2006)

Readings Is 43: 18-19, 21-22, 24b-25 Ps 41: 2-5, 13-14 2 Cor 1: 18-22 Mk 2: 1-12

Suggested Emphasis

"Remember not the things of the past. The things of long ago, consider not. See, I am doing something new."

Salesian Perspective

We have lots to learn from past promises or pain. We have lots to learn from past triumphs or tragedies.

But we can't afford to live in the past. We need to keep moving forward. We need to keep growing. We need to lookout for new insights, new lessons, new opportunities, new challenges, and new directions. In short, we need for how God invites us to become more of who God calls us to be with each new day.

We must live in the present.

St. Francis de Sales wrote to the Duc de Bellegarde, a powerful courtier who served at the palace of Henry IV in Paris: "Keep your eyes steadfastly fixed on that blissful day of eternity towards which the course of year on; the passing of years carry us stage by stage until we reach the end of the road. But meanwhile, in each present moment there is found a tiny kernel of the seed of all eternity; in our humble acts of devotion there lies hidden the promise of everlasting glory."

The practice of three virtues may go a long way in helping us to embrace the present, to fully live the newness of the present moment:

- *Forgiveness* - the process of letting go of hurtful things in the past.
- *Gratitude* - the process of thanking God for joyful things in the past
- *Hope* - the belief that with God's grace, our efforts and the good will of others, the best in life - with all its ups and downs - is yet to come.

We catch a glimpse of the openness and freedom that living in the present makes possible in a letter that Francis wrote to his good friend and companion, Jane de Chantal on the eve of the new year in 1609: "The year that is passing about to be swallowed up in the gulf which has devoured all the rest. O how desirable is eternity in exchange for this passing state of uncertainty and change. May time continue to pass on, time with which we ourselves gradually pass as to be transformed into the glory of the children of God."

The seeds of eternity - the power of God's renewing, transforming love - can be experienced in the unfolding of each hour, and each present moment. May God prevent us from missing the gift of each today by not allowing our eyes on yesterday.

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8th Sunday in Ordinary Time (February 26, 2006)

Readings Hos 2: 16b, 17b, 21-22 Ps 103: 1-4, 8, 10, 12-13 2 Cor 3: 1b-6 Mk 2: 18-22

Suggested Emphasis

"You are a letter of Christ, a letter written not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh in the heart."

Salesian Perspective

As in the case of the Scriptures, the image of 'heart' in the Salesian tradition embodies all that "is most profound, inalienable, most personal, most divine in us." (Ravier, *Sage and Saint*, p. 146).

Living from the heart per se, however, is no guarantee of a happy, healthy, holy life. We know that our hearts have as well as virtue; our hearts reflect darkness as well as light; our hearts entertain temptation as well as follow its

our hearts flirt with death as well as long for life.

In short, the content of our hearts - good and not so good - impacts upon every aspect of our lives, most especially relationships with God, ourselves, and one another.

Francis de Sales knows the joy and pain of the human heart. He knows of its high tides of grace, the low ebbs of everything else in between. He knows that living from the heart requires the willingness to consider its contents. He offers us this simple, yet powerful method for doing just that:

1. What affections hold your heart? What passions possess it? In what has it chiefly gone astray? By the power of the heart we pass judgment on its condition, examining them one after another.
2. The lute player touches all the strings to find those which are out of tune and brings them together either by tightening or loosening them. So, too, if we examine the passions of love, hatred, desire, hope, sadness, etc., in our hearts and find them out of tune for the melody that we wish to make to God's glory, let us attune them by the means of God's grace and the counsel of others. (Intro Part Five, Chapter 7)

In the Salesian tradition, the human heart is the place in which all of who we are - intellect, affect, will, sexuality, imagination, and so much more - comes together. The human heart is where the divine and the human are intimately intertwined. To that end, people willing to tune the strings of their hearts - to blend with God's melody of love - become people of integrity.

When people read the "letters of your heart," what do they see?

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Ash Wednesday (March 1, 2006)

Readings J1 2: 12-18 Ps 51: 3-6a, 12-14, 17 2 Cor 5:20-6:2 Mt 6: 1-6, 16-18

Suggested Emphasis

"When you fast, do not look glum like the hypocrites..."

Salesian Perspective

Lent is a time when each of us is challenged to recognize our need for conversion. We are invited to closely examine our relationship with God, ourselves and one another. Simply put, Lent asks us to name those sins, vices, weaknesses, and anything -- that prevent us from making real in thought, word and deeds our God-given dignity.

A popular way of ritualizing this inner journey is to 'give up' something for Lent. Maybe you refrain from tobacco or eschew alcohol; still others pass up all desserts. In short, we do without something we normally enjoy. Using traditional language, Lent is a time for fasting. Francis de Sales was no stranger to fasting or 'giving up' for Lent. He endorsed the practice of fasting, provided that it meets three conditions.

First, our fasting "should be entire and universal." Our 'giving up' cannot be limited to depriving our mouths of food or drink or other treats. Francis insists that, among other things, we should deprive our eyes of things that are "frivolous and unhealthy: we must deny our ears of "vain" talk or gossip: we should deny our tongue words that slander, accuse, or injure: we should give up "useless thoughts, vain memories and all the superfluous appetites and desires" of our hearts. Second, our fasting should not be done for the eyes of others. Rather, our 'giving up' is meant to be scrutinized by God alone. Third, all of our actions, including our fasting, serve only "to please God alone, to whom all honor and glory belong."

Fasting, however, is only half of the story. Lent, in its fullest expression is also a season for feasting! In their book Sense of Sexuality, (Doubleday 1989) Drs. Evelyn and James Whitehead remind us that "fasting, at its finest, is solely punishment nor denial. We fast not only to avoid evils but to recapture forgotten goods." Put another way of fasting is fruitful only if we have some deeply valued 'yes' in our life." The arduous discipline of feasting con our fasting; we need something for which to fast.

That's right. Feasting requires no less discipline than fasting. The discipline of feasting celebrates well and heart God-given blessings that we enjoy without engaging in selfishness and excess.

Lent, then, is as much a matter of 'doing' as it is 'doing without.' St. Francis de Sales writes in his Introduction to Devout Life: "Both fasting and working mortify and discipline us. If the work you undertake contributes to the glory of God and to your own welfare, I much prefer that you should endure the discipline of working than that of fasting;

He continues: "One person may find it painful to fast, another to serve the sick, to visit prisoners, to hear confessions, to preach, to assist the needy, to pray, and to perform similar exercises. These latter pains have as much value as the former." Whether through fasting or feasting, turning away from sin or embracing virtue, these forty days of Lent are about our 'insides': our heart, mind, thoughts, feelings, attitudes, hopes and fears. It is the journey of the soul and "As for myself," says Francis de Sales, "it seems to me that we ought to begin with the interior."

God give us the grace to make a new beginning with these forty days....and with every day that follows thereafter.

Rev. Michael S. Murray, OSFS, is the Executive Director of the De Sales Spirituality Center.

1st Sunday In Lent (March 5, 2006)

Readings Gn 9: 8-15 Ps 25: 4-9 1 Pt 3: 18-22 Mk 1: 12-15

Suggested Emphasis

"The Spirit sent Jesus out toward the desert. He stayed there for forty days, put to the test there by Satan."

Salesian Perspective

St. Matthew's Gospel provides details of the nature of the test that Jesus experienced in the desert: to be a different kind of Messiah, to find a quicker or more spectacular way to win people over, to employ a one-shot way of doing God's will that would make everybody happy.

In other words, Jesus was tempted to be *someone other* than who God called him to be.

This test in the desert was simply the beginning. The temptation dogged Jesus every day of his ministry. The voices in all different shapes and sizes - expelled demons, Pharisees, Sadducees, family, friends, even some of his closest disciples. Screaming, whispering or shrieking, the voices of temptation tried to dissuade Jesus from being himself, to abandon his focus, to abandon his mission, to turn away from his role in God's plan of salvation. Even as the life drained from his body on Golgotha, Jesus still heard the voices of temptation taunting, "You saved others, save yourself. Come down from that cross."

All of us are tempted to be someone other than who God calls us to be. Voices around us, voices within us attempt to convince us that we would be happier, healthier, more successful, powerful and persuasive if we were someone - other than who we are.

We are most like Jesus when we strive to be faithful to God's plan for us. We are most like Jesus when we are faithful to our unique role in God's plan of salvation for others. We are most like Jesus when we refuse the temptation to sell ourselves short, to sell ourselves out, to look for a short cut. We flirt with the easier, the more convenient, or the more popular.

of trying to do what is right, of trying to do what is good, of trying to do what is just.

St. Francis de Sales' advice is on point: "Don't sow your desires in some else's garden; cultivate your own as best you can. Don't try to be someone other than who you are; rather, desire to be thoroughly who you are."

With God's help, and the encouragement of others, let us be who we are...and be that well. In the midst of the clamor of life, let us be true to ourselves...and give glory and praise to the God who made us.

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2nd Sunday In Lent (March 12, 2006)

Readings Gn 22: 1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18 Ps 116: 10, 15-19 Rom 8:L 31b-34 Mk 9: 2-10

Suggested Emphasis

"Jesus was transfigured before their eyes."

Salesian Perspective

Something remarkable happened on that mountain.

Consider the possibility that it was not Jesus who changed but rather it was Peter, James and John who were transformed. Imagine that this account from Mark's Gospel documents the experience of Peter, James and John as their eyes were opened; their vision widened, enabling them to see without impediment the virtually blinding light of Jesus' love that flowed from every fiber of his being.

Indeed, every day of Jesus' life something of that remarkable brilliance, that remarkable passion, and that remarkable glory was revealed to people of all ages, stages and states of life. The shepherds and magi saw it; the elders in the temple saw it; the guests at a wedding saw it; a woman caught in adultery saw it; a boy possessed by demons saw it; a man blind saw it; a good thief saw it.

If so many others could recognize it in a word, a glance, or a touch, why might Peter, James and John have required extra effort in helping them to see Jesus' glory? Perhaps it was because they were so close to Jesus; perhaps it was because they were with him every day; perhaps it was because, on some level, they had somehow taken his glory for granted.

What about us? Do we recognize that same divine glory present in us, present in others, present in creation, present in even the simplest and most ordinary, everyday experiences of justice, truth, healing, forgiveness, reconciliation and compassion?

Or do we take it for granted?

St. Francis de Sales saw the Transfiguration as a "glimpse of heaven." During this season of Lent, may our eyes, minds and our hearts be transfigured and transformed. May we see more clearly the glory of a God who always redeems us, who heals us, who forgives us, who challenges us, who pursues us, who strengthens us and who loves us.

May we grow in our ability, through the quality of our lives, to make that "glimpse of heaven" a reality.

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3rd Sunday in Lent (March 19, 2006)

Readings Ex 20: 1-17 or 20: 1-3, 7-8, 12-17 Ps 19: 8-11 1 Cor 1: 22-25 Jn 2: 13-25

Suggested Emphasis

"I, the Lord your God, brought you out of slavery."

Salesian Perspective

The Ten Commandments served two purposes in the lives of the Israelites: it reminded them of the experience of slavery in the past at the hands of the Egyptians and it offered precepts for avoiding in the future the slavery of sin in all forms.

Jesus brought us a New Commandment: "Love one another as I have loved you." While not "abolishing the Law of the prophets," Jesus' command to love one another makes it very clear that simply keeping the Ten Commandments does not meet the standard that Jesus established. In fact, Jesus frequently criticized the Scribes and Pharisees for burdening others with a slavish interpretation of the Law of Moses.

Francis de Sales certainly understood that while we must observe the commandments and counsels of God without exception, observing the commandments and counsels of God without exception is not enough for those who wish to follow the example of Jesus.

We are called to lead lives of *devotion*.

Francis explained: "Devotion is that spiritual agility and vivacity that enables us to do what is right and good with alacrity and affection." Christian perfection challenges us to follow the commandments and counsels of God in order to promote "a cheerfulness and alacrity in the performance of charitable actions."

In short, it is the cheerful, enthusiastic and life-giving manner in which we do what is good that enables us to "fulfill the law and the prophets" and to make real in the lives of others the New Commandment, to "love one another."

Many people "give up" things during Lent. What a perfect time to free ourselves from the slavery of minimalism and to give up those affections and attitudes that prevent us from doing what is right and good in ways that are positive, cheerful and enthusiastic! What a perfect time to recommit ourselves to embracing the freedom of the Spirit and the daughters of God by living - each and every day - Christ's New Law of Love.

Be holy. Be healthy. For God's sake (as well as for your own sake and for the sake of others) be happy!

Doing what is right is not meant to weigh us down. Doing what is right is the way of being lifted up!

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4th Sunday in Lent (March 26, 2006)

Readings 2 Chr 36: 14-16, 19-23 Ps 137: 1-6 Eph 2: 4-10 Jn 3: 14-21

Suggested Emphasis

"God is rich in mercy...manifested to us in Christ Jesus."

"We are truly God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to lead the life of good deeds which God prepared for us to bring to the advance."

Salesian Perspective

Lent is a time to celebrate the mercy, the generosity and the kindness of God.

We certainly hear echoes of Paul's letter to the Ephesians in St. Francis de Sales' observations in his Treatise on of God (II, 5) where he writes: "Who now can have any doubt as to our abundant means of salvation since we have great a Savior, in view of whom we have been made and by whose merits we have been ransomed?"

Francis continues: "Far indeed was Adam's sin from overwhelming God's generosity; on the contrary, Adam's sin made God's generosity all the more and called it forth!"

Lent calls us to proclaim this truth: as much as God loved us by creating us, God loved us even more by redeeming us. As St. Francis de Sales claimed, "The state of redemption is a hundred times better than that of innocence."

Lent calls us to proclaim the truth that in the face of God's generosity we are all-too-frequently stingy, small-minded and small hearted. This is most powerfully displayed when we sin. Ironically, it is only when we truly accept God's generosity that we are truly able to repent of our sinful affections, attitudes and actions. Francis de Sales asks the question: "Do you not know that the kindness of God should lead you to repentance?"

