

STEP IN!

Salesian Bible Meditations New Bishop's Curriculum Edition

Volume 2: Ministry of Jesus

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Dedicated to my loving wife Jan,
my amazing daughters Erin and Amy
and my supportive Salesian family
throughout the world.

Live Jesus!

Volume 2: The Life and Ministry of Jesus

Our first volume of *Step In! Salesian Bible Meditations: The Old Testament* introduced the practice of Lectio Divina and, of course, the practice of Iconic Lectio. In that volume we focused primarily upon the stories of the Old Testament along with related teachings from Saint Francis de Sales. Judging from the positive response we received from both teachers and students alike, we decided to publish a second book.

In this volume of *Step In! Salesian Bible Meditations: The Life and Ministry of Jesus*, our focus is to highlight Jesus' Christological identity in relationship to the other members of the Trinity. The purpose is to illustrate that God prefers us to act within our community of faith, the Church. Just as each member of the Trinity glorifies and is glorified in the presence and activity of the other members of the Trinity, so we should rejoice to be part of and act with other members of the Church. Like Jesus, we should welcome the presence of the Trinity in the midst of our busy lives. This volume seeks to help you attain Saint Francis' goal for all meditation. That is "remaining close to our Lord ..., listening to His words, contemplating His actions and His affections, we will learn, with His grace, to speak, to act and to will like Him."

Another feature in this volume is plenty of pictures with angels holding scrolls with prophecies from the prophet Isaiah. The angels are there simply as messengers of God the Father, as the word "angel" implies. Other times the Father will be represented as a hand from Heaven or as a beam of light streaming from the heavens. Isaiah's prophecies are featured in this volume due to their Messianic/Christological importance plus the fact that Jeremiah's prophecies were used to represent the prophetic tradition in volume one. The Holy Spirit, in turn, will be shown as a dove with a halo or as swirls of wind as the "ru'ah elohim" or "breath of God" or by tongues of fire.

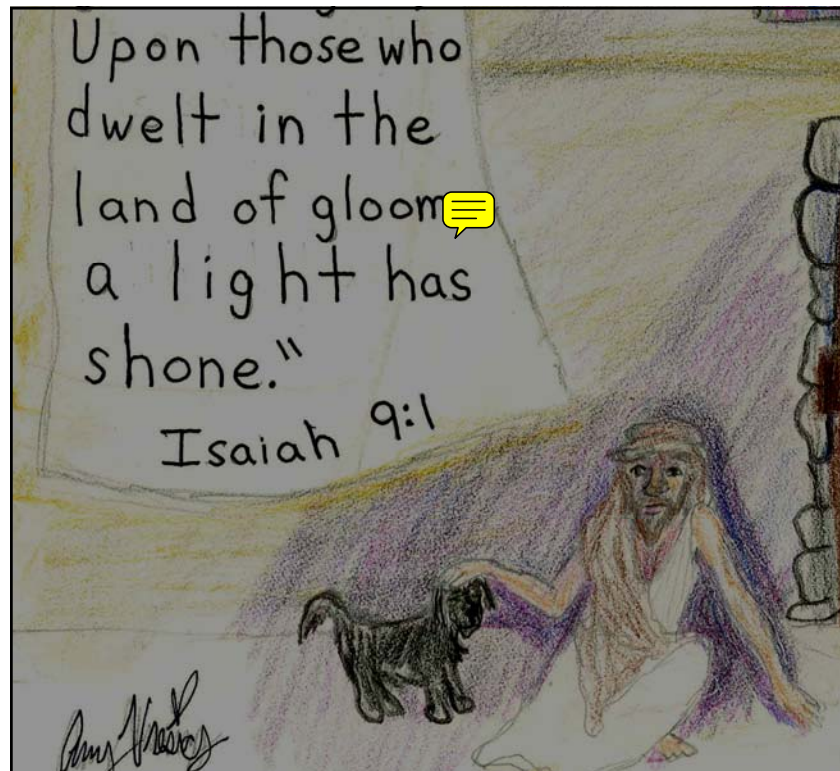
If you like this volume and have not read *Step In! Salesian Bible Meditations: The Old Testament*, we suggest that you get a copy. We also want you to know that we will publish more volumes in this series to complement the U.S. Bishop's New High School Religion Curriculum Framework. Our third volume will highlight stories from both the Old and New Testaments along with the themes of the original goodness of creation, individual and social sin and God's redemptive and saving work in both Salvation History and in our personal lives through grace. Volume four will focus upon the nature and goodness of the Church in light of some of our successes and failings throughout our history.

