

“Whoever conquers a man’s heart conquers the whole man”

- St. Francis de Sales

Dearest brothers and sisters,

We come to greet you at the beginning of this new year to wish you all the blessings of God our Father and Mother, of Jesus, and of the Holy Spirit, in communion of life.

Each month we will share with you a little reflection which will help us deepen the spirit of our identity as Salesian Cooperators. We hope that you will find this useful. Also, we are very happy to receive your own contributions or testimonies which pertain to this. Thus, we will walk together along the path of formation and will make this space a living corner of our “daily life.”

EDUCATING THE HEART WITH LOVE

Don Bosco took his inspiration from St. Francis de Sales for his work, choosing him as the Patron of his Congregation, to show us that charity and sweetness, the characteristic virtues of this great Saint, ought to be the basis of all our educative action. Today, January 24th, we celebrate his feast - one that was always celebrated with great solemnity at the first Oratory. St. Francis, a saintly Bishop, of a noble heart and a wise humanist, had a profound spirituality that placed God and his merciful love at the center of his life and of his history. He was the saint of tenderness of heart, modeled after the image of the heart of the Father. Due to his personal experience, St. Francis proposed, with efficacious conviction, the education of the heart because he knew that one reaches the whole person through his heart.

The heart, seat of love, but also of free and reasonable will, represents a person’s interiority. St. Francis sought this: a profound formation which was not simply training or a teaching which concerned only actions or exterior “correction”. For him, the “heart is the source of actions; these are the same type as the heart.”¹ By starting from the center, that is, from the heart of a person, one can obtain an integral formation, i.e., one that concerns the totality of the relationships that characterize it: with oneself, with others, with the social, cultural, and political world, and, on the spiritual level, with God. St. Francis was not in agreement with those who sought to educate people by concerning themselves only with exterior acts: “I never succeeded in approving the method of those who, wishing to reform man, begin from the outside, from their behaviors, their clothes, their hair; on the contrary, it seems to me that one must begin from the inside.”²

St. Francis is still today a font of inspiration in the formation of the heart, of the human and Christian nature of the young. He invites us to highlight true social relationships in our educative proposal, and, at the same time, the importance of “civility” and of good manners. We all know that this is a truly important topic in our day, in which individualism and the loss of Christian, social, and moral values risk tearing the family and social fabric. Today, therefore, more than ever, we must become consciously aware of our responsibility as Salesian educators.

¹ *Introduction à la Vie devote III*, Annecy, 1893, pp. 23

¹ / III, pp. 23

For us Salesian Cooperators, the commitment to be “the first and principal educators of our children, according to the pedagogy of goodness which is proper to the Preventive System, and to bring this wherever we find ourselves in our commitment to educate and to evangelize, so as to form “honest citizens and good Christians” is crystal clear in our *Project of Apostolic Life*. We must accompany, stand alongside, the young in order to share with them the joy and enthusiasm of living the values of truth, liberty, justice, and a sense of the common good and service to others with authenticity.³

Don Bosco welcomed and took for himself the spirit of St. Francis de Sales and made it his in his Salesian charism, to the point of saying that it was the most fitting charism for the times for education and for the instruction of the common people. His educational system, based on reason, religion, and loving kindness, seeks to win over the heart of the young. He was fully convinced that in every young person, even in the most unfortunate, there is a point that is accessible to good and that the first task of the educator is to find this point, this sensitive chord, and to profit from it.⁴ This needs to be done to help the young mature as Christians and citizens, with a project of Salesian and Christian life, so that they, too, might give their contribution to the construction of a society which is more human, Christian, and in solidarity.

Looking to St. Francis de Sales, and contemplating Don Bosco, and with a great love for the Word of God, we wish to make ours the wisdom that comes from on high. In our work with the young, in our family, in our Local Center, in our daily living, we wish to be builders of peace and of justice, leaving aside all that which might distance us from the Kingdom of God. We want to have the heart of the Good Shepherd who knows how to gather from every person the dream that God has for him and to help him realize it.

During this month we wish to find with our Salesian Saints what it means to EDUCATE THE HEART WITH LOVE: a love that unifies, that unites, that gathers, that comes together, that holds close, and that brings to unity.

Here are the 10 counsels, proposed by St. Francis de Sales, in order to acquire AMIABILITY:

I – Take Jesus as a model every day, thinking about His words: I am meek and humble of heart.

II – Always keep a serene face, even when alone and afflicted.

III – Every morning, before our good God, think what we can do to please others.

IV – Foresee the occasions in which you ought to hold back so as to be ready to do so.

V – Place yourself spiritually before others as if before a picture, choosing the best position so as to notice what is precious and not see the defects.

VI – Accustom yourself to polite vocabulary, remembering that for those who smile, everything smiles.

VII – Never make anything, not even your virtues, weigh on others, by being pompous or ostentatious, humiliating those who do not have those virtues; or, worse yet, rendering them irksome.

IX – Never correct anyone if you don't have the authority to do so and without adding a polite word.

X – Don't contradict anyone voluntarily; and, when this should happen, ask for pardon immediately.⁵

¹ Cf. *Progetto di Vita apostolica dei Salesiani Cooperatori*, Roma 2012, articoli dello Statuto 8 e 9.

¹ Cf. BRAIDO Pietro, *Prevenire, non reprimere. Il sistema educativo di Don Bosco*, Roma, LAS 2000.

¹ Cf. WIRTH Morand, *Francesco di Sales e l'Educazione, formazione umana e umanesimo integrale*, Roma, LAS 2006, PP. 571-593.