For Personal Reflection

?

1. What does being "single-hearted" mean to you at this point in your life?
2. In what ways do you find yourself tempted to do things or relate to others for self-serving reasons?
3. Can you think of a recent situation or experience in which, to the best of your recollection, you did something for the best of motives? How did that feel? What were the circumstances? Who was involved? How did things turn out?
4. In what areas of your life might you need to work to better purify your intentions or motives for doing what you do or being the way you are?

Further Reading

Introduction to the Devout Life: St. Francis de Sales. Part I, Chapter 2; Part II, Chapter 9; Part IV Chapters 14—15;

Treatise on the Love of God. St. Francis de Sales. Book VI, Chapter 11; Book VII, Chapter 3; Book IX, Chapter 9; Book XI, Chapter 11, 13; Book XII, Chapter 3, 4 and 11.

Spiritual Conferences. St. Francis de Sales. Conference XIV, page 279; Introduction, page lii.

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Volume 4 **Number 3**

Salesian Perspectives is a series of pamphlets published by De Sales Spirituality Services. The series offers practical approaches to holiness based on the lives and legacies of St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane de Chantal. Subscription information is available by contacting De Sales Spirituality Services. © 2005 by De Sales Spirituality Services. All rights reserved.

Seeing God...

SALESIAN PERSPECTIVES

Being Single-Hearted

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 the single-hearted; they shall see God."

There are a number of ways to describe the "single-hearted": those whose hearts are clean; those whose hearts have been purified; those whose motives are unadulterated; those who know themselves; those who are guileless; those who clearly know *why* they do *what* they do; those who are able to see the truth because they attempt to live it themselves.

You get the idea.

"Cling only to the one desire to please God, considering nothing else unless it fulfills that desire..."

Francis de Sales offers a great deal of reflection upon this beatitude, this way of being "blessed". He looks to the to the example of the saints: "Consider that their legs, arms and heads are uncovered because in their thoughts, affections and deeds they have no purpose or motive but that of pleasing God." (Introduction to the Devout Life. Part I, Chapter 2)

Indeed, this sets the standard for being "single-hearted". Francis de Sales described it thus: "In the pursuit of virtue, the less we consult our own interests, the more the purity of divine love shines from those virtues." (IDL Part IV, Chapter 14) Put another way, Francis wrote that "God seeks to lead us to great purity of heart, renunciation of all self-interest in what relates to God's service, and perfect self-denial." (Chapter 15)

The goal of the pure of heart, the goal of the single-hearted is union with the beloved. Francis wrote: "If I approach and join myself to another for no purpose other than to be near that person, and to enjoy this union, it is an approach of pure and simple union." (Treatise VII, Ch. 3)

"Now the sovereign motive of our actions, which is that of heavenly love, has this sovereign property, that being more pure, it makes the actions that proceed from it more pure."

Think about it. No matter how deeply we love another person, no matter how committed we are to doing what is right and just, no matter how pure our motives, there is always the temptation to love whom we love and to do what we do for less-than-noble or for self-serving reasons. What's in this for me? Will this help my career? Will this make me more popular? Does this make me feel good? Will this give me an advantage?

Francis de Sales offers a wonderful image in his Treatise on the Love of God of what it means to be truly single-hearted in the service of God, and by extension, in the service of our brothers and sisters: "One of the world's finest musicians, who played the lute to perfection, in a brief time became so extremely deaf that he completely lost the use of his hearing. However, in spite of that he did not give up singing and playing the lute, doing so with marvelous delicacy by reason of his great skill which his deafness had not taken away. He derived no pleasure from his singing or in the sound of the lute, since after his loss of hearing he could not perceive their sweetness or beauty. Hence, he no longer sang or played except to entertain the prince whose native subject he was and whom he has a great inclination as well as infinite obligation to please...for this reason he had the very greatest pleasure in pleasing the prince and was overjoyed when the prince showed that he enjoyed the music." (Book IX, Chapter 9)

"In the pursuit of virtue, the less we consult our own interests, the more divine love shines from them."

Single-hearted: doing what we do—being who we are—not because of any advantage/benefit to us, but ultimately for God. When we attempt to live this way, we will not only see God clearly in the next life but will indeed glimpse God in this life, making pure music to God through our motives of service to one another.