Lent calls us to "lead the life of good deeds." Repentance is not merely refraining from sin; repentance is also embracing virtue, of doing what is commanded and counseled by God "diligently, frequently and readily with alacrity and cheerfulness." (Introduction to the Devout Life, Part I, Chapter 1)

In what remains of this season, dedicate yourself to thankfulness. Be grateful for God's mercy, generosity and kindness to you: accept the salvation won for you in Christ! Turn away from those sins that prevent you from experiencing and accepting that generosity in your life. Give testimony to God's kindness and your repentance by being merciful, and kind in your relationships with others. In so doing, you more convincingly become "God's handiwork, created by Jesus Christ, to lead the life of good deeds" that God prepared for you - yes, you - from the creation of the world.

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4th Sunday in Lent (April 2, 2006)

Readings Jer 31: 31-34 Ps 51: 3-4, 12-15 Heb 5: 7-9 Jn 12: 20-33

Suggested Emphasis

"We should like to see Jesus."

"All, from the least to the greatest, shall know me, says the Lord."

Salesian Perspective

We would all like to see Jesus.

Where do we look for him? Up the sky? Far away places? Special people? Extraordinary experiences? Once-in-a-lifetime events?

Francis de Sales suggests that we start closer to home: "God is everywhere and in every thing. There is no place in this world in which God is not very really present. God is not only in the place in which you find yourself, but in a very special way, dwells in the depths of your heart." (Introduction to the Devout Life, II, 2)

so many blasphemies, so many calumnies, without saying a word."

"The third reason is that this animal permits us to burden it as much as we want without offering any resistance. The load with remarkable reliability. So much did our Divine Master love reliability that He Himself chose to give an example of it. So He bore the heavy burden of our iniquities and suffered for them all that we had merited."

Francis de Sales invites us follow the humble, patient and reliable Christ through the unfolding scenes to the climactic loving death. He urges us to practice personal humility, patience and reliability so that we might likewise humbly endure through our own trials in order to experience at our own resurrections and ascensions.

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Easter Vigil (April 15, 2006)

Suggested Emphasis

"If we have been united with him through likeness to his death, so shall we be through a like resurrection..."

Salesian Perspective

The death to which Paul refers is not limited to the death that Jesus experienced on the last day of his earthly life. The likeness to Jesus' death is not limited to the day that we draw our last breath. Truth is, we are called to share in the death of Jesus every day of our lives. Truth is, death - letting go, giving in, and letting in - is deeply imbedded in every dimension of our lives.

Listen to Francis de Sales' observations on this relationship between our lives - our loves - and the death of Jesus. The death and passion of our Lord is the sweetest and the most compelling motive that can animate our hearts in this life. It is the very truth that mystical bees make their most excellent honey in the wounds of this 'lion of the tribe of Judah,' slain, pierced and rent upon the Mount of Calvary. The children of the cross glory in this, their wondrous mystery which the world does not understand: out of death, which devours all things, has come the food of our consolation. Out of death, strong above all things, has issued the all-sweet honey of our love." (Treatise, Book 12, Chapter 13)

This is the greatest mystery of our faith: where there is decay, there is the promise of rejuvenation; where there is death, there is the promise of healing; where there is imprisonment, there is the promise of freedom; where there is adversity, there is the promise of sobriety; where there is emptiness, there is the promise of abundance; where there is ignorance, there is the promise of understanding; where there is failure, there is the promise of success; where there is disaster, there is the promise of redemption; where there is loss, there is the promise of being found.

Where there is death, there is the promise of life.

Losing, finding; falling behind, moving forward; feeling alone, being together...these and so many experiences are the rhythm of life, the dance of fasting and feasting, the dance of dying and rising.

"All love that does not take its origin from the Savior's passion is foolish and perilous. Unhappy is death without the Savior's love; unhappy is love without the Savior's death. Love and death are so mingled in the Savior's passion that we cannot have the one in our hearts without the other. Upon Calvary we cannot have life without love, or love without the Redeemer's death. Except there, all is either eternal death or eternal love. All Christian wisdom consists in choosing to die or to live rightly." (*Ibid*)

As we struggle to embrace the falling and rising tides of daily living, may God give us the grace and the courage to choose rightly and so to know

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Easter Sunday (April 16, 2006)

Readings Acts 10: 34a, 37-43 Ps 118: 1-2, 16ab-17, 22-23 Col 3: 1-4 or 1 Cor 5: 6b-8 Jn 20: 1-9 or Mk 16: 1-7

Suggested Emphasis

"Clear out the old yeast!"

Salesian Perspective

The words from Corinthians come from the earliest Easter Homily found in Christian literature. "Clear out the old yeast." Keep this Easter imperative in mind as we run with John and Peter to confront the mystery of the empty tomb. For us that clearing out the old yeast is a prerequisite to experiencing spiritual growth. Drawing on Jewish tradition the parable of the yeast illustrates the need to remove anything that holds us back from reaching our full spiritual potential. In doing so we are ready to solve the mystery of the empty tomb and to understand that it means that Jesus has freed us from a blighted vision that had convinced us that death somehow triumphs over life.

Following the celebration of Passover, Jewish families removed every trace of old bread, bread with yeast, from homes to prepare for the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which immediately followed Passover, and during which only unleavened bread, bread without yeast, was eaten.

Paul knew that it doesn't take much yeast to raise the dough. Likewise, it doesn't take much sinful behavior to distort a person's life, an entire family or even a whole community of believers either. He maintained that this corruption is the product of the yeast of malice and wickedness. Perhaps he also had in mind the corruption of authentic Jewish law under the influence of legalistic religious leaders, which Jesus consistently rebuked. In any case, it is in Jesus' passion, death, resurrection and ascension - the Paschal Mystery - that our spiritual house is emptied of the distorting influence of evil and we are once again prepared for life in a Christian community.

Mary, John and Peter had to shed their old understandings about death and its apparent power when they found the tomb of Jesus empty. Their old and corrupt understandings of the power of death and evil were no longer adequate if they wanted to understand and experience new life with Jesus.

St. Francis de Sales challenges us to acknowledge that our old ways of malice and wickedness are expressions of an inadequate way of understanding our potential for growth in the devout life. The very essence of practicing devoutness is to acknowledge our need to purify ourselves of the corrupting influence of sin and temptation and to recognize that God makes it possible for us to do so. Like Mary, Peter and John we become conscious of the new possibilities available to us.

Salesian spirituality is a day-to-day investment in the new vision made possible by Jesus' death and resurrection. It is a consistent effort to "put off the old man, and put on the new by forsaking sin and removing and cutting away what obstructs union with God." This purging "neither can nor should end except with our life itself." (Introduction to Devout Life: Part I, Chapter 5)

Conscious attention to our need to "clear out the old yeast" and prepare for this new and great feast is a great indication that we have unlimited potential for spiritual growth.

Alleluia!

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2nd Sunday of Easter/Divine Mercy Sunday (April 23, 2006)

Readings Acts 4: 32-35 Ps 118: 2-4, 13-15, 22-24 1 Jn 5: 1-6 Jn 20: 19-31

Suggested Emphasis

"He showed them his hands and his side..."

Salesian Perspective

In the wake of Jesus' crucifixion and death, the apostles were locked away together in fear. They were afraid they might suffer the same fate as their teacher.

Despite their anxious seclusion, Jesus breaks into their lives: not merely into the physical space in which they were taking refuge; Jesus also breaks into the core of their minds and hearts. Jesus attempts to calm their fears; he challenges them to be at peace; he does this in a rather confrontational and mysterious manner: by showing them the wounds on his hands and side.

Perhaps not so mysterious, however, if understood in the context of words written by the character of Dr. Hanni Lector in the closing scene of the film *Red Dragon*: "Our scars have the power to remind us that the past was real."

It is remarkable that the experience of resurrection did not remove the scars of Jesus' woundedness: the lasting pain, disappointment, misunderstanding, rejection, humiliation, abandonment, suffering and death. Notwithstanding his wounds, however, Christ's resurrection powerfully demonstrated that pain, sadness, suffering and injustice -- as they were -- did not, ultimately, wield the last word. While suffering was clearly a part of Jesus' life, there was something more to his life than suffering.

St. Francis de Sales wrote: "We must often recall that our Lord has saved us by his suffering and endurance, and must work out our salvation by sufferings and afflictions, enduring with all possible forbearance the injuries, deprivations and discomforts we meet." ([Introduction to the Devout Life](#), Part III, Chapter 3)

All of us bear the wounds of failure, deception, betrayal, disappointment and loss. Our hearts, our minds, our memories and our souls - bear the scars to prove it. Like the apostles, we, too, are tempted to withdraw from others, to lock ourselves away in some secluded emotional or spiritual corner, living in fear of what other pain or disappointments may come our way. Of course, in withdrawing from life, we figuratively - in some cases, even literally - die.

Jesus clearly demonstrates in his own life that our wounds do not necessarily need to overwhelm or disable us. And even if these wounds may be permanent, they need not rob us of the power and promise of recovery, of renewal - of resurrection - unless we despair, unless we allow ourselves to be defeated by the nails of negativity.

The wounds of our past certainly leave their mark in our present: they don't necessarily determine the course of our future. Turn to the love of Jesus who knows what it means to be wounded and who shows us how to move through our wounds...and the scars they leave.

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3rd Sunday of Easter (April 30, 2006)

Readings Acts 3: 13-15, 17-19 Ps 4: 2, 4, 7-9 1 Jn 2: 1-5a Lk 24: 35-48

Suggested Emphasis

"Peace be with you."

Salesian Perspective

In 1954, the great French painter, Henri Matisse died at the age of eighty-six. In the last years of his life, arthritis and deformed his hands, making it painful for him to hold a paintbrush. Yet he continued to paint, placing a cloth between his fingers to keep the brush from slipping. One day someone asked him why he submitted his body to suffering. Why did he continue to paint in the face of such great physical pain? Matisse's response went something like this: the pain eventually passes, while the beauty remains.

Why do I tell that story on the third Sunday of Easter? If we look at the Gospel passage from Luke, Jesus encounters his disciples for the first time and says "peace be with you." This particular passage from Luke follows the experience of Jesus' first disciples on the way to Emmaus. As in the case of Jesus' first disciples, we, too, can find ourselves wondering about (perhaps even disbelieving on occasion) in the presence of God in our messy and sometimes even joyless lives.

Some of us gather Sunday after Sunday to church. We wonder if all the claims of faith and stories of Jesus are true. Can Jesus give peace to our lives when we feel that our lives are anything but peaceful? How do we experience peace even as we are full of worries about the house, the car, the kids, the job, and the demands and deadlines of our state of life make us anxious and preoccupied?

When do we possibly find or make the time to be at peace? How can Jesus possibly provide this kind of peace for each of us - and all of us - long so deeply?

Remember the story of Henri Matisse? In a similar way, many of the worries, pains and frustrations that we experience will also fade away. At some point in the process many of the worries, pains and frustrations that we experience are used to shape us into something useful and beautiful for God and for one another. And the beauty of what we become through the process will ultimately prevail long after the world as we know it has passed away.

Saint Francis de Sales reminds: "Do not worry about the tensions and struggles in your life, because the same loving Father who takes care of you today, will take care of you tomorrow; either He will shield you from suffering or give us the unfailing strength to bear it. Be at peace, and put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginations."

In the midst of life's difficulties may Christ's peace be with us, a peace that helps us to embrace all of life's challenges and likewise enables us to see and reflect - life's greater beauty!

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4TH SUNDAY OF EASTER (May 7, 2006)

Readings Acts 4: 8-12 Ps 118: 1, 8-9, 21-23, 26, 29 1 Jn 3: 1-2 Jn 10: 11-18

Suggested Emphasis

"I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me in the same way that the Father knows me and the Father knows me."

Salesian Perspective

I'm sure you have heard the expression "to know is to love." When we're talking in a general way, it is certainly true that we can hardly be expected to fall in love with something or someone we are totally unfamiliar with. But the statement "to know is to love" is not completely true when it is a question of human relationships. In these relationships, it is more accurate to say "to love is to know", i.e., that once we have decided to love others, to commit ourselves to others, we open ourselves to them and they in turn, reciprocate by committing and opening themselves to us. Jesus expressed this truth when he says: "Whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him."

14:21) Francis de Sales echoes this truth by telling us, "Knowledge of the good can give us the beginning of love's measure." (Treatise, Book 6, chap. 4)

In today's gospel, Jesus makes a surprising and startlingly revelation about his relationship with us. "I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me in the same way that the Father knows me and I know the Father. He is saying that he knows us as intimately and as personally as his heavenly Father knows him. And we in turn know him the way he knows the Father. The kind of knowledge that Christ our Good Shepherd has for each one of us is acquired by a very close and intimate contact with us. It is a result of his love for us, of his willingness to commit himself totally and completely to us just as a shepherd totally and completely commits himself, his entire life to his sheep."

If we reflect on the relationship of a shepherd to his sheep, we see that his whole life is centered on the lives of his sheep. The shepherd is with them all day long, and many times throughout the night he watches over them. It's no surprise that he gets to know all of the peculiarities, all of the individual traits of each of his sheep and gives them each a name. To others his sheep may all look the same, but to their shepherd, each is different and distinct. So he has no trouble whatsoever picking his own out from among hundreds in the sheep pen.

The parable of the Good Shepherd is not so far removed from us as we might first be inclined to believe. It touches very well-springs of our being - our need to be known and loved for who we are, no matter what. We might sometimes think, feel or act in ways that are as smelly and dirty as most sheep are; we might get into all kinds of trouble by following our shepherd, like the sheep who get caught in bramble bushes, fall into rocky crags or have a hundred and one missteps. Nevertheless, our Good Shepherd is there to bind up our wounds. He knows and loves us to the extent that he puts his life on the line for us.

Like the Good Shepherd, do we put ourselves on the line for one another?

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5TH SUNDAY OF EASTER (May 14, 2006)

Readings Acts 9: 26-31 Ps 22: 26-27, 28, 30, 31-32 1 Jn 3: 18-24 Jn 15: 1-8

Suggested Emphasis

"We are to believe in the name of his son, Jesus Christ, and are to love one another as he commanded us. Those who keep his commandments remain in him and he in them."

