For Personal Reflection

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1. Have I ever been persecuted for doing what is right? When? Why? By whom?
2. How do I feel when my attempts to do good are rejected or ridiculed? How do I respond or deal with that experience?
3. How do I feel about suffering for what is right?
4. Do I avoid confrontation or disagreement? Over what issues? With whom?
5. Have I ever persecuted, ridiculed or rejected someone else because they were trying to do the right thing? Over what issues? With whom?

Further Reading

Introduction to the Devout Life: St. Francis de Sales. Part III, Chapters 3, 16 and 35.

Treatise on the Love of God. St. Francis de Sales. Book IX; Book XII, Chapter 13.

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God's Kingdom Is Theirs...

SALESIAN PERSPECTIVES

Those Persecuted for Right

The Sermon on the Mount is the first of five great discourses in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus begins this discourse with the well-known Beatitudes, one of which is: "Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of right; the Kingdom of heaven is theirs."

In a perfect world, doing the right thing would always be its own reward. Unfortunately, in this imperfect world where we live, doing the right thing sometimes brings nothing but trouble.

We know this is true. Our efforts to do what is right, good and just sometimes bring out the worst in people: ridicule, resistance and sometimes, outright hostility.

"The wrongs we suffer from good people are far harder to bear than those from others..."

While we might be upset, angered, embarrassed or hurt when this happens, we shouldn't be shocked. Francis de Sales suggests that "we must often recall that our Lord has saved us by his suffering and endurance and that we must work out our salvation by sufferings and afflictions, enduring with all possible meekness the injuries, denials and discomforts we meet." (Introduction, Part III, Chapter 3)

Whether we are aware of it or not, we sometimes nurture rather romantic notions about being persecuted for doing the right thing. Francis certainly knew this when he remarked: "Many people would be ready to accept evils provided that they were never inconvenienced by them." (*Ibid*)

"We must often recall that our Lord has saved us by his suffering and endurance and that we must work out our salvation by sufferings and afflictions, enduring with all possible meekness the injuries, denials and discomforts we meet."

More often than not, the kind of persecutions we actually experience are *anything but* dramatic or glorious. Francis de Sales wrote: "Do not limit your patience to this or that kind of injury or affliction. Some people wish to suffer no tribulations except those connected with honor: for example, to be wounded or made a prisoner of war, persecuted for religion, or impoverished by some lawsuit that they win in the end. Such people do not love tribulation but, rather, the honor that goes with it." Virtuous people "are true servants of God who bear up equally under tribulations accompanied by ignominy and those that might bring honor. To be despised, criticized or accused by evil people is a slight thing to a courageous person, but to be denounced, criticized or treated badly by good people, by our own friends and relatives is the test of virtue...Just as the sting of a bee is much more painful than that of a fly, so the wrongs we suffer from good people and the attacks they make are far harder to bear than those we suffer from others." (*Ibid*)

The lesson? Most of the persecution we experience isn't from strangers; it's not in exotic places halfway around the world; usually, it's precisely in the circumstances and relationships in which we find ourselves every day. Most of the tribulations or persecutions we experience aren't Hollywood material, but part of the challenge of being human in ways that God intends.

Maybe St. Jane de Chantal said it best: "No good without trouble."

Let's be honest. Given our preference, we would always prefer that others would never criticize, harass or ridicule us for trying to live a good life. We would like our attempts at practicing virtue—doing what is right and just—to at least be appreciated or accepted, if not celebrated. Francis de Sales certainly understood this when he wrote: "Considered in themselves, trials certainly cannot be loved. But looked at in their origin, that is, in God's providence and will, they are worthy of unlimited love." (Treatise, Part IX, Chapter 2)

When everything is said and done, maybe St. Jane de Chantal said it best: "No good without trouble." When our attempts to live well aren't well received, let's keep that in mind.