

Lasallian Reflection

FROM HERE TO ETERNITY

March 2019 – Br. George Van Grieken, FSC



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You have to suffer a constant martyrdom that is no less violent for the spirit than Saint Bartholomew's was for his body. You must, so to speak, tear off your own skin, which Saint Paul calls the old man, in order to be clothed with the Spirit of Jesus Christ, which is, according to the same Apostle, the new man. Let this, then, be your effort throughout your life, so that you may truly become disciples of Jesus Christ.

- St. John Baptist de La Salle¹

Lent is just around the corner, and the prospect of “mortification” and “fasting” and “discipline” is not on the top ten list of anyone I know. Most of us see this time of preparation for Easter as the “less fun” season of the liturgical year; no peppy Lent songs like before Christmas, and less decoration. But Lent has gotten a bad rep. As Anthony Bloom says so well, “Contrary to what many think or feel, Lent is a time of joy. It is a time when we come back to life. It is a time when we shake off what is bad and dead in us in order to become able to live, to live with all the vastness, all the depth, and all the intensity to which we are called. . . . This notion of joy that is connected with effort, with ascetical endeavor, with

¹ De La Salle, John Baptist, *Meditations by St. John Baptist de La Salle*, trans. Richard Arnandez, and Augustine Loes, eds. Augustine Loes and Francis Huether, (Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 1994), 293-4 (Med. 159.3)

strenuous effort may indeed seem strange, and yet it runs through the whole of our spiritual life, through the life of the Church and the life of the Gospel.”² If we are to be like Jesus, if we are to draw out the Reign of God in our midst, then we have to come to the realization that “The Kingdom of God is something to be conquered. It is not simply given to those who leisurely, lazily wait for it to come.”

So if we are to take Lent seriously, there is work involved. And as with all spiritual things in our lives, such work is a matter of desire, drive, and discipline. We all need a Lent coach!

What would a Lent coach do? The answer depends on the person receiving the coaching. The unique background, interests, talents, habits, and aspirations of each individual are brought into play for any coaching endeavor. But coaches also know that some general things are true pretty much all of the time: i.e., you have to motivate people, you have to show people how to do things right, and you have to get people to practice the basics over and over and over again. The funny thing is that athletes of all stripes are happy to make this effort for sports, but few are willing to make this effort for their spiritual lives. Why is that? And what would it look like if you actually followed the very best Lent coach this year?

John Baptist de La Salle, our Lasallian coach, “puts the emphasis on fidelity to the duties of state, observance of the daily spiritual exercises, attention to little things, in a word, on the mortification of the spirit and mind. . . . De La Salle urges his disciples to accept, and even love, the sufferings of the day in imitation of their teacher, Jesus Christ, and in living the Pascal Mystery, or simply as a condition of the Christian life.”³ He is pointing the way to our very best coach for the Lenten season. Can you guess?

That very best Lent coach is Jesus himself; what he says in the readings during Lent, what he shows us in his actions during Lent, and what he invites us to enter into during the liturgies of Holy Week. Here is the best coach for our spiritual lives. All we have to do is take his coaching seriously: pay attention to how he motivates us, learn how to do things right, and practice the basics over and over and over again.

What would the result look like? Here is one example: “How often does someone cry for help and we understand nothing? How often has our heart been stirred and our mind begun to understand, but we were not used to compelling ourselves, and our will wavered, and wavers too long, until it is too late. . . . Let us learn first of all to be grateful that God gives us the possibility to do right, instead of preening ourselves and being proud of the fact that for once we have done what should be natural to us always. And then gradually we may . . . learn to be humble in a way in which no one knows, not declaring that we are unworthy, but in adoration of God’s greatness, in veneration of other people, in the readiness to forget ourselves completely for the sake of God, for the sake of any person who meets us and challenges us to be compassionate, to be loving, to be understanding.”⁴

Lent is an invitation to follow our coach from here to eternity.

² Bloom, Anthony - http://mitras.ru/eng/eng_19.htm

³ Rodrigue, Jean-Guy – Introduction to the *Meditations*, op. cit., 13.

⁴ Bloom, Anthony - http://www.mitras.ru/eng/eng_155.htm