



# DE SALES AND MERMIER RESOURCE AND ANIMATION CENTRE

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FR. PETER MARY MERMIER

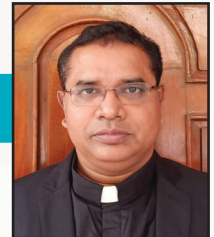
NOVENA IN PREPARATION  
FOR THE FOUNDER'S DAY

FIRST WEBINAR TALK

SALESIAN THOUGHT



## Editorial



*Dear Friends in Jesus Christ,*

*Greetings from DSM Resource and Animation Centre, Hyderabad.*

Every year as the month of September comes, we, the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales are reminded of two important days – 15th and 30th September. On 15th September, we celebrate the solemnity of the Mother of Sorrows, our Patroness and on 30th of the same month, we commemorate the Founder's Day as we mark the passage of Fr. Peter Mermier from this world to the next in heaven. According to our Constitutions, we should celebrate these days of the Mother of Sorrows, our Patroness and of the Founder with special preparations (No. 108) and appropriate devotional practices like Novena and solemn liturgical celebrations with all earnestness and love (General Directory, No. 80/iii).

### 1. Solemnity of the Mother of Sorrows

Our Blessed Mother Mary is known to us by so many different names such as Our Lady of Immaculate Conception, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Our Lady of Good Health, Our lady of Lourdes, Our Lady of Fatima and so on. But our Founder had chosen Mary, the Mother of Sorrows as the Patroness of the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales, that is Mary sitting at the foot of the Cross with the lifeless body of her son Jesus Christ. The most eminent sculptor Michelangelo, in his masterpiece beautifully depicts the 6th sorrow out of the seven which we meditate through the special Rosary of the Seven Dolors.

**Very Rev. Fr. Yves Carron**, our Assistant General, rightly points that Fr. Peter Mermier was genuinely sensitive to other situations through which we see the closeness of Mother Mary with the life of her Divine Son.

Therefore, I am sure that he had special reasons for choosing this image of Mary as our Patroness. Now 'Mother of Compassion' is

more used in the place of the 'Mother of Sorrows', since the former sounds more positive and appealing than the latter, especially in the Western world. However, the use of the title 'Mother of Compassion' in the place of 'Mother of Sorrows' would be fine if we understand clearly the meaning of the word 'Compassion' from its Latin word-root: cum-passion or compassion, which means to suffer together with). Hence, compassion should not be limited to the understanding merely as mercy, sympathy, pity or empathy. In English, the word 'compassion' means "to suffer together". And it is further defined as "the feeling that arises when you are confronted with another's suffering and feel motivated to relieve that suffering". In that sense, Mary who suffered together with Jesus on the Mount of Calvary is truly the Mother of Sorrows or Mother of Compassion.

While finalizing the draft of the revised Constitutions, **Rev. Fr. Antony Mookenthottam** of happy memory, had clarified at the request of the then Superior General, Rev. Fr. Agnelo Fernandes thus: *"The study on the origins of devotion to the Mother of Sorrows in our Congregation has revealed that Fr. Mermier at least from 1825 onwards used the title Our Lady of Compassion. He preached on the Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin also as Mother of Sorrows, our Model and Patroness of repentance. So, the General Council felt that we should combine both titles. Our Lady of Compassion: Mother of Sorrows and celebrate the solemnity together with the Church on 15th September as Fr. Mermier our Founder used to do. It is also an occasion for us to renew the spirit of compassion in us, to encourage ourselves and all (to turn away from sin or) to a constant conversion of heart and growth in love as we follow the example of Fr. Mermier."*

**Rev. Fr. Agnelo Fernandes** explains: "Mother of Sorrows indicates Mary sharing in the redemptive sufferings of Jesus and also those of her earthly children. Whereas compassion indicates the mission of one who suffers with or like Christ i.e. being engaged in compassionate understanding and actions that bring forth life.

**Very Rev. Fr. Abraham Vettuvellil**, our Superior General, points that "the title Mother of Sorrows stands more for the experience of Mother Mary sharing in the sufferings of her Son as well as in that of her earthly children and teaches us how to face sufferings and pain. Whereas, the title Mother of Compassion focuses our attention on how, having shared in the sufferings of her Son, Mary reaches out to others in compassion and compassionate service." In his personal opinion, "Mary in herself is a Mother of Sorrows and for us and with us, she is a Mother of compassion". And the Catholic Church celebrates only the feast of the Mother of Sorrows and there is no special feast of the Mother of Compassion. Accordingly, I can assure that the title the 'Mother of Compassion' is synonymous with the 'Mother of Sorrows.