Salesian Perspective

The scripture passage for today is part of Jesus' farewell discourse to his disciples, which takes up several chapters of the gospel of John. In these words Jesus is communicating to his disciples the most important things he wants them to remember. In a powerful and beautiful extended metaphor, Jesus speaks of himself as the vine and his disciples as the branches. He tells them that they must tie themselves closely to him. In order to be healthy, fruit-bearing branches they must be willing to be trimmed clean of those growths that keep them from bearing fruit. Above all, they must remain attached to the vine. If they become separated from the vine, they can produce no fruit. They will become withered and dry branches, good for nothing but to be burnt.

Jesus makes it clear that the disciples already have been given what they need. They have heard the words of life that Jesus has shared with them, if they make his words part of their lives they will live in him and he will live in them. Hearing the word is the first essential step. But it is only the first step. Living the word, absorbing it, making it an integral part of one's life, must happen if one is truly to thrive as a disciple of Jesus. It is as true for us today as it was for the disciples to whom Jesus spoke and with whom he lived while here on earth.

We, too, have been given God's word. Like the disciples, we too are called to live in Jesus, or to live Jesus, as Fr

Sales said, as we go about our daily tasks. And what is the fruit we are supposed to produce? Our fruit is a life in the love of Christ, a life lived in a way that shows our brothers and sisters that we really believe what Jesus told us. Our life marked by patience and kindness and gentleness and humility.

The way we know that we are living in Jesus and that he is living in us is that we are keeping his commandment called to love "in deed and in truth and not merely talk about it." We can and should read the scriptures and other books. We can and should meditate on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We can and should say our prayers and make use of the sacraments of the Church. In the end, however, it is how we treat our brothers and sisters that wins the story. If our words are not supported by our deeds, they are empty and barren words, good for nothing.

If we talk about the forgiveness of Jesus, but hang on to that grudge against an estranged relative for spoiling Christmas dinner ten years ago, we are not living Jesus. If we harbor resentment in our hearts against a colleague that got the promotion we wanted, we are not living Jesus. If we refuse to acknowledge addictive behavior and get help for it, we are not living Jesus. If we delight in gossiping about our neighbor's misfortunes or weaknesses, we have some pruning to do before we can bear fruit in the name of Jesus.

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6TH SUNDAY OF EASTER (May 21, 2006)

Readings Acts 10: 25-26, 34-35, 44-48 Ps 98: 1-4 1 Jn 4: 7-10 Jn 15: 9-17

Suggested Emphasis

"Love one another as I have loved you."

Salesian Perspective

Jesus taught us about a type of love that is very different from the love we often experience in the world. By His words and by His deeds, He showed us how the Trinity Itself loves. This love is a self-emptying love, a self-sacrificial love so focused on the other that the self is forgotten. In the great Paschal mystery, we see Jesus so absorbed in the Father that He willingly sacrificed His very self for this love: his love of the Father's will is all that matters.

St. Francis de Sales is a spiritual master in the school of this love. His great work, Treatise on the Love of God, is a journey into the very heart of the love of the Trinity. At the very end of this two-volume work, Francis reaches the summit. For Francis, this is the true academy of love: when the human will surrenders itself to the will of the Father in a self-donation, love blossoms. Nothing enflames the human heart as this act of self-emptying love.

Francis de Sales wrote: "The death and passion of our Lord is the sweetest and the most compelling motive that animate our hearts in this mortal life...The children of the cross glory in this, their wondrous paradox which the world does not understand: out of death, which devours all things has come the food of our consolation, and out of death, above all things, has issued the all-sweet honey of our love. O Jesus, my Savior, how worthy of love is your death, the supreme effect of your love." (Treatise, Part 12, Chapter 13)

You may ask how St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane de Chantal can be known for developing a philosophy of life that is optimistic, gentle, humble, and caring, if it is centered on Calvary. How do joyful friendship and devotion spring from such a source? Yet, this is exactly what we celebrate today. Easter, the Resurrection, the new life promised by God to us when we follow this path. While we will always pass through Calvary, Jesus has shown us that the true end of self-sacrificial love is a sharing in the very life of the Trinity Itself. This life, the true destiny of the human spirit, is that which never ends.

We don't have to look far to locate opportunities for self-sacrificial love. As St. Francis de Sales knew so well, they are present in every walk of life and in every situation of life. They come in small, medium, and large. The daily de-

ability to embrace them is a key to holiness. Let us listen to Jesus: "All this I tell you that my joy may be yours & joy may be complete."

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ASCENSION OF THE LORD (May 25, 2002 or May 28, 2006)

Readings Acts 1: 1-11 Ps 47: 2-3, 6-9, Eph 1: 17-23 pr Eph 4: 1-13 or 4: 1-7, 11-13 Mk 16: 15-20

Suggested Emphasis

"Go, make disciples of all nations."

Salesian Perspective

In speaking on the mystery of the Ascension of Our Lord, Francis de Sales wrote: "We forsake our merely human order to live a loftier life above ourselves. We hide all this new life in God with Jesus Christ who alone sees it, and gives it. Our new life is heavenly love, which vivifies and animates our soul, and this love is wholly hidden and the things of God with Jesus Christ. As the sacred words of the Gospel say, after Jesus had shown himself for a while to his disciples, he ascended up to heaven, and at length a cloud surrounded him, took him and hid him from eyes. Jesus Christ, then, is hidden in heaven in God. Jesus Christ is our love, and our love is the life of our soul. Therefore our life is hidden in God with Jesus Christ, and when Jesus who is our love and therefore our spiritual father appear on the Day of Judgment, we shall also appear with him in glory. That is, Jesus Christ, our love, will glorify us by communicating to us his own joy and splendor." (Treatise on the Love of God, Book VII, Chapter 6)

Our life is indeed hidden in God. The deepest reality of who we are is known only to God. Still, for Francis de Sales, living a life hidden in God is not the same as keeping that life a secret: it is about giving witness to the deepest truth who we are - and who God is - by the quality of our relationships with one another. Appropriate, then, that Francis de Sales calls us to practice the hidden virtues, "those little, humble virtues which grow like flowers at the foot of the cross: helping the poor, visiting the sick and taking care of your family, with all the tasks that go with such things and that useful diligence that will not allow you to stand idle." (Introduction to the Devout Life, Part III, Chapter 35)

Through the Ascension, Jesus has been removed from our sight: at least, from the grasp of our physical sight. Nevertheless, the same authority that Jesus claimed from his Father is given to us by virtue of our creation and confirmed in our baptism. We are called to continue the work that Jesus began, that is, to make disciples - followers, believers - of all nations. We are called to be convincing signs of the ongoing redemptive and challenging activity of the triumph of Christ, but in the simple, ordinary and everyday tasks of everyday life.

Paradoxically, to the extent that we are faithful to practicing the little, the hidden virtues that grow "at the foot of the cross" Jesus is no longer hidden: he becomes visible in our love, our concern, our pursuit of justice, our promotion of peace, our willingness to forgive, our attempts at healing.

What could be a more powerful - and convincing - way of making disciples of all nations?

Or, at least, making disciples of the people with whom we interact every day in our little corners of the world?

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7TH SUNDAY OF EASTER (May 28, 2006)

Readings Acts 1: 15-17, 20 a, 20c-26 Ps 103: 1-2, 11-12, 19-20 1 Jn 4: 11-16 Jn 17: 11b-19

Suggested Emphasis

"I consecrate myself for their sakes now, that they may be consecrated in truth."

Salesian Perspective

For the past six weeks we have been observing the great Sunday of Easter, which lasts fifty days, culminating in Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and our Blessed Mother and upon us, in our presence.

Christ is praying to his Father in the Gospel narrative for this 7th Sunday of Easter (John 17: 16-19) with the hope and the desire that we may remain one. He prays that God may protect us and guard us from the evil one: "Consecrate them...I consecrate myself for their sakes now, that they may be consecrated in truth."

In his Treatise on the Love of God, Francis de Sales observed: "Truth is the object of our intellect, and consequently the intellect finds its entire satisfaction in discovering and knowing the truth of things. In proportion as truths are more excellent, the intellect applies itself with greater delight and attention to their consideration." (Book III, Chapter

He continued: "When our mind is raised above the natural light of reason and begin to see the sacred truth of faith, O God, what joy ensues...If divine truths are so sweet even when proposed in the obscure light of faith, O God, what joy will those truths be when we contemplate them in the noonday light of glory! (*Ibid*)

Francis concluded: "Ah, how beautiful and dear to us are the truths that faith reveals by hearing."

We have indeed heard the truth: the truth embodied in the Good News of Jesus Christ, the "Word Made Flesh" who not only speaks the truth, but the one who, ultimately, is the Truth. As beautiful and dear to us as the truth of Jesus that we hear is, Jesus' truth in our lives is even more delightful when we put it into practice!

Jesus prays in today's Gospel that his disciples will see through the world's illusions. By arming themselves with that is God's Word, they will outwit the evil one who seeks to separate them from the Father's protection and from one another. As modern-day disciples and followers of Jesus, our primary responsibility as Christians is to name and embrace the truth of God's love for us today. The truth is that we must not merely hear it but we must also live this truth in our relationships with one another: we must see beyond the ways of the passing world and remain faithful to God's eternal plan and God's eternal way for us in ways that draw us more closely together rather than drive us apart.

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PENTECOST (June 4, 2006)

Readings Acts 2: 1-11 Ps 104: 1ab, 24ac, 29bc-30, 31, 34 1 Cor 12: 3b-7, 12-13 or Gal 5: 16-25 Jn 19-20: 15: 26-27; 16: 12-15

Suggested Emphasis

"Each of us hears them speaking in our own tongue about the marvels that God has accomplished."

Salesian Perspective

Despite the fact that they were speaking to many people from many languages and many cultures, the apostles were understood by all of their listeners as they proclaimed the marvels that God had accomplished.

How was this possible?

Enflamed by the power of the Holy Spirit, the apostles were speaking the language of the heart. They were speaking

enthusiasm. They were speaking with gratitude. They were speaking with praise and thanksgiving. They were speaking from their core. They were speaking from their soul.

In short, they were speaking the universal language - the language of the heart.

We are most human - we are most divine - when we speak the language of the heart, when we speak the language of the soul, when we speak and listen from the soul, when we are grounded in the Word-Made-Flesh.

As we know all too well from our own experience, there is more to communication than meets the eye...for that even the tongue or the ear. Communicating is often a lot easier said than done. We frequently misunderstand one another. We frequently presume to know what others are thinking or feeling. We frequently use the same words for which are different meanings. We frequently have different ways of saying the same thing. We frequently hear, but we frequently fail to listen. We are always talking, but talking is not the same as communicating.....of speaking from heart to another.

St. Francis de Sales tells us that the Holy Spirit comes to inflame the hearts of believers. When we speak and listen, hearts enflamed with joy, truth and gratitude, conflict gives way to understanding, confusion gives way to clarity, estrangement gives way to intimacy, hurt gives way to healing, frustration gives way to forgiveness, violence gives way to peace, sin gives way to salvation.

Francis de Sales offers us this advice: "Speak always of God as God, that is, reverently and devoutly, not with ostentation or affectation, but with a spirit of meekness, charity, and humility. Distill as much as you can of the delicious honey of devotion and of divine things imperceptibly into the ears of now one person and then of another. Pray to God in that it may please God to make this holy dew sink deep into the hearts of those who hear you. It is wonderful how powerfully a sweet and amiable proposal of good things attracts to hearts of hearers."

How might we need to speak, to listen to, to practice the language of love today?

Rev. Michael S. Murray, OSFS, is the Executive Director of the De Sales Spirituality Center.

The Holy Trinity (June 11, 2006)

Readings Dt 4: 32-34, 39-40 Ps 33: 4-6, 9, 18-20, 22 Rom 8: 14-17 Mt 28: 16-20

Suggested Emphasis

"May the grace and peace of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us always."

Salesian Perspective

God is revealed to us as a creating and loving Father, a nourishing and redeeming Son, and an inspiring and comforting Holy Spirit. It is in the image and likeness of the Trinity that we are created; it is in the image and likeness of the Trinity that we are called to live with one another on this earth; it is in the image and likeness of the Trinity that we are destined to share in the glory of heaven.

Trinity speaks of creative fullness; Trinity speaks of healing abundance; Trinity speaks of inspiring generosity.

The Holy Spirit, the Wisdom of God, is the source of the gifts that we need to experience and embody this Triune God in our daily lives. St. Francis de Sales wrote in his Treatise on the Love of God: "We need temperance to restrain the rebellious inclinations of sensuality; justice, to do what is right in relation to God, our neighbor and ourselves; firmness, in order that we might remain faithful in doing what is good and in avoiding what is evil; prudence, to discover the proper ways for us to pursue what is good and to practice virtue; knowledge, that we might know the true good and to love it."

we must aspire, as well as true evil, that we must reject; understanding, to penetrate well into the first and chief foundations or principles of the beauty and excellence of virtue, and; at the very end, wisdom, to contemplate the nature, the first source of all that is good." (Treatise on the Love of God, Book 11, Chapter 15)

Sound familiar? They should be: we know them as the "seven gifts" of the Holy Spirit.

The love that comes from this triune God, this love that is part and parcel of who we are, contains all of these gifts. Francis de Sales described this love as "a splendid lily that has six petals whiter than snow, and in its center are seven beautiful little golden hammers of wisdom that drive into our hearts the loving taste and flavor of the goodness of the Father, our Creator, the mercy of the Son, our Redeemer, and the sweetness of the Holy Spirit, our Sanctifier." (

As mysterious as the Trinity may be, two things are crystal clear: (1) we are called to embody God's creative fullness, God's healing abundance, and God's inspiring generosity, and: (2) we have been given the gifts to make that call a reality.

God, help us to clearly - and convincingly - reflect your image in our own minds, hearts, attitudes and actions. Grant us the grace to be your delight day by day in the lives of one another.

Rev. Michael S. Murray, OSFS, is the Executive Director of the De Sales Spirituality Center.

BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST (June 18, 2006)

Readings Ex 24: 3-8 Ps 116: 12-13, 15-18 Heb 9: 11-15 Mk 14: 12-16, 22-26

Suggested Emphasis

"Do this in memory of me."

Salesian Perspective

Eucharist - a word that literally means *thanksgiving* - is the central celebration of the Christian community. It speaks volumes of who God is in our lives. It speaks volumes of who we are called to be in the lives of one another.

Eucharist celebrates the truth that God so loves us that God sent Jesus to be our redeemer. Eucharist celebrates the truth that God so loves us that God allowed Jesus to be body broken and blood poured out for us. Eucharist celebrates the truth that God loves us so much that the Spirit raised Jesus from the dead that we might share in the power and promise of eternal life.

Eucharistic Prayer III for Children says it this way: Jesus "brought us the good news of life to be lived with you in heaven. He showed us the way to that life here on earth; the way of love...He now brings us together to one table and asks us to do what he did."

Eucharistic Prayer II for Reconciliation tells us that Jesus "has entrusted to us this pledge of his love." Eucharist celebrates the truth that we are called to do more than simply receive the body and blood of Christ. Eucharist celebrates the truth that we are the body and blood of Christ for one another. Eucharist celebrates the truth that we are called to allow ourselves to be broken and poured out for others, to spend our lives in the pursuit of justice, peace, reconciliation, healing, freedom, life and love.

We are called to proclaim the death of the Lord in our willingness to be bread and wine for others. We are called to proclaim the death of the Lord - the power of the Lord - the promise of the Lord - in our willingness to lay down our lives, our talents and our efforts to continue the redeeming, saving work that Jesus began.

We demonstrate our Eucharistic dignity and destiny when we follow Jesus' command to "do this in memory" of

only by celebrating Eucharist on the first day of the week, but by being Eucharist for one another, every day of the week by feeding, nourishing and forgiving one another.

Let us be Eucharist for one another. Let us feed, nourish and forgive...in memory of him...in fellowship with one another.

Rev. Michael S. Murray, OSFS, is the Executive Director of the De Sales Spirituality Center.

12TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (June 25, 2006)

Readings Jb 38: 1, 8-11 Ps 107: 23-24, 25-26, 28-29, 30-31 2 Cor 5: 14-17 Mk 4: 35-41

Suggested Emphasis

"Christ died for all so that those who live might no longer for themselves, but for him who for their sakes died and was raised up. Because of this we no longer look on anyone in terms of mere human judgment."

Salesian Perspective

St. Francis de Sales, the "doctor of love," had his own perspectives on judgment. Specifically, he cautioned against rash judgment. He observed: "Fear, ambition, and similar mental weaknesses often contribute to the birth of suspicious judgment" when it comes to our perspectives of other people.

He continued: People "who have drunk in pride, envy, ambition, and hatred think that everything they see is evil and reprehensible. To be cured...I say, drink as deeply as you can of the sacred wine of charity....The sin of rash judgment is truly a spiritual jaundice that causes all things to appear evil to the eyes of those infected with it."

Put another way, judgment is ultimately in the eye -- or the heart -- of the beholder. "If your reflections are kind and your remarks are kind," remarked Francis, "your judgments will also be kind. If your affections are charitable, your judgments will be kind."

Obviously, if our affections are neither kind nor charitable, our judgments of other people will be, at best, unkind and uncharitable. Such a practice is incompatible with anyone who is trying to be a "new creation" in Christ.

Unfortunately, we know from our own experience that it is all too easy to waste our time judging the motives and intentions of other people. If this weren't bad enough, we seldom keep such opinions to ourselves, but often share our judgments with third parties, leading to "uneasiness, contempt of neighbor, pride, self-satisfaction, and many other effects, chief among them being slander."

Perhaps Francis de Sales really put his finger on the issue and summed it up when he wrote: "It is the mark of an unprofitable soul to amuse itself with examining the lives of other people." The old ways of looking at other people in terms of mere human judgment have passed away: what are we doing to keep it that way?

Besides, on any given day, we probably have more than enough to do when it comes to examining our own lives: why do we? Why spin our wheels, then, by dissecting the lives of others for our own amusement...and to our own shame?

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13TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (July 2, 2006)

Readings Wis 1: 13-15; 2: 23-24 Ps 30: 2, 4, 5-6, 11, 12, 13 2 Cor 8: 7, 9, 13-15 Mk 5: 21-43

Suggested Emphasis

"God did not make death, nor does God rejoice in the destruction of the living."

"Just as you are rich in every respect, so may you abound all the more in your work of charity."

Salesian Perspective

Death is an unavoidable part of life. In truth, long before each of us takes our last breath, we will experience many deaths throughout our lives: occasions of loss, disappointment, surrender and letting go.

Francis de Sales offers this advice to all people who, while celebrating God's gift of life, also accept the reality of death: "How worthwhile it is really to understand that we are only given this life so as to gain eternal life! Without this knowledge we fix our affections on what is in this world through which we are passing; when it comes to leaving, we are dismayed and full of fear. Believe me, if we are to live happily during this pilgrimage we must keep alive before our eyes the hope of arriving in our homeland where we shall stay for all eternity." (Selected Letters by Elizabeth St. Elizabeth, 261)

Life is full of so many people, relationships, gifts, blessings, challenges and endeavors that enhance and nourish the human spirit! How do we truly, fully and completely enjoy them without clinging to them?

By being generous.

Look no further than to the example of Jesus himself. Jesus, the Son of God, the one in whom, through whom all things exist "made himself poor so that we might become rich." (2 Cor 8) Jesus did not cling to all the good and blessed here on earth for his own consumption or satisfaction: his satisfaction was found in generously sharing all of who he was and what he possessed with others. Jesus conquered sin and death precisely because he had committed himself to the path of generosity during the course of his life.

In the face of limitation, in the face of setback, in the face of sin, in the face of surrender we are tempted to cling exclusively to all the good that God gives us. Jesus shows us another way; insofar as we are willing to respond to the experiences of loss and letting go by generously sharing ourselves with others, we are destined to conquer death and come to understand what it means to truly live.

If there is anything that we truly possess and never lose in this life, let it be our commitment to perform good works, to make real and tangible the richness of God's love in us, and to generously share God's love and good works with another.

Rev. Michael S. Murray, OSFS, is the Executive Director of the De Sales Spirituality Center.

14TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (July 9, 2006)

Readings Ez 2:2-5 Ps 123:1-4 2 Cor 12: 7-10 Mk 6: 1-6

Suggested Emphasis

"A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and among his own kin and in his own house."

Salesian Perspective

The account in today's Gospel is but one of many episodes in which Jesus experienced rejection: people "took offense at him because of his dedication and devotion to doing God's Will in his own life. So strong was this resistance and rejection in his native place that "he was not able to perform any mighty deed" there.

The temptation that Jesus faced - the temptation we all face - is to be more concerned about being accepted by others than to stick with our convictions when confronted by rejection. We are tempted to dilute the truth, to lower our standards, to abandon anything that "rocks the boat." We are tempted to win friends at all costs, but we lose ourselves in the process.

St. Francis de Sales, the gentleman saint, was a man who tried his best to speak and live the truth of the Gospel in a humble, gentle and friendly way. For all his powers of persuasion, though, he, too, experienced rejection. In his [Introduction to the Devout Life](#) he writes: "As soon as people see that you wish to follow a devout life they cast a thousand darts of mockery and detraction at you. The most slanderous of them will slander your devotion as hypocrisy, bigotry and trickery. Your friends will raise a lot of objections which they consider very prudent and charitable: they will tell you that you will become depressed, lose your reputation in the world, be unbearable, grow old before your time, and that your affairs at home will suffer. They will say that you can save your soul without going to such extremes." (Chapter 1)

Ouch! Seems that the Good News is not always so good for the folks who try to live it!

To be sure, we sometimes need to look for the kernels of truth that may be contained in criticism and rejection. Are we arrogant? Are we strident? Are we too pushy or stubborn? Is it really God's Will that we promote, or our own? If our conscience is clear, how do we deal with rejection?

Francis de Sales' advises: "Be firm in your purposes and unswerving in your resolutions. Perseverance will prove that you are sincerely sacrificing yourself to God and dedicating yourself to living a devout life." He concludes: "The Lord may hold us to be fools." Like Jesus, sometimes rejection is a price - however painful - that we must be willing to pay.

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15TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (July 16, 2006)

Readings Am 7: 12-15 Ps 85: 9-14 Eph 1: 3-14 or 1: 3-10 Mk 6: 7-13

Suggested Emphasis

"The Lord took me from following the flock, and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'"

"In Him we were also chosen, destined in accord with the purpose of the One who accomplishes all things, according to the intention of his will, so that we might exist for the praise of his glory we who first hoped in Christ."

Salesian Perspective

St. Francis de Sales once traveled to Bellevaux with a young priest where he relived his first days as a missionary in the Chablais. The residents were very timid and wary. The two could not get any lodging, no wine, no seats to sit or eat poor bread for which they paid enormously - a little cheese, a little water, having no table other than the ground and no tablecloth other than their own cloaks.

Francis said: "Here is the real apostolic life, the life where one can imitate in some fashion the poverty of Jesus Christ and his Apostles. I am accustomed to this because for two or three years I experienced the same cruelty from the residents in various villages."

Even with these setbacks, or because of them, Francis loved the people whose pastor he was. He gave everyone a fraternal welcome and led them in apostolic generosity which he himself practiced. He put into practice: "It is better to be humble with the poor than to share booty with the proud." (Prov. 16: 19) He knew the apostolic spirit: "He is clothed in sackcloth; he is broken-hearted; he soothes the dejected spirit." (Prov. 33:19)

Francis listened to God's voice and added his own to the Lord's. His keen intellect and educational background prepared him for the challenges ahead.

him how to argue, yet he was able to turn aside hatred. Francis had a great desire to debate the Protestant ministers, but few took up the challenge. A few in his audience secretly took notes from his sermons, copied them, and passed them around Geneva. There was little response at first, but later there came great and many conversions.

One can do a great deal in his or her own style of preaching, teaching, and work. It is a great gift to allow the Holy Spirit to work in us and others, not to be discouraged by hardships, disappointments, and our own way of wanting things done. Many great people have gone before us and have shown us the way. Francis showed the power of the word of hope, hope which eventually produced great fruit, due to the insight and vigor and determination of a saint who was unwilling to allow frustration and pain to prevent him from preaching the word of the Lord.

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16TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (July 23, 2006)

Readings Jer 23: 1-6 Ps 23: 1-6 Eph 2: 13-18 Mk 6: 30-34

Suggested Emphasis

"Rest a while..."

Salesian Perspective

All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." Not only might it make Jack dull: it might cripple his attempts to be healthy, and even holy.

Make no mistake. Growing in holiness - making real in our own lives the love of the God in whose image and likeness we are created - is serious business. It requires hard work; it requires discipline; it requires self-examination; it requires commitment.

As Francis de Sales would say, it requires devotion.

But Salesian spirituality also recognizes the value of relaxation, of taking 'time out,' of 'catching your breath,' of time for play. In fact, relaxation is not only permissible: it is necessary!

Francis de Sales claims: "It is actually a defect to be so strict, austere and unsociable that one neither permits on others any recreation time." The Introduction to the Devout Life (1609) contains ample evidence of the Gentleman's appreciation of the important role that rest and recreation play in the pursuit of a fully human, God-centered life. "From time to time we must recreate in mind and body." He continues: "To take the air, to go for a walk, to enjoy friendly chat, to play music, or sing or hunt...are such honest diversions that the only thing needed to utilize the simple prudence, which gives to all things their rank, time, place and measure."

To be balanced, we need to know our limitations: we need to know when it's time to say 'enough,' if only for a little while. St. Jane once wrote in the context of a letter to a member of her community: "I must run, for I have little rest and my arm and hand are starting to tire and hurt, even though I've just begun to write. I'm not able to do as much as I used to."

In his book Touching the Ordinary, Robert Wicks identifies practices that can help us establish and maintain a balanced life: get enough sleep; eat right; practice leisure; pace yourself. Learn to laugh; focus on values; practice self-appreciation; be involved, but not too involved; have a support group; escape on occasion; be spontaneous; avoid negativity. Establish good friendships; practice intimacy.

Our Lord Jesus Christ spent virtually his entire public ministry meeting the needs of others: healing, teaching, forgiving, challenging, forgiving; in short, working. But the Gospels that document Christ's work ethic also clearly document

times when he withdrew from his activities to rest, to renew, to enjoy an other's hospitality, to spend time with family, to be helpful in rededicating himself to doing the Will of God.

There are plenty of ways to achieve balance between work and play, livelihood and leisure, pay and play. Consider them in a personal, prayerful manner. Choose those consistent with the state and stage of life in which you find yourself. Realize that as your life changes, so too may your means for achieving this happy, healthy and holy balance.

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17TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (July 30, 2006)

Readings 2 Kgs 4: 42-44 Ps 145: 10-11, 15-16, 17-18 Eph 4:1-6 Jn 6: 1-15

Suggested Emphasis

Let us place our lives in the hands of Jesus with utter confidence.

Salesian Perspective

St. Francis de Sales says in the *Introduction to the Devout Life* two classes of people ought to communicate frequently: the strong lest they should become weak, and the weak, that should become strong; the sick, that they may be restored to health, and the healthy, lest they should fall into sickness.

To have confidence in God, Francis de Sales says: Give into the hands of God's most loving providence whatever may seem to you painful, and firmly believe that He will sweetly conduct you, your life and all your affairs. "When some persecutions or contradictions threatening us with some great trouble, we must retire -- we and our afflictions to the Holy Cross -- with a true belief that all will end to the advantage of those who love God."

One day an ordinary woman inserted herself among people who experienced a constant cycle of poverty and cruelty. She saw the tragic plight of those far less fortunate than herself and decided that she needed, personally, to do something about it. She took all the wealth that she possessed and rented an old building with a dirt floor. The building was not very attractive to look at but it would provide a start for the work that she felt drawn to inaugurate. The next day the woman went out and traveled around the neighborhood and offered to teach the children. She used the building as her classroom. She had no books, no desks, no chairs, and no tables. Her chalkboard was the dirt floor. She rubbed it smooth with an old rag and wrote on it with a stick. That was the way the woman fought back against poverty and cruelty around her.

