

**MEDITATIONS  
OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE**

- II - (2/2)

**Brother Mario Presciuttini**

**2. The means of nourishing the spirit of faith:  
MEDITATION IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD.**

For De La Salle, this particular form of prayer called mental prayer or meditation is the indispensable source of nourishment and support for the spirit of faith.

Closely related to it is the idea of the presence of God, that is, living, thinking and making choices always with reference to God in the midst of everyday life.

The presence of God is a characteristic of Lasallian spirituality. The Meditations for Sundays and Feasts constantly recall its importance and benefits: habitual attention to the holy presence of God "gives a foretaste of eternal bliss" (Med. 179, 3) because it enables one "to enjoy God by anticipation" (Med. 177, 3) and "because it is so useful to you in your employment. As your work relates to God and the salvation of souls, it is most important not to lose sight of God while performing it" (Med. 179, 3; Sauvage/Campos op.cit. p.151).

It is in mental prayer or meditation that this contact and union take place, and during it that one can learn the will of God (cf. Med. 37, 2; 62, 2/3; 42, 3; 181, 3...) and dispose oneself to fulfil it through love (cf. Med. 36, 2; 177, 3...).

Lasallian meditation is characterised not only by the presence of God but also by some basic elements revealed by its structure: it is

(a) Christocentric: De La Salle considers Jesus especially in the mystery of his incarnation and in his redeeming mission: the work of the Christian teacher who shares in the same salvific mission is constantly linked with the work of Jesus himself (cf. Med. 33; 39, 2; 61, 3; 70, 2; 86, 3; 106, 3; 193, 3; 195; 196, 2...).

(b) Biblical: All the models for meditation offered by De La Salle are centred on the Bible; there is a constant recurrence of Biblical passages containing "maxims" or "mysteries" on which to build one's spiritual life; Suggestions of this nature are frequent and forceful: "It is from this sacred book that you must draw the knowledge which you should daily offer to your pupils. Thus they will imbibe the true Christian spirit. But it is necessary that you, in the first place, should nourish your soul with the holy truths contained in this precious book, and that you should let them sink into your mind by frequently meditating thereon" (Med. 159, 1; cf. Med. 170, 1; 192).

(c) Ministerial: It is so first of all in the sense that meditation nourishes and prepares for the fulfilment of one's educational ministry: "It is your duty to go up to God every day by mental prayer to learn from him all that you must teach your children, and then come down to them by accommodating yourself to their level in order to teach them what God has communicated to you for them - as much in your mental prayer as in the holy scriptures which furnish you with the truths of religion and the practical maxims of the holy gospel" (Med. 198, 1). The Meditations for the Time of Retreat go so far as to make the educational apostolate the exclusive object of mental prayer!

It is so also in the sense that it is a prayer for those being educated; a prayer of intercession, a prayer for sufficient light to guide them (cf. in this connection, Secondino Scaglione, "Preghiera ministeriale nelle Meditazioni di S.G.B. de La Salle", *Rivista Lasalliana*, 4/1971).

**3. A view of life through the eyes of faith:  
ONENESS OF SPIRITUAL LIFE  
AND APOSTOLATE**

This is the foundation of apostolic work and the practical way in which the spirit of faith finally expresses itself.

The spirit of faith makes it possible to do away with the dichotomy that is often found between the religious (Mass, devotions, prayer, sacraments, catechism...) and the secular (studies, teaching, work, entertainment, material needs...).

For De La Salle, this dichotomy is overcome by the view of faith which looks upon every action in life as

part of God's plan and one that is carried out with a view to its accomplishment.

In accordance with a principle which he states in his personal rule of life, and which he constantly repeats in various writings, "one must not make a distinction between the duties of one's state and the question of one's personal sanctification and salvation."

Life must be united around a single central point which draws it to itself and from which it radiates. Sauvage/Campos (op. cit. p.138) make this point: "To act in view of God means to make the unconditional consecration of one's whole life to God part of everyday life." There are many Meditations in which De La Salle stresses the power of a commitment which ends only with the sacrifice of oneself for God. "To commit it only to him means really to sacrifice one's life for him." For a Brother, this fundamental commitment is translated into zeal to work for the good of the pupils. In order to fulfil his duty properly, he must "consecrate himself entirely and give his life". An interior fire such as this is all-devouring; it enables the Brother to direct all his actions to God, to give him all his time, all his thoughts, his whole heart. (cf. Med. 58, 1; 70, 2; 104, 2; 114, 3; 135, 2...). And this happens whatever the activity involved even when it is apparently "secular". The zeal of which De La Salle often speaks is none other than faith translated into action.

### 3.1 The theology of education

This strongly unitary view of life is the basis of De La Salle's whole theology of education developed in his Meditations, especially in those for the Time of Retreat.

According to it, "The Christian educator, imbued with the spirit of faith and guided by the Holy Spirit, contemplates in his meditation the mystery of Christ, God's only plan, God who reveals himself in life and who wishes to save all mankind in Christ. In it he becomes aware of the needs of young people, communicates with the salvific will of God, offers himself to the Father in the Spirit and in Christ, in order to contribute to the "salvation" of these young people: to help them to live according to the Christian spirit in every single moment of their lives" (S.Gallego, op.cit. p.33).

The main points of this theology of education can be briefly summarised as follows:

#### (a) God takes the initiative

Either in the foundation of the Christian Schools (cf. Med. 193), or in the call of the Christian educator to the mission (cf. Med. 131; 140, 2; 146, 2; 177, 1; 197, 3...).

#### (b) The purpose of the Christian school is complete salvation

This consists either in human growth through instruction, or personal spiritual growth through the teaching of the truth and apprenticeship in Christian life, or social growth through initiation into ecclesial and secular life.

#### (c) The Christian educator is a collaborator of God

\* he is called and prepared by God; \* he is entrusted with an ecclesial ministry; \* he becomes an instrument of grace by his witness and work; \* he is at the service of all the pupils, in particular of those who are poor and weak; \* he takes care over his initial and continuing formation; \* he always acts as an active member of an educational community. (These topics are treated in the following section devoted to the Meditations for the Time of Retreat).

#### (d) The education offered by the Christian school:

\* is directed to the development of the whole person (cf. Med. 160, 3); \* is characterised by tender attention to each pupil (cf. Med. 33); \* takes place in an atmosphere of solidarity, responsibility, commitment which includes vigorous evangelising action.

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This process, which is based on the spirit of faith and affects the whole life of a person, including the smallest pedagogical indications, can be followed throughout the length of the Meditations.

Some topics are certainly developed more fully and in greater detail in other works of De La Salle, but they can all be found in the Meditations, if only by allusion, and all are linked to a Gospel text, to the example of a saint, or to a systematic consideration of the educational apostolate of the school.

As has already been said several times, the Meditations for the Time of Retreat are concerned exclusively with this last point, and now I should like to treat them in some detail.