

# De Sales

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## SPIRITUALITY CENTER

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*"Heaven: Down-to-Earth values"*



Mary D. Ford

"To *Live Jesus* is to have – in Francis de Sales' words – the name of Jesus engraved on one's heart. To allow Jesus to live, one does not simply learn about Jesus or pray to Jesus or even imitate Jesus. One surrenders the vital center of one's being – one's heart, as understood in the holistic biblical sense, to another living presence. The Pauline dictum, 'I no longer live but Christ lives in me,' is at the core of the distinctive Salesian inscription. (Letters of Spiritual Direction, page 10)

The following values are woven throughout the entire fabric of Salesian spirituality.

*Keep The Big Picture in Mind.* By virtue of our creation each of us is created to live a life of holiness. In the Salesian tradition, the word we can substitute for holiness is "devotion". Being holy - being devout - is not about being otherworldly. It is not about viewing this world as merely a kind of waiting room for heaven. Being devout is about fully embracing life as it is, and working together for life as it can be.

*Develop, Maintain and Deepen a Prayerful Life.* Developing a life of prayer is absolutely essential for persons seeking to "Live Jesus." In the Salesian tradition, the form and focus of prayer can be wide and varied. What is most important is that the practice of prayer – however sophisticated or simple – fits the state and stage of life in which people struggle to work and live each day. Prayer keeps us grounded. Prayer keeps us centered. Prayer keeps us balanced. Prayer keeps us focused. Prayer keeps us in touch with who we really are, and who we are called to be.

*Know What You're Doing.* There is no such thing as a "random" act of kindness in the Salesian tradition. Anything worth doing is worth doing well. Any

life worth living is a life that is deliberate, intentional and conscious.

*Embrace the Ordinary.* Salesian spirituality challenges us to find fulfillment precisely in the state and stage of life in which we find ourselves. The places in which we work, the neighborhoods in which we live and the homes in which we love are precisely where God challenges us to grow, to bloom and to blossom into the people that God calls us to be.

*Live in the Present Moment.* In his book entitled The Seven Secrets of Successful Catholics, author Paul Wilkes observes: "Ours is a life lived in the present tense. Memories may be precious or painful, plans lofty or low, but all we really have to live is today. Each day, each hour brings with it opportunities for our spirits to soar, for us to become the people we know we can be."

*Respect yourself; respect others.* Respect, taken from the Latin, literally means to "take a second look." Our view of ourselves – our view of others – must go far deeper than first impressions. To practice respect – of taking a second, or a third, or a fourth look – demands that we must be willing to learn more about the truth about ourselves, and to learn more about the truth of one another.

*Treat People Right.* This is not always easy to do. We are frequently tempted to relate to others in ways that are not just, that are not reasonable. We are tempted to promote only our own concerns, to first ask "what's in it for me?" or to always be concerned about taking care of "number one". At times like these "we have two hearts. One heart is mild, favorable and courteous toward ourselves; the other is hard, severe and rigorous toward our neighbor." At times like these we have "two balances: the one to weigh out conven-

iences to our own greatest advantages, and the other to weigh those of our neighbor to their greatest possible disadvantage." (Introduction to the Devout Life, Part III, Chapter 36)

*Watch your mouth.* Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me: baloney! Words can hurt. Words can discourage. Words can kill. Words can console. Words heal. Words encourage. Words liberate. Words lift up. Words give life. Choose – and use – your words carefully. You are responsible for your words and for the impact that they may have upon others.

*See the glass – and life – as "half full."* The "Gentleman Saint" was not naïve. Francis de Sales recognized the tragedy of sin. He acknowledged the allure of temptation. He knew the experiences of suffering, pain, loss and injustice. He saw the possibility of human fear and blindness. But more importantly, Francis proclaimed the greater truth of God's creative power, the greater reality of God's redeeming love, the greater possibility of God's inspiring hope. Thomas Green wrote: "God is truly here for those who have eyes to see. For God, everything is possible. This is the faith foundation of the good sense and joyous hope so prominent in Francis de Sales." (Come Down Zachaeus)

*Remember the Power of Little Things.* On any given day we may not encounter many occasions to do great things for other people. However, each day is filled with countless opportunities to do little, simple, ordinary things for one another. The Salesian tradition places a high value on doing little things for each other precisely because there are so many opportunities to recognize and practice these little courtesies, these little habits, these little virtues.