To the casual observer it may have appeared to be a pathetically miniscule response to such immense human suffering but she placed her confidence in God.

Whatever happened to the woman and her undertaking? Today there are some eighty fully equipped schools, three hundred dispensaries, seventy leprosy clinics, thirty homes for the dying, thirty homes for abandoned children and a thousand volunteers worldwide, continuing the work that this singular woman began.

The woman was Mother Theresa.

There is no better story to illustrate the point of today's first reading and Gospel reading. The boy gave what little he had to Jesus and Jesus did the rest. Let us place the little that we have in the hands of Jesus with utter confidence. He will accept us, bless us and make our lives grow beyond even our greatest expectations. Thus we experience, first hand, the significance of insignificance.

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TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD (August 6, 2006)

Readings Dn 7: 9-10, 13-14 Ps 97: 1-2, 5-6, 9 2 Pt 1: 16 - 19 Mt 17: 1-9

Suggested Emphasis

"He was transfigured before their eyes and his clothes became dazzlingly white, whiter than the work of any bleacher could make them."

Salesian Perspective

Something remarkable happened on that mountain.

Consider the possibility that it was not Jesus who changed but rather it was Peter, James and John who were transformed. Imagine that this account from Mark's Gospel documents the experience of Peter, James and John as their eyes were opened; their vision widened, enabling them to see without impediment the virtually blinding light of Jesus' love that flowed from every fiber of his being.

Indeed, every day of Jesus' life something of that remarkable brilliance, that remarkable passion, and that remarkable glory was revealed to people of all ages, stages and states of life. The shepherds and magi saw it; the elders in the temple saw it; the guests at a wedding saw it; a woman caught in adultery saw it; a boy possessed by demons saw it; a man born blind saw it; a good thief saw it.

If so many others could recognize it in a word, a glance, or a touch, why might Peter, James and John have required extra effort in helping them to see Jesus' glory? Perhaps it was because they were so close to Jesus; perhaps it was because they were with him every day; perhaps it was because, on some level, they had somehow taken his glory for granted.

What about us? Do we recognize that same divine glory present in us, present in others, present in creation, present in even the simplest and most ordinary, everyday experiences of justice, truth, healing, forgiveness, reconciliation, and compassion?

Or do we take it for granted?

St. Francis de Sales saw the Transfiguration as a "glimpse of heaven." During this season of Lent, may our eyes, minds and our hearts be transfigured and transformed. May we see more clearly the glory of a God who always loves us, who redeems us, who heals us, who forgives us, who challenges us, who pursues us, who strengthens us and who sustains us.

May we grow in our ability, through the quality of our lives, to make that "glimpse of heaven" more clearly visible and available to the eyes - and in the lives - of others. May God help us to recognize the remarkable things that occur every day in our own lives...and in the lives of one another.

Rev. Michael S. Murray, OSFS, is the Executive Director of the De Sales Spirituality Center.

19TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (August 13, 2006)

Readings 1 Kgs 19: 4-8 Ps 34: 2-9 Eph 4: 30-5 2 Jn 6: 41-51

Suggested Emphasis

"Get rid of all bitterness, anger, harsh words, slander and malice of every kind. In place of these be kind, compassionate and mutually forgiving."

Salesian Perspective

"In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God. The Word was God. Through the Word God made all and not one thing in creation was made without the Word."

Just as the Word who is Jesus Christ is the source of all power, so, too, our words are powerful. At their best, our words feed, heal and create. At their worst, our words choke, injure and destroy."

St. Paul certainly knew this. So did St. Francis de Sales.

So do we.

St. Francis de Sales observes that negative speech breeds "disdain for one's neighbor, pride, self-satisfaction and a hundred other very pernicious effects, among them the greatest pest of conversation, slander." He continues: "Slander is a kind of murder...whoever removed slander from the world would remove a great part of its sins and injustice as well."

Using words that are "kind, compassionate and mutually forgiving" isn't just a matter of being nice: it's a matter of justice. It is about giving people their due; it's about giving people respect; it's about recognizing people's God-given dignity. Ultimately, it's about using the power of our God-given ability embodied in language in ways that build up - the people of God.

Salesian spirituality is known for its practicality. What could be more practical than using words that help to build up and support one another? What is more readily available for us to gift one another than the words we have? Even when we need to challenge or correct others, we should still speak in such a way that ultimately promotes peace. Our tongues, says St. Francis "ought to be like a scalpel in the hand of a surgeon who is cutting between nerves and tendons." St. Jane de Chantal observes: "When you need to correct someone, make it in private and with kindness."

In the beginning was the Word. May our words continue the story of God's creative, redemptive and life-giving Word. May God's Word be for all of us the last word. May God's Word - the Word that gives life - be all the words that we need.

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ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN MARY (August 15, 2004)

Suggested Emphasis

Our reflection for today's Sunday Salesian - today's Feast of the Assumption - comes entirely from Francis de Sales' Treatise on the Love of God, Book 7, Chapter 14

Salesian Perspective

"I do not deny that the soul of the most Blessed Virgin had two portions, and therefore two appetites, one according to the spirit and superior reason, and the other according to sense and inferior reason, with the result that she could experience the struggle and contradiction of one appetite against the other. This burden was felt even by her Son, Jesus, that in this heavenly Mother all affections were so well arranged and ordered that love of God held empire and control over all most peaceably without being troubled by diversity of wills and appetites or by contradiction of senses. Neither repugnance of natural appetite nor sensual movements ever went as far as sin, not even as far as venial sin. On the contrary, all was used holily and faithfully in the service of the holy love for the exercise of the other virtues which the most part, cannot be practiced except amid difficulty, opposition and contradiction..."

"As everyone knows, the magnet naturally draws iron towards itself by some power both secret and very wonderful."

However, there are five things that hinder this operation: (1) if there is too great a distance between magnet and iron; (2) if there is a diamond placed between the two; (3) if the iron is greased; (4) if the iron is rubbed with onion; (5) if the iron is too heavy."

"Our heart is made for God, and God constantly entices it and never ceases to cast before it the allurements of diabolical love. Yet five things impede the operation of this holy attraction: (1) sin, which removes us from God; (2) affectation; (3) sensual pleasures; (4) pride and vanity; (5) self-love, together with the multitude of disordered passions which brings forth, which are like a heavy load wearing it down."

"None of these hindrances had a place in the heart of the glorious Virgin. She was: (1) forever preserved from all passions and completely exempt from the rebellion that self-love wages against love of God. For this reason, just as iron, if free from all obstacles and even from its own weight, would be powerfully yet gently drawn with steady motion by the magnet - although in such wise that the attraction would always be more active and stronger according as it came closer together and their motion approached its end - so, too, the most Blessed Mother, since there is nothing to impede the operation of her Son's divine love, was united with him in an incomparable union by gentle ecstasies without trouble or travail."

"They were ecstasies in which the sensible part did not cease to perform its actions but without in any way disturbing the spiritual union, just in turn perfect application of the spirit did not cause any great distraction to the senses. Hence the Virgin's death was the most gentle that can be imagined, for her Son sweetly drew her after the odor of his perfume she most lovingly flowed out after their sacred sweetness even to the bosom of her Son's goodness. Although the soul had supreme love for her own most holy, most pure, and most lovable body, yet she forsook it without resistance... At the foot of the cross love had given to this divine spouse the supreme sorrows of death. Truly, then, it is reasonable that in the end death would give her the supreme delights of love."

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20TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (August 20, 2006)

Readings Prv 9: 1-6 Ps 34: 2-7 Eph 5: 15-20 Jn 6: 51-58

Suggested Emphasis

"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him (her)."

Salesian Perspective

What a wonderful gift the Eucharist is! Jesus gives us his flesh to eat and his blood to drink. And he commands us to eat and drink of his flesh and his blood in order that we might have life eternal life.

Like Wisdom in today's first reading, Jesus invites us to the meal he has prepared for us, a meal that enables us to share in his saving death and resurrection. On the Cross Jesus' flesh was pierced and his blood shed for others and for me. As we eat and drink, we are called to forsake foolishness that we might live and advance in the way of wisdom and understanding. (Proverbs)

The words of Wisdom remind us that this is a sacred meal, a meal of covenant. God has given Jesus for our sake. In Jesus, God's great love and mercy become visible, tangible. When we eat Jesus' body and drink his blood, we are expressing our willingness to be one with Jesus in his saving mission to the world. We announce his good news to the world.

Now we seek to understand better how we are to live as members of this covenant community. In this meal, we are united with Jesus and one with the community, one in the Body of Christ. As we leave this sacred meal, we are charged

to live the daily reality of our oneness.

St. Francis de Sales offers us some practical advice on how to make this happen more effectively. After Communion consider Jesus seated in your heart and bring before him each of your faculties and senses in order to hear his voice and promise him fidelity. This exercise can become our thanksgiving and our commitment to living out what we have celebrated and received. Jesus will offer us a way of using our intellect, our will, our memory, our hearing, our touch and our speaking today in a way that gives witness to God's loving presence in the world.

St. Paul today encourages us: Watch carefully how you live, not as foolish persons but as wise. Our eating and drinking at the table of the Lord makes all of us one. May the wise way we live today make visible the oneness we experience in the Eucharist.

Remember: you are what you eat...you are what you drink.

Rev. Michael S. Murray, OSFS, is the Executive Director of the De Sales Spirituality Center.

21ST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (August 27, 2006)

Readings Jos 24: 1-2a, 15-17, 18b Ps 34: 2-3, 16-21 Eph 5: 21-32 or 5: 2a, 25-32 Jn 6: 60-69

Suggested Emphasis

"Help us to seek the values that will bring us lasting joy in this changing world."

Salesian Perspective

These words from the beginning of the Opening Prayer of today's mass have a profoundly significant message for us. Our worlds change, and sometimes constantly. We might tend to think of the "changing world" as something without or beyond ourselves. But sometimes the most difficult world to accept with all its changes is the world within - the one with turmoil and vicissitudes that no one ever sees - except ourselves.

We talk today of decisions and choices. Everyone wants freedom. Well, certainly God wants us to have that freedom, as it is the most dramatic and far-reaching gift he has given us. In the first reading today, Joshua addresses freedom head on: "Decide today whom you will serve." That's about as direct and contemporary a message as we can have. "What do you want? Decide!" There is no room for the wishy-washy in Joshua's approach. There is also no question where he stands: "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

Paul confronts the same issue in his letter on married life: "Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ." This opening statement is critical because without it the later advice to be subservient could appear demeaning and appalling. The "subordination" to which the Christian is called is always presented within and because of love - mutual love. That is why we serve others, and put ourselves at least second, if not literally last. Christ loved us first, and we love him in return. To put others first, especially in a relationship - or in a family - is the only way to have life, and to share life, to the full.

It is also the only way to make love truly life-giving.

This teaching of Christ can be "hard," and the early followers of Christ found it so, but like Peter in the Gospel, once it is said and done, "to whom shall we go?" Again and again, the losses and trials of life affirm that only He has "the gift of eternal life."

Francis de Sales reminds us that instability in life is inevitable, and it is our failure to recognize the truth that makes our lives unstable and changeable in our moods. He encourages us to remain firm and steadfast in our resolutions. The challenge is to live the daily reality of our oneness.

of our changing world "within" is one of constancy. And that constancy is achieved by fidelity to the decisions in daily life to love and serve the Lord, and one another - the very resolution with which we close every liturgy.

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22ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (September 3, 2006)

Readings Dt 4: 1-2, 6-8 Ps 15: 2-5 Jas 1: 17-18, 21b-22, 27 Mk 7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Suggested Emphasis

"Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls."

Salesian Perspective

Traditions are powerful things. Whether they deal with the making of Grandmother's special casserole for our Thanksgiving meal, with who hosts for Christmas and Easter, with where we go for family vacation, with rituals at the death of a loved one, or with something so simple as who sits where around the dinner table, traditions are a precious parcel of all of our lives. When they are positive ones, traditions can give us a sense of identity, stability and value. Our lives are filled with change.

But traditions can be negative too; especially when they become detached from the values they were meant to sustain and protect. Jesus knew that all too well as today's gospel account suggests. He challenged the Pharisees in their adherence to the laws regarding ritual purity. Jesus saw them using the traditions to unfairly judge others as being "in" or "out" of God's circle of mercy and love, as if they, and not God, were the determiners of righteousness and religious worth.

God's Word this Sunday certainly challenges us to look at the power of tradition(s) in our lives. If they are positive, we should continue to make them part of our lives. But if they are negative behaviors or even attitudes--old grudges we just can't forget, old hurts we just can't forgive, old patterns of destructive choosing or thinking that we just can't escape--then, with the grace of God already "planted within us," we need to do something new to change them.

St. Francis de Sales suggests, when these old negative "traditions" make us less than the child of God we are reborn, that we concentrate on the "present moment." We are not defined by our past nor can we do anything about it. The future is yet to be. But what we do have is the here and now, the present moment, and the grace of God at that moment.

It is only in the present moment that we can replace old negative behaviors and attitudes with new, life affirming ones. When we concentrate on accessing the power of God planted within us to make new choices "present moment" by "present moment," we are well on our way to starting new, positive "traditions" which will sustain us now and in the future, as people who "do justice and live in the presence of the Lord."

With God's grace, let us start a new tradition of living in the "present moment." That's a tradition worth keeping for a lifetime!

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23RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (September 10, 2006)

Readings Is 35: 4-7a Ps 146: 7-10 Jas 2: 1-5 Mk 7: 31-37

Suggested Emphasis

"Your faith in our Lord Jesus Christ glorified must not allow of favoritism."

Salesian Perspective

Listen to what Francis de Sales has to say on this topic. (Introduction Part III, Chapter 36)

"If we like a certain practice we despise everyone else and oppose everything that is not to our taste. If someone looking or if we have taken a dislike to that person, we find fault with everything that person does: we never stop plugging that person, and are always looking for an opportunity to run that person down. On the contrary, if we love someone because of their good looks, there isn't anything that person does that we aren't willing to overlook."