Obviously, Our Founder, Servant of God Fr. Peter Mermier firmly wished that the Mother of Sorrows should be our Patroness for the following reasons:

- a) First, "to be closer to the Crucified Christ, through a life of complete surrender and total dedication to the Father's will and to be more ready to suffer the consequences of standing for the values of the Kingdom of love, justice, peace and reconciliation". (Ref: MSFS Constitutions, No. 10)
- b) Our Blessed Mother, "through her closeness to Christ and by her perfect discipleship she becomes the model for our closeness to Christ and our discipleship". (Ref: MSFS Constitutions, No. 10)

- c) To constantly remind us to be compassionate with others to the extent that our commitment to Christ and His Kingdom finds expression in our apostolic commitment even at the cost of our own lives
- d) To identify ourselves with the sufferings humanity as we realize that God suffers in those humans who suffer
- e) To urge us to proclaim the Good news of liberation and wholeness at all times and in all places
- f) To remind us of the daily challenges of our missionary commitment made to the Lord
- g) To grow in compassion and preferential love for the poor and marginalized

We are duty bound to live personally as well as to promote the devotion to the Mother of Sorrows in our communities, missions, parishes and formation houses.

- (i) Celebrate once in a month the Mass in honour of the Mother of Sorrows
- (ii) Recite the Rosary of the Seven Dolours / Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary
- (iii) Pray the Novena before the annual feast of the Mother of Sorrows

## 2. Founder's Day

Both the MSFS Constitutions and the General Directory insist on the need to celebrate the Founder's Day in the most fitting manner.

- a) The MSFS Constitutions No. 108, clearly states: On 30th September, the day of his death, we celebrate the memory of our beloved Founder, Servant of God Father Peter Mermier.
- b) The General Directory No. 80/ ivpoints: A preparation lasting nine days is to be made in order to highlight the solemnity of the Founder's Day on the 30th September every year. Our deep love for our Founder and our Congregation should mark these days. A votive Mass in honour of St. Francis de Sales is to be celebrated on the Founder's Day.
- c) It is highly recommended that we devote some quality time in these special days of the Novena and on the Founder's Day itself to read and reflect on the writings of Fr. Peter Mary Mermier.
- d) Marking our love for our Founder and the Congregation, a votive Mass in honour of St. Francis de Sales is to be celebrated on the Founder's Day.

My dear friends, in this latest issue of the DSM Resource and Animation Centre, I wished to underline the significance of 15th and 30th September. At the same time, I tried to clarify and certain doubts and questions regarding these two important occasions. I firmly hope that this editorial would enlighten us little more on the significance of these two occasions in our life as the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales in particular and also others with whom we work and collaborate at large. Let us mark these two important dates of our Congregation in the month of September with fitting spiritual and liturgical celebrations in all our Communities, Parishes and mission centres.

**HAPPY FEAST!**

**LIVE JESUS!**

**HAPPY FOUNDER'S DAY!**



**Fr. B. Suresh Babu MSFS**

# WEBINAR

DE SALES and MERMIER (DSM) SPIRITUAL INSIGHTS

15<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2020

FEAST OF THE MOTHER OF SORROWS



**VERY REV. FR. YVES CARRON** MSFS  
ASSISTANT GENERAL

TOPIC

**SIGNIFICANCE OF THE  
FEAST OF THE MOTHER OF SORROWS FOR MSFS**

# WEBINAR

DE SALES and MERMIER (DSM) SPIRITUAL INSIGHTS

30<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2020

**FOUNDER'S DAY**

**REV. FR. JOHNSON KALLIDUKIL** MSFS  
GENERAL COUNCILOR & GENERAL SECRETARY FOR MISSION



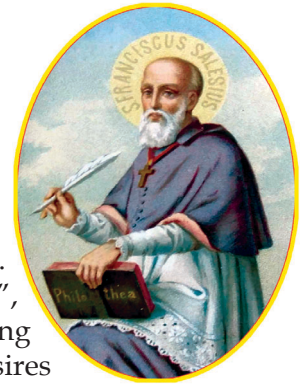
TOPIC

**MISSIONARY ZEAL OF FR. PETER MERMIER:  
I WANT MISSIONS**



# SPIRITUALITY OF THE HEART

*Blessed is the heart that loves God with no other pleasure than that of pleasing God ! -St. Francis de Sales*



## 1. Introduction

The Spirituality of St. Francis de Sales has undoubtedly made a great impact on the spiritual tradition of the Catholic Church. Today, it is also popularly known as the “Spirituality of the Heart”, since it deals principally with the human heart which, according to St. Francis de Sales, is the seat of human emotions and desires especially love for the Divine Majesty. And so, he says: “Blessed are those whose hearts are ever open to God’s inspiration; they will never lack what they need to live good holy lives, or to perform properly the duties of their state.” He insists therefore to give to God our hearts first and follow Him in all that He commands, counsels unconditionally.

## 2. Heart is the Source of Love

St. Francis de Sales writes in his spiritual classic Treatise on the Love of God: “The love we have for God takes its origin from the first satisfaction which our heart experiences. As soon as it becomes aware of divine goodness, it begins to tend towards it.” According to him, when the human heart loves God, it rejoices in every delight that comes out of His love. For, there is nothing, which urges the human heart so much as love itself. Indeed, if anyone knows to be loved, he or she is also urged to return love. So too, every heart which finds its delight in God responds positively to reciprocate the same to God.