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Christ the Storyteller

Luke 16:19-31



**Also the Light of the World
(John 8:12-17) and The Way, the
Truth and the Life (John 14:6)**

BEFORE WE BEGIN

Background Information

What do you think of word problems in math class? Do you love the challenge of figuring the essential concepts to solve the problem, or do you wish you could just be given a simple equation? Math teachers know that life does not come to us in simple equations, so they use word problems to help us discern whether or not we really understand the mathematical principles and concepts that are part of everyday life.

Jesus used parables like the Rich Man and Lazarus to see who was allowing his teachings to take root in their hearts. In the Beatitudes Jesus announced the Kingdom of God. Through his miracles, Jesus showed that the Kingdom of God was overcoming the reign of sin and evil and its grip on the world. Now, in his parables Jesus was seeing if his disciples were truly understanding the true meaning of his ministry. Jesus' parables are not mere stories. They are a radical call to embrace the demands of discipleship by accepting a new vision of life.

As the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6), Jesus demands that we learn of his ways to find the truth and gain eternal life. As the Light of the World (John 8:12), Jesus gives us chances to grasp God's will in our complex world. May the Spirit of God open our hearts and minds to the message of Jesus concerning the will of God the Father.

Salesian Concept

What Does it Mean to Love God and the Poor?

In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, the rich man failed to understand the warnings of Moses and prophets against ignoring the needs of the poor and less fortunate. He allowed a large chasm in social economic status to keep him from meeting the needs of a poor man just outside his home. May Jesus' parable keep us from doing the same.

Saint Francis de Sales takes heed of this lesson from the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. He urges us to close the gap between us and the poor in our midst in the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, **“If you love the poor, Philothea, truly share their poverty and be poor like them. Seek their company, taking pleasure in welcoming them in your home, in visiting with them in theirs. Be at ease with them when you meet in church or on the street. Be poor in your speech when talking with them as a friend, but be rich with your hands by sharing with them what you have in greater abundance.”** 10

MEDITATION: A SALESIAN METHOD

1. Remote Preparation

- a. Throw off all your concerns from the school day. (*Relax*)
- b. Read Luke 16:19-31 below.

"There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day. And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Dogs even used to come and lick his sores. When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, and from the netherworld, where he was in torment, he raised his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he cried out, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.' Abraham replied, 'My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented. Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go from our side to yours or from your side to ours.' He said, 'Then I beg you, father, send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment.' But Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.' He said, 'Oh no, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' Then Abraham said, 'If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.'"

2. Immediate Preparation

- a. Ask for a deeper awareness of God's presence.
- b. Ask for God's inspiration to pray sincerely.

3. Considerations (*Write down your insights about how God calls us to justice.*)

Imagine that you are listening to the beginning of this parable of Jesus without knowing the end. Upon hearing the description of the rich man, you cannot help but wish that you too could dress like an aristocrat and eat like a king. In what other ways do you wish that your life today reflected the rich man in this parable? In what ways are you thankful that you do not live like Lazarus?

You pity Lazarus in comparison to the rich man's lifestyle, but other than seeing the two men as neighbors, what other connections do you see between them? In reality, what responsibilities do you feel the rich man has towards Lazarus based upon your own lived experience?

As a first century Palestinian Jew, it does not surprise you that Lazarus is in heaven. You are surprised, however, that the rich man is not in heaven. It is not until you hear that the rich man expects Abraham and Lazarus to immediately jump at his commands that you see the real problem. The rich man expects everything to go his way, revealing his arrogance. Lazarus, as part of God's Anawim, accepts both blessings and hardships with gratitude or patience along with an overall trust in God. Which description best matches your personality?

Jesus' parable ends with Abraham rejecting the rich man's last request to send someone back from the dead to warn his family. What do you make of Jesus' "word problem" that if they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead? What is the hidden message for Christians today?

4. Affections (*Write a three sentence spontaneous, heartfelt prayer.*)

What do you feel as you see the gap between the rich and the poor in the parable and in the world today? What prayer can you offer to God in order to show your desire to help the less fortunate even while enjoying the many gifts God has given to you and your family?