"In general, we prefer the rich to the poor...we even prefer those who are better dressed. We rigorously demand rights, but want others to be considerate when insisting on theirs. We maintain our rank with exactness, but we want others to be humble and accommodating when it comes to theirs. We complain very easily about our neighbor, but our neighbors must never complain about us. What we do for others always seems like such a big deal, but what others do for us seems like nothing at all."

"In short, we have two hearts. We have a mild, gracious and courteous attitude toward ourselves and another that is severe, and rigorous toward our neighbor. We have two weights: one to weigh goods to our own greatest possible advantage and another, to weigh to our neighbor's greatest possible disadvantage."

This is the essence of discriminating against others "in our hearts:" to live with two hearts, to live by a double standard. As James says, when we set ourselves up as judge (and jury) of our neighbor while failing to use the same standard on ourselves, we "hand down corrupt decisions."

God shows no partiality. Nor should we.

How can we remedy our tendency to prefer some over others? Francis de Sales is crystal clear and unambiguous: be equitable in all your actions. Always put yourself in your neighbor's place and your neighbor in yours and you will judge justly. Imagine yourself the seller when you buy and the buyer when you sell and you will sell and buy justly.

"This is the touchstone of all reason."

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24TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (September 17, 2006)

Readings Is 50: 4-9 2 Ps 116: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9 Jas 2: 14-18 Mk 8: 27-35

Suggested Emphasis

"Get thee behind me, Satan."

Salesian Perspective

The saints are heroes of our faith tradition. They are people to whom we look up; they are people we admire. They remind us God can accomplish in us the kinds of things God accomplished in them. But the stories of the saints are more than a consideration of the promise of human strength, courage, fidelity and tenacity. Their stories are also powerful reminders of the reality of human frailty, weakness and infidelity. In a sermon he preached on Palm Sunday, March 27, 1623, Francis de Sales observed: "All creatures, you see, are a mixture of perfection and imperfection. For this reason, they should not be used as symbols of either. Every person, no matter how holy, has some imperfections. Made in God's image, every person reflects something of God's goodness while, at the same time, that same person carries some imperfections." (Pulpit and Pew)

Consider the example of St. Peter in today's Gospel. When the apostles were asked the question, "Who do you say Jesus is?" by Jesus, Peter is the first to proclaim: "You are the Messiah!" A mere few verses following this great public demonstration of faith, Peter takes issue with Jesus' prediction of his ultimate rejection, death and resurrection, and is subjected to a great public humiliation when Jesus turns on him and proclaims: "Get thee behind me, Satan!"

It seems that even saints had their ups and downs. In the case of St. Peter, this would not be the last display of both his perfections and imperfections. In the Treatise on the Love of God, Francis commented: "Who would not marvel at the heart of St. Peter, so bold among armed soldiers that he alone takes his sword in hand and strikes out with it? Yet a short time later, among unarmed people, he is so cowardly that at the mere word of a servant girl he denies and abandons his master." (Treatise, Book X, Chapter 9)

Francis de Sales believed that we have as much to learn from the setbacks of the saints as we do from their successes. It is a good thing to see the defects in the lives of the saints. It not only shows God's goodness in forgiving them, but it teaches us to imitate the saints in their efforts to overcome their failings and to do penance for them. We study the lives of the saints in order to imitate them; we study the failings of the saints in order to avoid them." (*Ibid*)

This way of looking at the saints can be most helpful in our everyday attempts to "Live Jesus." Seeing the defects of the saints can serve as a strong vaccine against any dismay or discouragement we may experience when faced with our own sins, failings and imperfections. Likewise, seeing the virtues of the saints can dissuade us from becoming smug and satisfied with our shortcomings. Bottom line? The saints are companions for the journey. They have much to teach us about how to pursue a life of devotion: overcoming our sins and failings, strengthening our practice of virtue. Francis de Sales (himself a saint) challenges us to see the saints as real people, and to realize that we can learn from their trials as well as from their triumphs.

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25TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (September 24, 2006)

Readings Wis 2: 12, 17-20 Ps 54: 3-4, 5, 6-8 Jas 3: 16-4:3 Mk 9: 30-37

Suggested Emphasis

"Humble yourself profoundly before God, and return him thanks."

Salesian Perspective

The first disciples certainly did ascribe to the fact that Jesus was very probably the Messiah for whom they yearned, yet he was one with a mission far from the reality that they expected. Today's Gospel gives a vivid picture of this dilemma in their failure to appreciate the fact that Jesus speaks about his upcoming death and resurrection and the suffering involved in that particular path. The clear unfolding of that prediction met with confusion and fear on the part of his disciples. This was because they found themselves unable to grasp this reality in light of their own expectations and dreams.

Their perception of their role in the reality of this kingdom led them to arguing among themselves. Their expectations were naturally convinced them of the importance of their own role in the fulfillment of Jewish hopes for their future and embroiled them in hostility, envy and enmity among themselves. Jesus again clearly demonstrated the importance of their role and how this would be played out - in ways far different from their own perceptions. The little child, in their midst, presents clearly the ideal to which his disciples are called. How unaware they seemed to be of the call that was to be of service rather than to be served.

Saint Francis de Sales speaks of the natural difficulty often involved in our acquiescence to the will of God. Often we find ourselves in the position of the apostles in the Gospel account today where following the will of God does not

conform to our own expectations or desires. In The Treatise on the Love of God in Book 9, Chapter 2, Francis truly living heart loves God's good pleasures not only in consolations but also in afflictions, but it loves it most on the cross, in pain, and labor, because love's principal power is to enable the lover to suffer for the beloved object.

We need to ask ourselves today how our own expectations, hopes or dreams prevent us from truly acquiescing to the Will of God. Do the difficult times we encounter stifle us in our attempts to follow God's will? Have we been able to conform our attempts to have God's will conform to our own desires and wills? Do we really appreciate the gift that Jesus has given us?

A prayerful reflection upon these questions will lead to that opportunity needed for us to acquiesce to the Will of God. What a necessary part of our journey of faith this process really is. In The Introduction to the Devout Life, Book 1, Chapter 1, St. Francis de Sales wrote, "Prayer places our intelligence in the divine love. It is the best way to purify our intelligence of its ignorance and our will of its bad affections...I suggest, above all, Philothea, mental prayer of the mind and heart, especially that which is made on the Life and Passion of Our Lord. In contemplating Him you will be united with Him; you will learn to act like Him and to conform your actions to His."

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26TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (October 01, 2006)

Readings Nm 11: 25-29 Ps 19: 8, 10, 12-14 Jas 5: 1-6 Mk 9: 39-43, 45, 47-48

Suggested Emphasis

"How offensive to God are rash judgments."

Salesian Perspective

"How offensive to God are rash judgments!" says St. Francis de Sales. "The judgments of the children of men are rash because they are not the judges of one another, and when they pass judgment on others they usurp the office of God. Lord...if an action has many different aspects, we must always think of the one which is best." (Introduction to the Devout Life, Part III, Chapter 28)

These words of de Sales would have been very good advice for the disciple John in today's Gospel when he asks Jesus to stop a man expelling demons in His name "because he is not of our company." They are in fact very similar to what Jesus himself gives John: "Do not try to stop him. No man who performs a miracle using my name can at once be expelled from me. Anyone who is not against us is with us." John is not the only one who could profit from this advice. Many others could too.

These words of Jesus and St. Francis de Sales remind us that all those who do the work of Jesus belong to Him, they are "of our company" - members of our Roman Catholic Church - or not. They remind us that we should focus on denominational labels and more on the actions, spirit, and attitudes of fellow followers of Christ - without in any way diminishing our faith in the Roman Catholic dispensation as the mother of all Christian religions. Most of all, they remind us that if there is any trace of prejudice or bigotry remaining in our hearts against members of other Christian religions, we should rid ourselves of it immediately. The sad truth of history is that Christians over the centuries spent too much time building fences and too little time building highways for God. It is time now to dismantle the fences and build the highways. It is time now to tear down the walls and build bridges. It is time now to reach out with love to all our allies in the Christian faith, wherever we find them.

God needs you and me - and Christians everywhere - to be His prophets. Prophets in the Biblical sense typically appear in times when society has stopped listening to what God says. Biblical prophets speak "on behalf of God." They do not tell others what will happen; they tell them what should happen. They tell others what God wants and what God says. God desperately needs you and me to speak on His behalf, to tell others what God wants for us. God needs you and me

stand up and be counted on the values of the Gospel. God needs you and me to tell others that God wants peace, life, not death; love, not hate; concern for the other, not preoccupation with self; freedom, not license; truth, not correctness; justice for all, not discrimination.

In the words of St. Francis de Sales, he needs us to "often speak of God in familiar conversation with our...friends and neighbors." (Introduction to the Devout Life, Part III, Chapter.26) And "if the world holds us to be fools," because behaving like prophets, "let us hold the world to be mad." (*Ibid*, Part IV 4, Chapter 1)

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27TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (October 08, 2006)

Readings Gn 2: 18-24 Ps 128: 1-6 Heb 2: 9-11 Mk 10: 2-16 or 10: 2-12

Suggested Emphasis

"It is not good for man to be alone."

Salesian Perspective

Today's readings remind us of our need to have profound respect one another. Today's readings speak of the reverence we should have for every human being. Today's readings speak of the care and concern that we should have for creation.

More importantly, the readings speak of a deeper truth: like the God in whose image and likeness we are created, we are not meant to live alone.

Francis de Sales wrote: "God has signified to us in so many ways and by so many means that God wills all of us to be saved that no one can be ignorant of this fact. For this purpose, through Creation God made us in his own image and likeness; by the Incarnation, God has made himself in our image and likeness...God's goodness moves God to communicate liberally to us the help of divine grace so that we may come to the joy of his glory..." (Treatise on God, Book VIII, Chapter 4)

Just as God communicates with us, we are meant to live in communion with one another.

In his Conferences, Francis spells out how being ourselves leads us to be in relationships with others. "The sweet loving bond of holy love will be continually drawn tighter and closer as we advance farther and farther along the path of our own perfection. As we become more and more capable of union with God, we shall unite ourselves closer and closer to one another...At each communion, which we make, our union will be rendered more perfect, for, uniting ourselves with Our Lord, we shall remain always more closely united together, and therefore this is why the holy reception of the celestial Bread and of this most adorable Sacrament is called Communion: that is to say, common union." (Conf VI, On Hope)

Fundamentally, Francis de Sales tells us that we are born to love. We are made for relationship. Much of who we are is much more of who we could be - can only become reality through the relationships we establish and nurture with others.

To be sure, we need to be ourselves. We need to grow in self-knowledge and self-acceptance. We need to embrace our strengths and our weaknesses. We need to consider what we can do on our own. We need to accept what we cannot do on our own. But none of this happens in a vacuum: the fullness of who God calls us to be is found precisely in our relationships with one another.

Not only is it not good for man to be alone. We can only be fully human when we live in communion with God. with one another.

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28TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (October 15, 2006)

Readings Wis 7: 7-11 Ps 90: 12-17 Heb 4: 12-13 Mk 10: 17-30 or 10: 17-27

Suggested Emphasis

"How hard it is to enter the kingdom of God."

Salesian Perspective

In the closing minutes of the movie Field of Dreams, the character of Thomas Mann (portrayed by that acting gr Earl Jones) is invited by the ghost of Shoeless Joe Jackson (played by Kevin Costner) to come "out" with the tea corn field. Ray Concella is incensed. After everything that has happened, why is the writer invited instead of Ra launches into a litany - actually, something more like a pouting rant - of all the things that he has done in follow promptings of the "voice." He wraps up his question with the statement: "Not once have I asked what's in it for a ghost inquires: "What are you saying, Ray?" Ray responds: "I'm saying, what's in it for me?"

How honest. How revealing. How human.

We hear echoes of this same refrain in St. Peter's statement in today's Gospel: "We have put aside everything to you." Implied? "What's in it for us?"

The truth is that the demands of the Good News never seem to let up. Even as we grow in our love for God, our and others the Good News always calls us to give more, to go deeper, to press on, or, as the voice in Field of Dreams suggested, to "go the distance."

The truth is that the invitations and even consternations of the Good News sometimes don't feel so good.

Is it any wonder why we sometimes ask the questions, at least to ourselves: "What more do you want? Why sho this? What's in it for me?"

What's in it for us is a twofold promise. First, we come to know the joy that comes with being more concerned a giving than receiving. We experience the freedom that comes with allowing God to penetrate all - not just some we are. In short, we experience the wealth that is only known by generous people.

Second, we live each day with the belief that we shall one day enjoy God's generosity forever in a life that never

So, what's in it for us? How about purpose, meaning and direction in this life? How about the fullness of these - many other gifts - in the life to come?

Now that's Good News!

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29TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (October 22, 2006)

Readings Is 53: 10-11 Ps 33: 4-5, 18-20, 22 Heb 4: 14-16 Mk 10: 35-45 or 10: 42-45

Suggested Emphasis

"Through his suffering my servant shall justify many."

Salesian Perspective

Following the admonition of Christ that we should be the servants of others wouldn't sound so daunting if it were one little word.

Suffering.

Jesus is very clear: to serve is to suffer; to suffer is to serve. This begs the question: did Jesus serve because he had pain?

Consider the meaning of the word "suffering." The American Heritage Dictionary describes suffering as "to feel distress; sustain loss, injury, harm or punishment." Jesus certainly experienced all these things in a big way. In that regard, we have in Christ one who is able to sympathize with us. (Hebrews)

But suffering is more than simply experiencing pain. The same dictionary directs the reader to consider the root: English word servant, and therein we find a powerful revelation: in its root meaning, to suffer is to carry, to bear children."

Suffering is not simply the ability to experience pain. No, suffering is the willingness to forbear, to persevere, to do in doing what is right and just, what is healthy and holy even in the face of opposition or resistance. Suffering is that comes from efforts at bringing forth life in the lives of others.

This kind of suffering is not powerless passivity. This suffering - divine suffering - is about being proactive. This suffering - this service - is a matter of choice: the choice to love.

