

De Sales

SPIRITUALITY CENTER

"God's Image...and Likeness"



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Mary D. Ford

We are made in God's image and likeness. Therefore, all of us share a common dignity: we are sons and daughters of God. Made in God's image and likeness, all of us share a common destiny: to live forever in that love with God and one another.

Recognizing this, we treat each person (including ourselves) with profound respect and reverence. In the midst of an all-too-frequently violent society – at school, in the workplace, at home, on the street – Salesian spirituality calls us to respond (rather than react) to our world and the people in it in a gentle, balanced way.

We are challenged to live *gently*, first of all, with *ourselves*. Francis reminds us not to become upset, obsessed or discouraged by our failings. Rather, Francis desires that we seize the courage to pick ourselves up and move on after we fail. He counsels: "Be patient with everyone, but above all with yourself."

Gentleness with *ourselves* leads to gentleness with *others*. We learn to let go of judgmental attitudes and become more compassionate. The desire for retaliation or revenge--the source of so much violence in our world--gives way to forgiveness. By striving to live this way we become peacemakers in our homes

and in the community at large.

Salesian spirituality recognizes that for *each of us* each person is *unique* and unrepeatable. Since each has a different character and different gifts, holiness will feel – and look – differently for each of us. How, then, do I become holy? Quite simply, says Francis de Sales, by doing God's will, that is, by living in ways that display our God-given dignity and destiny. He exhorts: "Do not wish to be anything but what you are, and try to be that perfectly."

Recognizing that God's will for us is embedded in the state and stage of life in which we find ourselves, Salesian Spirituality *stresses* the importance of embracing the *ordinary* demands and responsibilities of our vocation -- a challenge indeed, for each of us, for all of us. Stretched by the demands of family and job, beset by financial concerns, regretful about the past, worried about the future, we may want to run away--in effect, at least, if not actually in fact. Perhaps we will find God in some less hectic setting! Maybe we'd be happier somewhere else, doing something else or being someone else. Francis reminds us, however, that God is closest to us precisely in the busyness of our vocation. "It is not tranquility which brings God close to our

hearts... it is rather the fidelity of our love," he says.

Following God's will calls for ongoing, prayerful *discernment*. In the Salesian way of looking at life, discernment often involves a balancing. On the one hand, we need a certain openness, or flexibility, to respond when the Holy Spirit calls us to new ways of thinking and acting. On the other hand, *perseverance* (which includes planning and determination) in one's vocation is essential for spiritual growth. Francis reminds us: "Just as a shrub that is often transplanted cannot take root and as a result cannot come to maturity and yield the desired fruit, so that soul that flits from plan to plan cannot gain proper growth in perfection, since perfection does not consist in beginnings but in accomplishments."

When fear and doubt close in on us, Salesian Spirituality points to signs of *hope* — yes, even *joy*. True, sin and its terrible effects are real in the world. But sin is not the final word. God has spoken his final word in Jesus. Jesus offers us the grace to fulfill our human potential: to become lovers of God and neighbor, to grow in holiness — to bring to fruition the divine nature and image in ourselves...and with one another!