5. Resolution (*Write a resolution that describes what you will do and when.*)

What do you feel you should do in order to live this day well in light of your meditation? Write one concrete resolution that can serve as your response to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor.

6. TOP-Off (*Thanksgiving / Offering / Petition*)

- a. Give thanksgiving to God for this experience of calm.
- b. Offer to God your resolution of
- c. Ask God to give you the grace to accomplish this.

7. Word Art (*Draw an image with words to help you recall this prayer time.*)

Pick any word, phrase or image from this meditation that can help you remember your time with God today. This word and/or image should also help you gratefully fulfill your resolution to reach out in order to get to know the poor among us and meet their needs.

4. Affections (*Write a three sentence spontaneous, heartfelt prayer.*)

5. Resolution (*Write a resolution that describes what you will do and when.*)

6. TOP-Off (*Thanksgiving / Offering / Petition*) **Check Box**

7. Word Art (*Draw an image with words to help you recall this prayer time.*)

Introduction to Iconic Lectio by Neil Kane

In the previous pages you have been practicing Lectio Divina or sacred reading of the Word. Now it's time to introduce the practice of Iconic Lectio or sacred reading of an icon or image.

In the Christian Churches of the East, where iconography began, one is said to “write,” not paint, a sacred icon. The idea that God communicates or reveals himself through the Word Made Flesh, led to the creation of the icons. Therefore, we can now practice Iconic Lectio by discerning the meaning of an image or icon.

This book takes the sacred iconic tradition from the Byzantine or Eastern Church and alters it slightly to fit our modern times. We read the meaning of a visual logos or image by contemplating it. We experience and seek to understand the significance of colors in the drawing. While beholding the facial expressions of ancient biblical figures like Jesus, Mary or Peter, we can enter more deeply into their experience as well as the mood, the tone, the feeling of the icon.

The goal is to appreciate the icon rather than to intellectually dissect it. Iconic Lectio should use the senses, heart, and the mind. While Lectio Divina uses the imagination to awaken our thoughts and feelings, Iconic Lectio uses our senses to enliven one's mind and heart. Under each of the pictures you will find two questions to help you enter into the mood, tone and feeling of the icon as well as your own personal awareness of God's activity in your life. Do not feel limited by these questions, as the Holy Spirit may lead you to consider other aspects of the image for your own spiritual welfare. The goal is to come away from your prayerful experience with a new and profound sense of God's presence and love in your life that you can take with you. Therefore, in group discussions you can feel free to share your thoughts as long as you are viewing the same icon everyone else is. Each icon offers many different starting points for meditation. While it is important to keep to some traditional rules of faith, like the Trinity is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we do no service by painting God into a confining box based upon one's past experience.

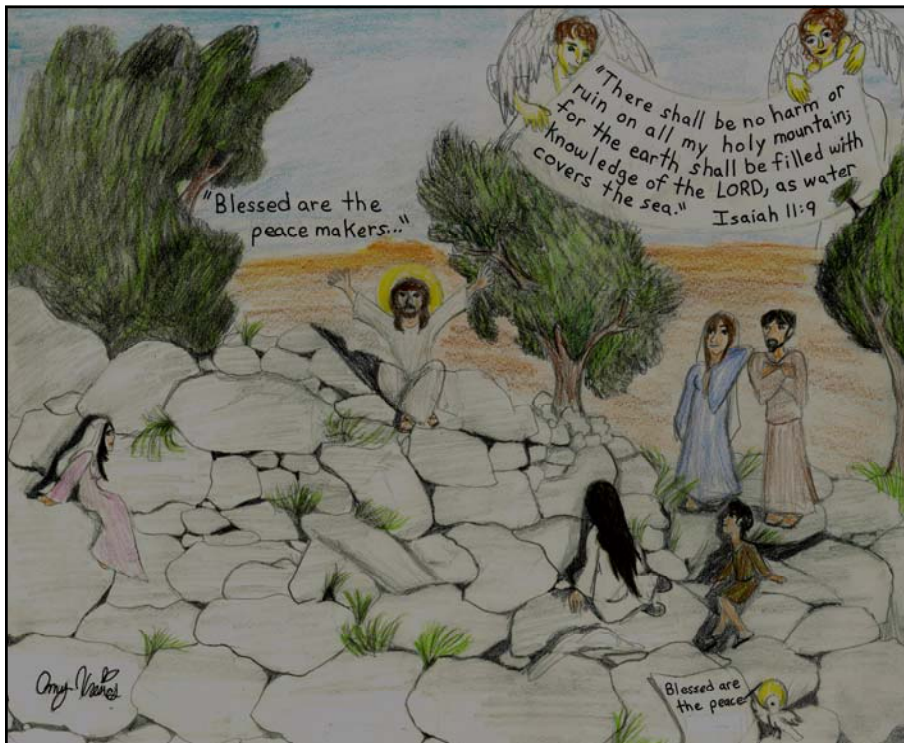
Finally, you may wish to draw your own icons that serve as a reminder and marker of your spiritual growth. You do not need to be an artist to do this. Just use a combination of basic shapes and biblical phrases that can help you remember your reflections during prayer.

