

De Sales

SPIRITUALITY CENTER

"Simplicity...of Intention"



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In common parlance, calling someone "simple-minded" is hardly complimentary. We use a word like "simpleton" as an insult that indicates the relative intellectual inferiority of the object of our criticism.

The antonym of "simple" would be something like "complex," and the implication is that a more sophisticated or intelligent person is better able than the simple person to handle a multitude of tasks with some proficiency.

Our culture values productivity, technology, gadgetry, and efficiency. Therefore worldly success requires a certain complexity of skills and abilities. Why then do we adherents of Salesian spirituality, who profess a love and acceptance of the world as it is, continue to uphold simplicity as a most important virtue?

St. Francis de Sales tells us that simplicity is the opposite of complexity but *not* in areas of intelligence or capability. Simplicity is a matter of *motivation* or *intention*. If our motivation is focused or single-minded (i.e., not convoluted), then our action will be simple. Salesian spirituality dictates that our *intention* for

any action be the love of God and neighbor. What we buy/sell, where we work, who we love or how we live should be guided by the single-minded desire to grow in the image and likeness of God, not diffused or confused among a host of motives.

Many people seem to be motivated by love of self, love of things, love of power, etc, and this shows in their actions. Still, it is unreasonable to expect that anyone can completely eliminate her/his mixed motives: looking out for "number one" certainly comes easily for most of us.

A healthy spiritual simplicity is concerned with purifying the intention of our actions. A good question to ask ourselves over and over again: "*Why* am I doing what I am doing?" Notice there is no mention of feelings or desires, only a question of *the intention* for acting. Conscious awareness of this *why* helps us to perform virtuous deeds.

St. Francis de Sales provided his Sisters of the Visitation with a tool he inherited from his Jesuit educators as a "simplicity check," the examination of conscience. Take a few minutes many times throughout the day; review your

actions and interactions thus far; ask yourself whether or not your aim has been the love of God and neighbor. This, observed St. Jane de Chantal, should produce "guileless simplicity which makes us even-tempered and friendly toward everyone."

The great gift of simplicity is the *clarity* with which one sees life. Simple people have a strong faith-based guideline for all decision-making: "Do I by this action demonstrate my love for God?" In this they unlock the power and promise of even the most ordinary and apparently insignificant actions of kindness, civility and charity. In a nutshell, simplicity is about having a razor-sharp awareness of not only *what* one does but *why* one is doing it.

O holy simplicity! Give us the grace to willingly accept the ignominy—and the power—of being simple people in a complex world. Give us the wisdom to understand that *what* we do is enlarged—or diminished—by *why* we do it.

Remember: "Blessed are the single-hearted: they shall see God..." in their world, themselves and in one another.