

# De Sales

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## SPIRITUALITY CENTER

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*"Tools...of the Trade"*



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Mary D. Ford

My father was a builder. He built cars for Chrysler. He built helicopters for Boeing Vertol. What I remember most were all the things he built around the house: cabinets, shelves, shutters, molding, trim and other things.

He was passionate about building. He was a stickler for detail.

He was good at it, too.

As I boy I sometimes sat for hours on a stool and watched him create things at his workbench. He had tools, lots of tools. Each had its own unique purpose and function.

In the years that I observed him build, I learned three things: (1) there is a tool for every job, (2) there is a job for every tool, and (3) there's no one tool that does it all.

I didn't inherit my father's gift for working with wood. Yet, as I enter more deeply into the heart of Salesian spirituality, I more deeply appreciate the wisdom that guided all of my father's endeavors. In the Introduction to the Devout Life, Francis de Sales writes: "Frequently, the great fault of those undertaking the practice of virtue is to stubbornly insist upon using a particular one in all circumstances."

As useful as a saw may be, you can't drive nails with one.

As sophisticated as a drill press is, you shouldn't try to cut lumber with one. As simple and effective as a hammer may be, you don't use one to cut glass.

The art and discipline of Salesian spirituality is about acquiring and mastering as many of the virtues as possible. It also challenges us to learn how to match each virtue with the situation, relationship or circumstance at hand. We must resist the temptation to become attached or infatuated with a favorite virtue and try to make it fit every task or job in life. After all, if all we ever use is a hammer, eventually everything in life tends to look like a nail.

We are created in the image and likeness of God, the Master Craftsman, the Master Builder. We are called to build the Kingdom of God on this earth, precisely in the particular state, stage and place in life in which we find ourselves. Through the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit, we must craft relationships, families and communities that promote justice, and peace, reconciliation and healing, love and life.

As we attempt to acquire the tools and knowledge needed to live a life of virtue, we look to the humble, gentle, compassionate and patient Jesus as our teacher,

guide and companion. We can't force one tool to do it all; we need to apply the tools that each situation requires, and so to practice a discipline that requires the utmost flexibility. "We must keep our minds in tranquility in order to do everything in its season," observed St. Jane de Chantal. There is a time for every tool for every season...under heaven.

Four virtues are absolutely essential in helping to build the kingdom of God: (1) *Humility* - be humble enough to know that they are many tools for living that we can learn from God, and one another. (2) *Gentleness* - we need to let the tools we acquire do the work: we must not try to force them; (3) *Flexibility* - we need to select the right tool for the job, the right job for the tool: we can't get attached to a select favorite; (4) *Patience* - creating worthwhile things on earth takes time. If Rome wasn't built in a day, imagine the time required to build something that will last forever in heaven!

In the spirit of St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane de Chantal, may we follow the example of Jesus Christ our Savior who is the Son of God and who, perhaps not coincidentally, was the son of a carpenter.