All icons are doors to the sacred.



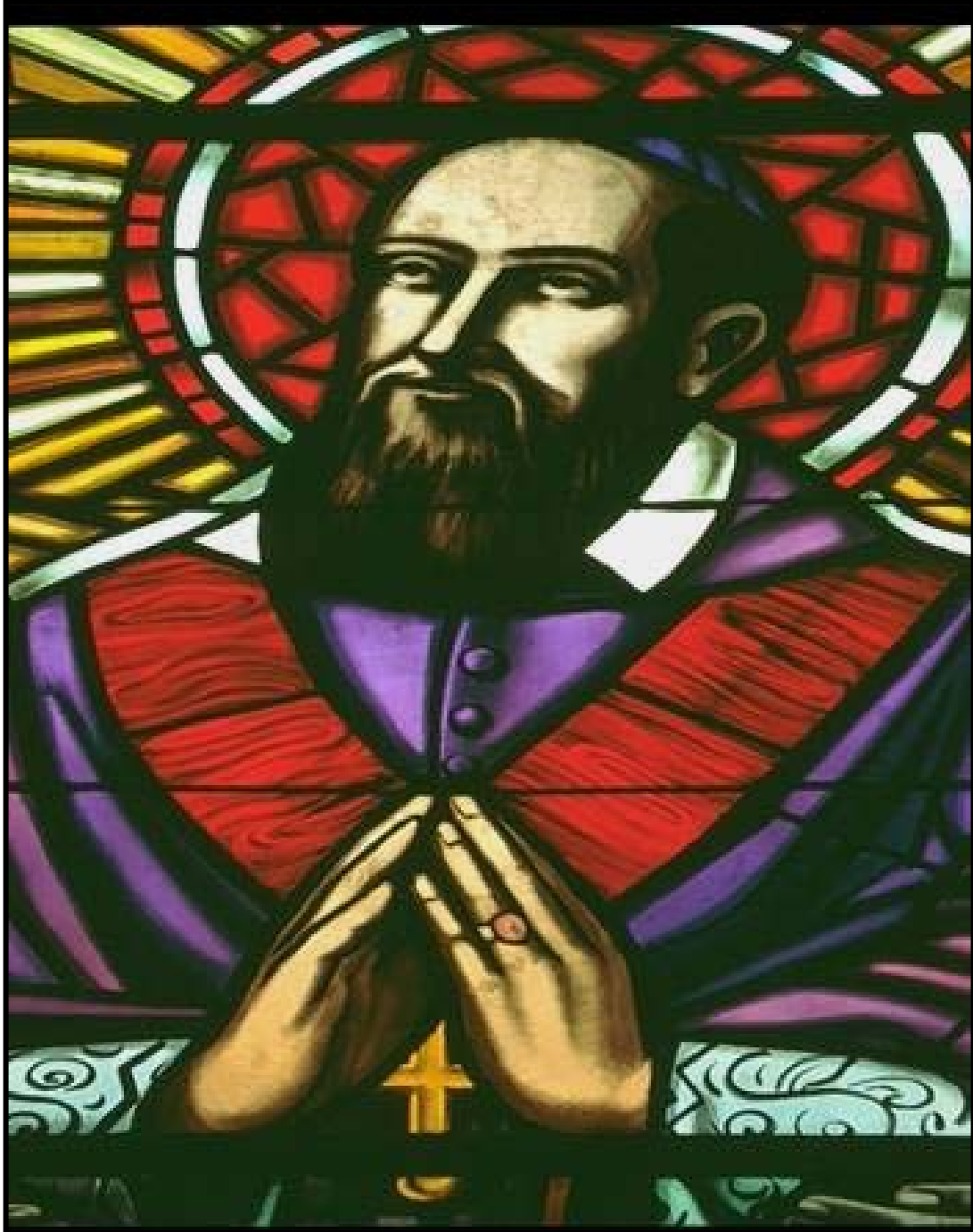
Christ the Eschatological Prophet Who Calls Us

How is the image of the Cross and the Resurrection seen in this image?
 What are the risks and rewards of saying “Yes” to Jesus’ invitation to follow Him?



