



De Sales

SPIRITUALITY SERVICES

"practical paths to holiness"

"Dealing with Temptations"



The Salesian tradition identifies three steps that can lead to sin: (1) a sin, great or small, is suggested; (2) the person being tempted is either pleased or displeased with the suggestion; (3) the person either consents to the temptation, or refuses it.

Let us be clear: being tempted is not, in itself, sinful! Temptations cannot make us displeasing to God "unless we delight in them and/or consent to them," counsels St. Francis de Sales. "Let the enemies of our salvation set before us their snares and allurements as much as they like. Let them remain always at the door of our hearts seeking entrance. Let them make as many proposals as they like. As long as we are determined to take no pleasure in this, we can never offend God."

Our first line of defense against temptations is to turn our attention from them, but to do so gently, calmly and simply. St. Jane de Chantal recommends that we "pay no attention to them, doing whatever is necessary to take our minds off them. Your methods, however forceful, must reflect moderation."

This moderation is critical. If we overreact to the presence of temptations, we may actually reduce our ability to resist

them. Losing our cool in the face of temptations merely increases our spiritual turmoil, allowing Satan to "fish, as it were, in troubled waters."

Strategies for countering a specific temptation depend upon the size or nature of the temptation itself.

Great temptations may resist our efforts to simply turn away from them. In fact, they may actually pursue us. Remedies for dealing with this type include:

- * Uniting yourself with the crucified Christ;
- * Speaking of it with a spiritual director, confessor or a trusted friend;
- * Resolving to be as stubborn and determined as the temptation itself;
- * Refusing to look at the temptation or to argue with it;
- * Keeping your attention fixed on the Lord.

What small temptations may lack in quality they more than make for it in quantity. Like small flies or gnats, they buzz about our ears, bite us on the nose or cheeks, obscure our vision and generally distract us from our God-given dignity and destiny.

Advice? Don't waste time examining them. Simply brush them away or practice the oppo-

site virtue.

A word of caution. Small temptations can actually be more dangerous to our spiritual health in the long run precisely because they are so frequent and appear so insignificant! People trying to grow in holiness may successfully resist a great temptation, only to be worn down and compromised by the multiple and insidious assaults of small ones.

All this talk of resisting temptations overlooks the other important insight of Salesian spirituality: temptations can actually serve as reminders of our need for growth, our need for good, our need for God.

Francis de Sales tells us that the experience of temptation can "bring us back to reality, make us reflect upon our frailty, and cause us to have recourse more quickly" to our Creator.

When the voice of temptation speaks to you, turn away the eyes of your mind; cover the ears of your heart. Seek the love and strength of the God who created you, who redeemed you, who inspires you.

Above all, practice a life of virtue. There is no better remedy against the suggestions of temptation than to be otherwise occupied doing the creative, redemptive work of the Lord.