Jesus did not love to suffer. Jesus suffered precisely because he was willing to love. Jesus suffered - he persevered his commitment to being a source of love in the lives of others.

That's what made Jesus a servant. That's what can make us true servants. Like Jesus, while our love will be marred by suffering, it is far more important that our suffering be expressions of our love.

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30TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (October 29, 2006)

Readings Jer 31: 7-9 Ps 126: 1-6 Heb 5: 1-6 Mk 10: 46-52

Suggested Emphasis

Have the strength to recognize in our own blindness how Jesus might heal us.

Salesian Perspective

In our first reading we are reminded of the Lord's promise to the people of Israel that God will protect them and bring them home for He is "the Father of Israel and Ephraim is my firstborn." God is particularly solicitous of the weak women with children, and those who cannot care for themselves.

This concern exhibited by a loving Father gives us some glimpse into the unique relationship between God and

people. St. Francis de Sales continually reminds us of God's love for his creation. This "truth" certainly makes sense. It is very consistent with the fundamental reason for our existence. After all, what child is not loved by his or her parent in a totally gratuitous fashion?

In our second reading we are confronted with the role of the high priest, human as we all are. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews makes clear that the high priest is able to be compassionate because he, himself, is a wounded healer. Again, we see the gratuitous nature of our relationship to our God. God gives to us a vocation, no matter what our life. It is not ours to take, but rather to respond to his invitation.

The Gospel recounts the story of the blind beggar, Bartimaeus. What a wonderful story to help us to understand how much we are loved by our God unconditionally. However, this relationship, while gratuitous, is not passive. Bartimaeus cries out to Jesus to have pity on him. Jesus, in response, returns the sight of the blind man. The blind man asks if he might be able to see and Jesus tells him that his faith has saved him.

We ask for the faith that we need to see the fundamental relationship between God and his people. Our blindness prevents us from seeing the unique goodness in each person. This inability to see the good keeps us in our sinfulness and prevents the possibility of maximizing our gifts and talents for our own good and the good of our brothers and sisters.

Francis de Sales challenges us to have the faith of the blind man and so to be confident enough in our own intrinsic worth that we dare to ask our Lord for his healing power in our lives, that we might see. If we are strong enough to take this step, oh, the places we will go!

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ALL SAINTS (November 1, 2006)

Readings Rv 7: 2-4, 9-14 Ps 24: 1-4ab, 5-6 1 Jn 3: 1-3 Mt 5: 1-12a

Suggested Emphasis

"These are the ones who have survived the great period of trial..."

Salesian Perspective

"Let us join our hearts to these heavenly spirits and blessed souls. Just as young nightingales learn to sing in concert with the old, so also by our holy associations with the saints let us learn the best way to pray and sing God's praises. (Introduction to the Devout Life, Part II, Chapter 16)

We stand on the shoulders of giants. Over the last two thousand years countless men, women and children of many places and cultures have spent their lives in the service of the Good News of Jesus Christ. From among these many a smaller group of individuals have earned the distinction of being known as "saints."

These are real people to whom we look for example. These are real people to whom we look for inspiration. These are the real people to whom we look for encouragement and grace.

These saints - these real people - have blazed a trail in the midst of trials while living and proclaiming the Gospel. Our challenge to us is to follow their example in ways that fit the state and stage of life in which we find ourselves.

In case you haven't yet figured it out, you, too, are called to live a saintly - a God-centered, self-giving - way of life in every place in which you live, love, work and play every day. Francis de Sales wrote: "Look at the example given by the saints in every walk of life. There is nothing that they have not done in order to love God and to be God's devoted followers... Why then should we not do as much according to our position and vocation in life to keep the cherished resolutions and holy protestations that we have made?" (Introduction to the Devout Life, Part V, Chapter 12)

What does it mean to be a saint? Surprisingly, it is much more down-to-earth and obtainable than we might think. St. Francis de Sales observed: "We must love all that God loves, and God loves our vocation; so let us love our vocation, to not waste our energy hankering after a different sort of life, but get on with your own job. Be Martha as well as Mary and be both gladly, faithfully doing what you are called to do..." (Stopp, Selected Letters, Page 61)

In the view of St. Francis de Sales, sanctity - sainthood - is measured by our willingness and ability to embrace the present time and stage of life in which we find ourselves. Saints are people who deeply embraced their lives as they found them, rather than wasting time wishing or waiting for an opportunity to live someone else's life. Sainthood - sanctity - holiness is marked by the willingness to embrace God's will as it is manifested in the ups and downs of everyday life.

How are you being called to be a saint today? How, in the midst of trials, can we blaze trails of love today?

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ALL SOULS (November 2, 2006)

Readings Wis 3: 1-9 Ps 23: 1-6 Rom 5: 5-11 Jn 11: 17-27

Suggested Emphasis

"Christ, once raised from the dead, will never die again; death has no more power over him." (Romans 6: 3 - 9)

Salesian Perspective

On the subject of praying for the dead, St. Francis de Sales wrote: "We believe that we may pray for the faithful and that the prayers and good works of the living greatly relieve them and are profitable to them, for this reason those who die in the grace of God, and consequently counted among the saints, do not go to paradise at the very moment, but many go to Purgatory, where they suffer a temporal punishment, from which our prayers and good works can help and serve to deliver them." (The Catholic Controversy, 3, pages 353- 354)

We pray for our departed brothers and sisters. We pray that they may be at rest. We pray that they may be experiencing the fullness of peace. We pray that they may no longer want for anything. We pray that they may take their place at the eternal banquet of love, a place prepared for them by God before the beginning of time.

On this Feast of All Souls, we pray for all the dead whom we have loved and lost.

But prayer is a conversation. Prayer is an experience of mutuality. Prayer is never a one-way street. Therefore, we do not only pray for the dead: we also pray to them, for they are not merely "the dead" but are now counted among the living.

We pray to them for their assistance and support. We pray to them for guidance and strength. We pray to them for patience and forbearance. We pray to them for reconciliation and healing. Someday, we may pray to them for them to simply put one foot in front of the other.

Here is a simple example of this subject. Francis de Sales had occasion to write a letter of encouragement to a married woman. In it he recommended: "I should like you to consider how many saints, both men and women, have lived in a married state like you, and that they all accepted this vocation readily and gladly: Sara, Rebecca, Anne, Monica, and a host of others. Let that encourage you and ask them to pray for you." (Stopp, Selected Letters, page 61)

So, we not only pray for the dead, we pray to the dead. We ask them to pray for us. Just as death no longer has power over them, so too we pray that the effects of sin and death will not have power over us during what remains of our lives.

journey on earth. We ask them to pray that when we likewise pass from this world to the next, we shall join the eternal banquet of love.

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31ST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (November 5, 2006)

Readings Dt 6: 2-6 Ps 18: 2-3, 3-4, 47, 51 Heb 7: 23-28 Mk 12: 28-34

Suggested Emphasis

"Which is the first of all of the commandments?"

Salesian Perspective

When we get right down to it, what is the most important dimension of our faith? Upon what foundation does the faith of Christianity rest?

Jesus' answer is unambiguous: love.

This love has three dimensions.

Love of God. Francis de Sales tells us that the reason that we love God is because of who God is: our dignity, an destiny. "We love God because God is the most supreme and most infinite goodness."

Love of neighbor. Francis de Sales tells us: "Love of God not only commands love of neighbor, but it even pours love of neighbor into our hearts. Just as we are in God's image, so the sacred love we have for one another is the true image of our heavenly love for God."

Love of self. This is the aspect that perhaps we are most tempted to overlook: after all, "self-love" sounds suspicious like being self-centered. Why should we love ourselves? Because, says Francis de Sales, "we are God's image and likeness." When we live up to the sacred dignity that God bestows upon us we are "most holy and living images of the divine."

Why is authentic love of self so critical to our love of God and neighbor? Simply, if we fail to love ourselves, how can we possibly give praise and thanks to God for creating us? If we fail to love ourselves, how can we possibly give praise and thanks for our neighbor who is likewise made in the image and likeness of the same God? And if we can't thank God for creating us and our neighbors (whether we always *like* ourselves or others being a *different* matter), what kind of feelings should we expect to have toward the One who is the source of all that is?

The fullness of Christian perfection - the fullness of living Christ's life - can be likened to a three-legged table. To the extent that any one of the three legs is weak, the whole table is unstable. Such a table cannot hope to support any significant weight. So, too, if any one of the three loves of our lives - God, self and others - is deficient, all three suffer, and we cannot hope to carry the weight of God's command for us to build up something of God's Kingdom on earth.

To be sure, love is ultimately the simple answer to all that is most important in our lives. In our lived experience however, we know that this love is never quite as simple as we might like it to be.

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32ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (November 11, 2006)

Readings 1 Kg 17: 10-16 Ps 146: 7, 8-9, 9-10 Heb 9: 24-28 Mk 12: 38-44

Suggested Emphasis

Trust in God leads to generosity to others.

Salesian Perspective

In the first reading today and in the Gospel reading we meet two widows who are very similar. Both put their trust in God rather than in things.

In turn, both are rewarded and recognized for their trust, for their faith, in God.

The first widow is a foreigner to the Hebrews. She is from Zarephath, a coastal city on the Mediterranean. Elijah came through this land during a famine. As in all famines, the rich complain and the poor starve. The woman was poor. When Elijah met up with her, she was putting her last scraps together before she and her son would die. Imagine a stranger going up to this woman and asking for food in the name of the Lord. And imagine this woman putting her faith in God and feeding the prophet. Putting her total trust in God, she received enough to eat for a full year.

The second widow was the one of the Gospel reading who put two small coins into the Temple treasury. Jesus saw her donation, although it seemed insignificant, was tremendous because she gave all that she had. Her donation was an act of putting her faith in God to care for her.

What these two widows did is extremely difficult for all of us. No matter how great our faith is, it is profoundly difficult to put our total trust in God. There is something within us all that looks for solutions to our problems outside of faith. A great fallacy of our age is that money can solve our problems. It is the job of advertisers to convince us that we can buy happiness. Paradoxically, the happiest of those blessed with material wealth and riches are those who freely share their success with others.

The radical message of today's readings is that we must place our confidence in God rather than in our material possessions. This is difficult for us to do because it demands our practicing the forgotten virtue of humility. Only a humble person who recognizes his or her profound need for God is certain that the presence of God in his or her life is fundamental to happiness.

Perhaps, some day, we will have the profound faith to trust in God as these two widows trusted in God. But, the reason that is the fundamental reason why we gather together to worship, to pray and to celebrate the Sacraments: while we realize that our faith can always be deepened, we also acknowledge that we cannot do that alone.

We need God.

We need one another.

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33RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (November 19, 2006)

Readings Dn 12: 1-3 Ps 16: 5, 8-11 Heb 10: 11-14, 18 Mk 13: 24-32

Suggested Emphasis

"As to the exact day or hour, no one knows it...except the Father."

Salesian Perspective

Scripture is very clear: the world as we know it will pass away. Scripture also makes it very clear that we cannot know "the exact day or hour" that moment will come.

Still, it is only natural that we sometimes become anxious when we imagine that the world as we know it will cease. It is even more understandable that we should become anxious when we consider the inevitability of our own personal death. Here, too, however, we do not know "the exact day or hour."

Francis de Sales himself reminds us: "We, in this life, are walking, as it were, on ice."

How should we deal with the reality that, one day, our earthly lives will end?

We deal with an uncertain future by living well now each and every present moment. The present moment is the time we have at our disposal. The present moment is the only time we have to make choices that either help - or hinder - our efforts at preparing for eternity.

St. Francis de Sales advises us: "Keep your eyes fixed on that blissful day of eternity toward which the course of our lives bears on us; and these as they pass, they themselves pass by us stage by stage until we reach the end of the road. Meanwhile, in these passing moments there lies enclosed, as in a tiny kernel, the seed of all eternity; and in our little works of devotion there lies hidden the prize of everlasting glory, and in the little pains we take to serve God lies the traces of bliss that can never end." (Stopp, Selected Letters, p. 236)

To the extent that we live each present moment we can experience the gift of peace. "We must in all things and everywhere live peacefully," says St. Francis de Sales. "If trouble, exterior or interior, comes upon us, we must receive it peacefully. If joy comes, we must receive it peacefully, without throbbing of heart. If we must avoid evil, we must do so peacefully, without disquieting ourselves. If there is some good to be done, we must do this peacefully, too."

Place yourself in the hands and heart of Jesus who, St. Francis reminds us, is "the Prince of peace: where you meet your absolute master, all is peace." Place yourself in the hands and heart of Jesus who is the master of each present moment: where you live each present moment, you are best prepared for your last moment.

When we are at peace, when we live intentionally, we can handle everything that life has in store for us: everything including death itself...a death that leads to eternal life.

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CHRIST THE KING (November 26, 2006)

Readings Dn 7: 13-14 Ps 93: 1-2, 5 Rv 1: 5-8 Jn 18: 33b-37

Suggested Emphasis

"His Dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away; his kingship shall not be destroyed."

Salesian Perspective

Today we celebrate Christ's kingship, Christ's power, Christ's royal character. Unlike earthly kings, however, Christ's dominion, as we hear in the Book of the Prophet Daniel, is an everlasting dominion. Unlike other kings, Christ's dominion will never pass away.

What kind of king is Christ? How is his dominion unique among other monarchs? We look to the words of St. Francis de Sales:

Sales in a conference on "hope" he gave to the Sisters of the Visitation in 1620. The occasion was the founding of another Visitation community (some 80 of which were established by the time St. Jane de Chantal died in 1641)

"You have always only one and the same king, our crucified Lord, under whose authority you will live secure and wherever you may be. Do not fear lacking anything, for as long as you do not choose any other king, he will always be with you. Take care to increase in love and fidelity towards Christ's divine goodness, keeping as close to this king as possible, and then all will be well with you. Learn from him all that you have to do. Do nothing without his advice. This king is the faithful friend who will guide you and govern you and take care of you as, with all my heart, I ask him to do for you."