Christ the Teacher and Messiah

What do you believe made Jesus such an extraordinary teacher?
 Which teachings of Jesus are most meaningful to you?
 Which teachings do you find to be the hardest to keep?



The Introduction to the Devout Life

Introduction to the Devout Life

Four hundred years ago Saint Francis de Sales wrote the *Introduction to the Devout Life* in response to a religious climate similar to our own world today. People were leaving the Church to join the new religions born during the Reformation. Others turned their attention away from matters of faith to ponder the new discoveries in science and the arts that during the Renaissance.

This popular move away from Catholicism was not essentially a rejection of the Catholic Faith itself. Rather it was a rejection of the failure of many in the Church to live according to their Catholic faith. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) was called to respond to the issues raised by the Renaissance and Reformation. The result of the Council was not to change what the Catholic Church taught, but rather to change the method used to teach the Catholic Faith in changing times.

The Council of Trent first focused upon priestly training in seminaries with a uniform catechism. A catechism is a book of theologically true statements about the Catholic faith organized into questions and grouped by topic. The Catechism had to be developed because during the Middle Ages and up through the Council of Trent, poor education led some priests to mislead the faithful about Church teaching. As a bishop during the Counter Reformation, Saint Francis de Sales sought to teach the Catholic Faith to both the priests and lay people in a way that was not only faithful to the new catechism, but also responsive to changing times and attitudes.

Francis' popularity as a teacher of spiritual truths led his friends to persuade him to publish a book on the subject of Christian life in the world. The *Introduction to the Devout Life* (1609) was addressed to a fictional woman named "Philothea." Philothea means "a soul in love with God." The *Introduction to the Devout Life* is the forerunner of the Vatican II teaching, "the universal call to holiness."²⁵

In the *Introduction*, Francis uses imaginative meditations, often focusing upon the affections of one's heart to lead the reader, "Philothea" or "a soul in love with God" to choose to lead a devout life.

The *Introduction to the Devout Life* covers the following topics:

Part One: Meditations to lead one to choose the devout life

Part Two: Prayer and the Sacraments

Part Three: The Practice of Virtue

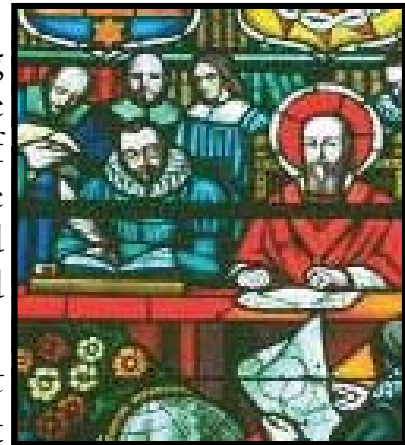
Part Four: The Struggle against Temptations

Part Five: Renewing One's Desire to Lead a Devout Life.

Part I: The Decision to Live the Devout Life

People today often see the Church as being against reason and science, when in truth the Church values both faith and reason as sources of God's revelation. That is why De Sales started the Florimontane Academy where scholars could discuss recent developments in the arts and sciences.²⁶

In the first part of the *Introduction to the Devout Life* Saint Francis de Sales cautions us about accepting false forms of devotion, just as we should be cautious of accepting false representations of what the Catholic Faith teaches and calls us to do.



Francis de Sales listening to scholars at the Florimontane Academy.

