

# De Sales

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## SPIRITUALITY CENTER

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*"Three-step protection...for life's journey"*



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Mary D. Ford

America's railroads observe "Three-Step Protection" to increase safety for their employees. Before workers go on, under, or between cars in a train, engineers must (1) apply the brake, (2) center the reverser on the throttle and (3) place the generator field switch in the OFF or OPEN position. Such a procedure (1) reduces injury and (2) promotes productivity.

"Wherever we may be, we can and should aspire to a perfect life." So wrote St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622), bishop and a doctor of the Church, nearly 400 years ago in his spiritual classic, the Introduction to the Devout Life. Working together with another great saint, Jane de Chantal (1572-1641), Francis showed how people in all walks of life can become holy. Like other schools of Christian spirituality, Salesian spirituality helps believers to develop a deeper relationship with God and others through Jesus. As with railroading, this endeavor, too, is fraught with hazards and dangers. Salesian spirituality provides its own 'three-step protection' plan that can reduce injury and promote productivity and progress as we pursue a practical path to holiness.

**Do All Through Love.** Salesian spirituality challenges us to become holy--to become saints! Salesian spirituality is often described as a "spirituality of the heart," the place in which the divine love and human love become one in the same. Love alone motivates and sustains our quest for holiness. "Do all through

love, nothing through fear," urged Francis. As we know, love is hard work: it isn't for the faint of heart. It requires knowing when to take hold and knowing when to let go. In an age that over-emphasizes self-actualization and self-fulfillment (often at the expense of others), Salesian spirituality points to a different way to find fulfillment and happiness. It calls us to practice interior discipline, to practice the "little virtues": patience with aging parents or rebellious teenagers, gentleness and humility with friends and co-workers, and simplicity in our lifestyle. In the quiet of our hearts we learn to turn everything over to God, to die to our self-absorption, to live totally for Jesus by loving one another. Salesian spirituality understands that spiritual progress comes slowly and, often, at great cost. At the same time, is also maintains that in turning our hearts to God and in doing God's will we find our greatest happiness and fulfillment.

**Live in the Present Moment.** We only have the present moment, the here and now, in which to respond to God. But focusing on the present can be difficult: it requires a tremendous amount of energy and effort. We may find it much easier to spend our time regretting past actions, or fretting about an uncertain future. Even positive memories, or daydreams about happy times to come, can distract us from what is happening within us and around us right here, right now.

**See Holiness as Relationship.**

Salesian spirituality is profoundly relational; it realizes that spiritual progress comes in and through relationships. Holiness does not develop in a vacuum or in isolation. Within the family, for example, we are challenged to grow daily in the little virtues. As we perform ordinary tasks--cleaning, cooking, helping with homework, planning a birthday party, celebrating an anniversary--with extraordinary love, we find God. We truly become like Jesus as we seek to work out our salvation in our relationships with one another.

Personal spirituality grows within the Christian community. As we gather to hear God's word and celebrate God's presence, we are energized by the faith of others. They challenge us to offer our gifts to the community, to move us beyond self-preoccupation to a greater concern for what is good for all us.

Within this community of faith strong spiritual friendships may develop. Salesian spirituality values such friendships as a gift from God. Already in love with God, these friends grow in love for each other, and express this love in generous, often creative, service to the community--indeed, to the world. Spiritual friends challenge and support us; they expect the best for and from us; they bring out the best in us; they show us the face of God.

Holiness is more of a journey — a way of living — rather than a destination at which to arrive. May these three steps protect and encourage us along the way!.