No benign dictator here. No benevolent tyrant. No monarch who lords his power over others. No self-serving leader who consolidates his wealth or influence at the expense of others.

Christ is a crucified king. He is a monarch who lays down his life for others. His dominion serves the needs of others. His prestige gives others guidance and hope. His kingdom provides sound advice. His commonwealth is all about faithful loving friendship.

Francis de Sales (as he so often does) really nailed it when he wrote in his Introduction to the Devout Life: "We must do nothing by living generously, nobly, courteously, and with a royal, just and noble heart." (Part II, Chapter 36)

Like Christ, we are called to use our God-given power and promise to serve the needs of others. Like Christ, our "divine right" demands that we love one another with "a royal, just and noble heart."

How do we use our "divine right" as sons and daughters of God?

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FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT (December 3, 2006)

Suggested Emphasis

"Be vigilant at all times."

Salesian Perspective

The readings today convey a sense of longing and expectation. The readings today speak of the anticipation of a promise fulfilled, a day when the justice of God will be available to all, and not just a chosen few. The readings also speak of the need to not be caught off guard when the fulfillment comes.

We Christians believe that this fulfillment of hope is embodied in the person, the power and the promise of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the justice of God. Jesus is "the Lord, our justice." Jesus seized every opportunity to mediate to others the love, the reconciliation, the truth - in short, the justice - of the living God.

As followers of Jesus, the vigilance we practice is not limited to waiting for the fulfillment of a far-off, final promise. Our vigilance is about seizing the countless opportunities we have each day to mediate something of the justice of God who is Jesus Christ, in our relationships with others.

Advent challenges us to identify anything in our lives that distracts us, that causes us to "become drowsy" or we do not do what is right and good in the eyes of God. Advent challenges us to rid ourselves of those cares and anxieties that reduce our ability to seize the challenge that Jesus offers to us to be models of his justice in the eyes of our brothers and sisters. Advent calls us to recognize that we are no longer waiting for the Kingdom of God to take its rightful place in our hearts: rather, the Kingdom of God waits for each of us to do our part in fulfilling its promise in the lives of others.

Be vigilant at all times. What is the point of having great intentions "to conduct ourselves to please God" if we r countless opportunities each day, each moment to meet the needs of one another?

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IMMACULATE CONCEPTION (December 8, 2005)

Readings Gn 3: 9-15, 20 Ps 98: 1, 2-3, 3-4 Eph 1: 3-6, 11-12 Lk 1: 26-38

Suggested Emphasis

"Nothing is impossible with God."

Salesian Perspective

In order to fully appreciate the Church's teaching on the Immaculate Conception - that Mary was preserved from effects of Original Sin from the moment of her conception - Francis de Sales placed it within the larger context, God's plan of salvation.

In his Treatise on the Love of God, Francis wrote: "God displays in a marvelous manner the incomprehensible r His power in the vast array of things that we see in nature, but God also displays the infinite treasures of His goo an even more magnificent way in the unparalleled variety of goods that we recognize in grace. In a holy excess o God is not content solely with granting to his people, that is, to the human race, a general or universal redemptio whereby everyone can be saved. God has diversified redemption in many ways so that while God's generosity sl forth in all this variety, the variety itself in turn adds beauty to his generosity."

"First and above all, God destined for his most holy Mother a favor worthy of the love of a Son who, since he is all-powerful, and all-good, necessarily prepared a Mother in keeping with himself. Therefore, God willed that h redemption be applied to her in the form of a remedy that would keep her safe, so that the sin which spreads sov generation to generation would not reach her. As a result, she was redeemed in a surprising way. At the appointo the torrent of original sin began to roll its fatal waves over the conception of this holy woman (with the same im strength it had exerted at the conception of all Adam's other daughters): then, when the torrent had reached that did not pass beyond it but stopped...In this way, God turned all captivity away from his glorious Mother. To her gave the blessing of the two states of human nature: she possessed that innocence which the first Adam had lost surpassingly enjoyed that redemption which the second Adam gained for her. Hence, like a chosen garden that v bear the fruit of life, she was made the flower of every kind of perfection." (Book II, Chapter 6)

How was this freedom from the effects of sin displayed in the life of this singularly redeemed woman? Everythi she experienced in life "was used holily and faithfully in the service of holy love for the exercise of the other vir which, for the most part, cannot be practiced except amid difficulty, opposition, and contradiction...The gloriou experienced all human miseries (except such that directly tend to sin) but she used them most profitably for the o and increase of the holy virtues of fortitude, temperance, justice, and prudence, and of poverty, humility, patienc compassion. Therefore, such things did not hinder heavenly love but on many occasions assisted and strengthen continual exercise and advance." (Treatise on the Love of God, Book VII, Chapter 14)

Whether sinner or sinless, we all have one thing in common: we are called to embrace each day as fully as possi its countless opportunities to practice "fortitude, temperance, justice, and prudence, and of poverty, humility, pa and compassion." In this we not only experience the freedom of God's redemption, but we can more freely be in of God's redemption in the lives of others.

Rev. Michael S. Murray, OSFS, is the Executive Director of the De Sales Spirituality Center.

2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT (Dec 10, 2006)

Suggested Emphasis

"Prepare the way of the Lord with the splendor of glory from God forever."

Salesian Perspective

John went throughout the whole region proclaiming a baptism of repentance as it is written using the words of Isaiah: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths."

Just as John the Baptist reminds the people in the region of the Jordan to prepare the way of the Lord, so too we are called to do the same. It started with our Baptism when we became members of the Body of Christ. It happens in our daily words and actions, our call to "**Live Jesus**" every moment of every day.

Our reading from Baruch reminds us to put on the splendor of glory from God forever and our Responsorial Psalm reminds us the Lord has done great things for us, we are filled with joy.

We may ask ourselves if we truly are filled with joy as we prepare the way of the Lord. Are we? This only happens through our work on our relationship with God and one another. We can not give what we do not have. If God is not the center of our life, we will fail.

St. Francis de Sales tells us in The Introduction to the Devout life, that devotion must be experienced in different ways by the gentleman, the worker, the servant, the widow, the young girl and the married woman. Not only that, but practice must be adapted to the strength, activities and duties of each individual person.

St. Francis de Sales knew we must start with our interior, our prayer life. If we work on building a good relationship with God, we can do what St. Paul tells the Philippians: "I pray always with joy in every prayer for all of you."

If we remember the splendor of glory from God forever, we will be able to prepare the way of the Lord with joy in our daily encounters with one another. We will be able to "**Live Jesus**" every moment of every day.

Rev. Michael S. Murray, OSFS, is the Executive Director of the De Sales Spirituality Center.

3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT (Dec 17, 2006)

Suggested Emphasis

"What should we do?"

Salesian Perspective

The crowds asked John the Baptizer: "What should we do?" Such a simple question. Such a challenging question. Such a potentially life-changing question.

You and I live in a world in which the coming of Christ has already occurred. However, this world in which we live is also a place in which the possibilities of that promise have yet to be fulfilled.

What should we do? Try to fulfill it by sheer force of human will? Should we just shrug our shoulders and hope for the best?

The answer for us is the answer that John offered to the crowd two thousand years ago: "Be generous, do your justice, and don't exact from others more than they should - or can - give." In short, following the Will of God, following

example of Jesus, cooperating with the promptings of the Spirit is not about doing more, doing extra. It's not about embracing a different vocation. It's not about being someone other than who you already are. Simply - and yet, powerfully - it is about doing more with the life that you are already living, and doing more with who you are in that give life, justice and peace to others.

Francis de Sales firmly believed this. He cautions against jumping to the conclusion that following Jesus, walking with Jesus and being Jesus for others requires that we do extra. Francis says clearly: "Be who you are. Be that well."

We want a world that more perfectly reflects the peace, the hope, the reconciliation, the justice and righteousness of the Kingdom of God. We want a world that more clearly embodies the fulfillment of the promise given to us in Jesus. We want a taste here and now of the banquet that awaits us forever in heaven.

What should we do? Be generous. Do our jobs, live our lives justly. Do not take or expect from others more than they should - or cannot - give.

Be who you are. Be that well. Be who, what, why and how God creates, redeems and inspires you to be: joy to yourself and joy to others.

Rev. Michael S. Murray, OSFS, is the Executive Director of the De Sales Spirituality Center.

4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT (Dec 24, 2006)

Suggested Emphasis

"Mary set out and traveled in haste."

Salesian Perspective

The angel Gabriel's greeting to Mary contained 2 discrete, yet related, messages: (1) Mary would be the mother of the long-expected Messiah, & (2) her cousin Elizabeth had conceived a child.

No sooner has Mary said "yes" to the invitation to be the mother of the Messiah than she is off "in haste" to visit her cousin.

In a very real sense, long before she actually delivered the child who would redeem the world from the hopeless despair of sin, Mary was already giving birth to the Messiah through her own willingness and eagerness to serve the needs of another: in this case, a relative who, because of her age, might have been considered a woman with a "late" pregnancy.

On the face of it, there is nothing noteworthy about Mary's action. After all, wouldn't any decent human being do the same for a relative in need? What makes Mary's service remarkable is the urgency with which she did it. She is a true model of virtue, one who clearly demonstrates in her own life that the best way of saying "thank you" for God's grace to her is to be a source of that goodness to others.

St. Francis de Sales observed: "Mary does not consider that she is wasting time when she goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth. No, it is an act of loving courtesy." (Stopp, Selected Letters, p. 159) In her "haste" to serve Elizabeth, she shows us the path of true devotion. Francis de Sales continues: "God rewards us according to the dignity of the exercise. I do not say that we may not aspire to the outstanding virtues, but I do say that we must train ourselves in little virtues first without which the great ones are often false and deceptive."

Advent reminds us that the great hope for which we all long is built upon the foundation of little, simple, ordinary kindness, graciousness, welcome, patience, honesty, hospitality, and compassion. Mary shows us that even the r

singular demonstrations of God's love for us, first and foremost, challenge us to recognize the opportunities already present in our ordinary lives to devote our energies in promoting the welfare of one another.

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Christmas (December 25, 2006)

Suggested Emphasis

"All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God."

Salesian Perspective

"God has signified to us in so many ways and by so many means that God wills that all of us should be saved and no one can claim to be ignorant of this fact. For this very purpose God made us "in his own image and likeness" by and by the Incarnation God has made himself in our image and likeness, after which he suffered death in order to die and save us." (Treatise on the Love of God, Book VIII, Chapter 4)

From the beginning of time God has desired that all of us come to know the truth and be saved. What is this truth? We are made in God's image and likeness; we share in the very essence of God's divine life; we are awash in God's redeeming and inspiring love; we are meant to grow this life and love here on earth; we are destined to experience love and life forever in heaven.

Provided that we choose to do so.

Beyond the comforting images of the stable, the "star of wonder," the magi, the shepherds and the angelic choir, there is a hard and unavoidable truth: while God desires that we be saved, the decision is still ours to make. Francis de Sales observed: "All men are not saved, although the will that all should be saved still remains God's true will, for God respects us according to the condition of both divine and human nature. God's goodness moves him to communicate liberally the help of his grace so that we may come to the joy of God's glory, but our nature requires that God's liberality leave us at liberty to use it for our salvation or to neglect it to our damnation." (*Ibid*)

This is not an attempt to rain on the parade of the Christmas promise of joy, peace, reconciliation and joy. This is not to throw a wet blanket over the time of year which Francis de Sales described as "dedicated to the sovereign mercy shown to us by the Son of God when he was born on earth for our salvation." (Stopp, Selected Letters, p. 294) Simply put, Christmas is a time to ask ourselves the question: Do I take the gift of Jesus Christ in my life as seriously as God does? Put another way, am I as interested in the eternal disposition of my soul as God is?

All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God in the birth of the Messiah. Would that all the ends of the earth - starting with people like you and me - would choose to accept this gift, and make better use of this gift.

To say nothing of sharing it.

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THE HOLY FAMILY (Dec 31, 2006)

Suggested Emphasis

"Being Holy, 'living in God's house,' does not preserve us from difficulties."

Salesian Perspective

The heart of any parent would go out to Mary and Joseph in today's Gospel. Noticing that Jesus was missing and leaving Jerusalem, we can imagine this brief - yet troubling - interchange: "He isn't with me. I thought he was with you. You mean he isn't?"

This was not the first instance of troubling news for the Holy Family. In fact, challenges faced them from the very beginning. St. Francis de Sales says: "Consider the vicissitudes and changes, the alternations of joy and sorrow" in the Holy Family. "What joy, what jubilation for Our Lady to receive the tidings that she will bear the Eternal Word. By contrast, consider St. Joseph, seeing that she was with child and knowing that it was not by him: into what anxiety and distress he no doubt plunged!"

Again: "When our Lady brought forth her Son, the angels announced his birth, the shepherds, and magi came to him: what rejoicing and consolation was theirs, amid all this. But wait: a little later, the angel of the Lord said to them in a dream: take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt! Oh how great a subject this must have been to our Lord and St. Joseph." (Conference III, Sermon on the Octave of Holy Innocents)

While the ups and downs, the joys and pains of Jesus, Mary and Joseph have something to teach us, the real lesson for those who try to maintain and nurture "holy families" in our own lives is how the Holy Family faced life's tribulations. They must consider the great peace and serenity of mind and heart of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, shown in their constancy amid all the unexpected events that befell them."

The measure of a "holy family" is not found in what does - or does not - happen to its members. Rather, a "holy family" is one that demonstrates a certain grace and confidence when faced with the events of daily living, especially the unexpected ones. Francis de Sales urges us: "Consider whether we are justified in being surprised and troubled when we meet with similar accidents in the house of God. We must repeat over and over again to ourselves, so as to more fully impress this truth upon our minds, that no turn of events must ever carry away our hearts and minds in displays of impetuosity or temper, for unevenness of temper proceeds from no other source than our own passions and preferences."

We most imitate the Holy Family in our own relationships when we impress upon our minds and hearts that the world does not revolve around us, that things do not always go our way, that our plans are frequently not the last word, that we cannot always control what happens to us: we can, however, choose how to respond to the unexpected in our lives in ways that promote faith, tranquility, strength and courage.

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