“Now, little faults one commits at the beginning of an undertaking increase gradually and proportionally as one advances, finally becoming almost irreparable, before all else one must know what the virtue of “true devotion” is. This is especially the case here because, ... there are ... numerous counterfeits of it.”²⁷

As you most likely already know from this series, De Sales taught that true devotion is simply a true love of God that makes us attentive to do God's will promptly, carefully and often. Saint Francis uses the following analogy to make his point about what true devotion is like: “Just as a sick man walks only as much as is needed, slowly and painfully, so the sinner, when his sins are forgiven, walks only as much as God commands, ...until devotion is reached. Then, like one in good health, he walks, then runs and jumps about on the way of the Commandments. Finally he goes even further, and moving beyond what is only commanded, he runs along the paths of the counsels and heavenly inspirations.”²⁸

Saint Francis warns us that the world only sees Christians avoiding sin, serving others and making sacrifices, but fails to see the love that makes these very actions enjoyable, pleasant and even easy.²⁹ True devotion, according to De Sales, perfects everything and everyone. If it harms any legitimate task or occupation, it must be a false devotion, since true devotion makes us more peaceful, sincere, faithful and agreeable to our duties in life.³⁰

Knowing what true devotion is in reality is one thing, choosing to live a devout life is another. This is why Saint Francis de Sales leads us through a series of ten meditations to rid us of sinful habits and any affection we may have for them. In the final meditation Saint Francis paints a picture of hell without fire and sulfur. Rather De Sales asks us to imagine the people there with faces “wild with hatred, envy, anger and impurity.” These unfortunate souls despise one another but still “pay (the devil) homage by the various sins they commit.”³¹

On the other hand Saint Francis depicts Jesus in heaven as praying for these poor souls while being surrounded by a vast choir of angels and devout souls from every walk of life. In comparison to those who chose hell, people in Heaven “live in order, sweetness and joy, loving Our Lord and each other with a holy love.”³² In the previous meditation, De Sales writes, “... millions of blessed souls sweetly call you, hoping you will be with them one day... They assure you, that the way to Heaven is not as difficult as the world says.”³³ Imagine your



Meditation Ten: The Choice of a Devout Life

grandparents and loved ones in Heaven gazing on you now. After living a life of devotion, they yearn for you to join them, but worry that any misguided affection for sin will keep you from following their example of faith.

De Sales warns us against our attachments to various sins, “And thus, poor, weak sinners who abstain from sin for a while ...would really like to be able to commit it without being damned, and they speak about it with pleasure, and consider those who do commit the sin fortunate indeed.”³⁴ Saint Francis concludes that for such people any future good works will be few and far between with little staying power. Thus, De Sales teaches that to truly rid our souls of sin we must add the power of the Sacrament of Reconciliation to our conversion. A good Confession will help us reject sin and anything associated with it so we can truly resolve to serve God faithfully and “Live Jesus!”³⁵

Saint Francis concludes “Just as there is no natural good that can not be corrupted by bad habits, so there is no imperfection...that cannot be overcome..., first of all by God’s grace and, cooperating with that, by our own hard work and zeal... May God give you the grace to put this in practice!”³⁶

Application for Today Questions *(Possible answers in the TE)*

Part I: The Decision to Live the Devout Life



1. Name some aspects of faith that Catholics have difficulty doing promptly, carefully and often?
2. What your grandparents and great- grandparents in heaven say to you now about the importance of worshipping God sincerely at Mass?
3. Why is it so important in Confession to remove our affection for sin?
4. How can the practice of true devotion perfect us in our duties at home, in our work at school and in all our relationships?

Part II: Prayer and Sacraments

1. How can meditating on your favorite Gospel story enlighten your mind about God's love for you and rid your heart of its affection for sin?
2. Which Salesian method of recalling God's presence works best for you?
3. How do the Preparation of the Day and Examination of Conscience relate in a similar way to the Sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation?

Part III: Choice and Exercise of the Virtues

1. Which Salesian teaching on virtue makes the most sense to you?
2. What can we learn from the example of Jesus about being truly humble in the story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet?
3. What can we learn from the example of Jesus about being truly gentle in the story of Jesus' Agony in the Garden?
4. How encouraging are your friends in helping you live a virtuous and moral life in terms of avoiding underage drinking and/or premarital sex?

Part IV: Temptations

1. How can the spiritual activities that draw us closest to God give us the courage to practice our faith in the face of temptations and ridicule?
2. Which is the most helpful piece of Salesian advice concerning temptation?
3. Which is the most encouraging piece of advice from Saint Francis de Sales concerning temptation and sin?

Part V: Self Renewal

1. What is the wisdom in Saint Francis de Sales' advice to renew our desire to live a devout life daily, weekly, monthly and yearly?
2. How would living in a devout Christian manner improve your life?