In St. Francis de Sales’ opinion, “whoever wins a man’s heart has won the whole man” (ITDL, Part III, Ch 23), because human heart is, indeed, equivalent of the person and not just the will or intellect. He perceives the heart as the centre of cognition, emotion, love, and conviction. Therefore, he insists that since the heart is the source of love, as long as love flows from the heart it will never be unreasonable. If a person is close to God, all his good actions belong to God. So too, if one’s heart is close to the heart of God, then all that comes from it comes from God. Hence, our Beloved Patron writes thus: “Blessed is the heart that loves God with no other pleasure than that of pleasing God!” (TLG, IX, Ch.11)

## 3. God Alone can Satisfy Our Heart’s Desires

St. Francis de Sales teaches: “When the human heart loves God, it enjoys the delight of this love. It has an unparalleled satisfaction in loving an object so lovable.” (TLG, IX, Ch.9) In fact, first we must deeply listen to our heart and do accordingly. It is important to ask ourselves regularly as part of review of life these questions: Where is my heart? What are its attachments? Indeed, it is said that spirituality is about finding our restfulness in God alone, since He alone can satisfy our hearts desires. Every human soul has in it a deep longing to belong to God. St. Augustine cried out: “My heart is restless until it rests in you, O God.” St. Francis de Sales too underlines the fact that human soul can find the spiritual solitude only when they find their solace in God.

#### **4. One who loves God submits freely to the Will of God**

If one lacks these affections and emotions, then we can conclude that there is no love itself. One who loves God from the depths of his or her heart submits to the will of God utterly whatsoever might be its effects apparently. One who loves God genuinely cannot remain unaffected and unmoved but always aims at fulfilling all that proceeds from the permissive will of God. I quote our Saint: "Just as one who is in a ship lets himself move according to the movement of the vessel in which he is, so also the heart that is embarked in the permissive will of God should have no other will than that of allowing itself to be led by God's will." (TLG IX, Ch.13)

#### **5. God Knows Our Hearts**

In his Introduction to the Devout Life, St. Francis de Sales insists that as the birds have nests in the trees and deers have their bushes to seek shelter, our hearts must find refuge in the Lord in order to refresh ourselves in the midst of daily occupations. Human beings see only the external appearances, but God always sees the heart of the human person. Hence, God knows us in every detail, what we are, what are our thoughts, our inner attitudes, our heart's desires and intentions. Every human person has to be true to one's heart and should avoid all sorts of duplicity and hypocrisy. It is highly important to be authentic in our relationship with God and one another.

St. Francis de Sales also believes that the human heart can remain all by itself in the presence of God alone. He insists that prayer, which is a powerful means of expressing our love for God, is nothing but a heart-to-heart conversation since God, although omnipresent, is particularly present in our spirit. In and through prayer, we experience the gratifying love of God. The heart of living Jesus is to be encountered on the cross.

#### **6. Spirituality Grows Through Relationships**

St. Francis de Sales was of the firm opinion that the heart-centre of Christian faith existed in relationships, both with God and human beings. All of us are called first to love God above all things and with all our heart and with all our strength. Then we are also obliged to love other human beings. St. Francis de Sales points: "Nothing compels the human heart so much as love. If one knows to be loved, by whomsoever it is, one is urged to return love" (TLG VII, Ch. 8) In his opinion, "The heart which is taken up by delight in God cannot prevent itself from giving reciprocally to God another delight." (TLG VII, Ch. 8) The human relationships are very much part of the way God works in human hearts. For us who live in the world with its cares and worries, unlike the monks, who took flight from the world, all relationships are part of the journey to God. This important aspect of the spirituality of the heart is primarily dealt in his works especially Introduction to the Devout Life, and Letters of Spiritual Direction.

Indeed, the Spirituality of St. Francis de Sales, which is popularly known as the spirituality of the heart, calls us to love God wholeheartedly and with single-minded devotion with the sole aim of pleasing God who first loved us and gave His own on Jesus Christ to us. In brief, it reminds us to live a spirituality of love, integrity and virtue, is as relevant in our times as in the time of St. Francis de Sales.

**- Fr. BAVIRI SURESH BABU MSFS**

## FR. PETER MARY MERMIER

### [1790 – 1862]



**Mermier - the CHILD - His home and upbringing :** Peter Mary MERMIER was born on 28th. August 1790 at Vouvray, in the parish of Chaumont belonging to the district of Frangy, Savoy.

**His Parents :** The parents of Fr. Mermier, because of their land- owning and lineage enjoyed a high social-standing in the area. Peter Mary was one of two sons (his sibling was Louis). From his farther he inherited the qualities of a peasant, namely, good sense, practical mind, prudent audacity, tenacious and calm perseverance.

His Mother, Antoinette BASTIAN, was born into a family blessed with an ancestry of eminent lawyers and illustrious clerics, was brought up in the Boarding of the Visitation Monastery of Annecy, where she received an excellent Salesian education.

Already in 1793 the ‘Reign of Terror’ unleashed on Savoy by the protagonists of the French Revolution. The infant eyes of Peter Mary, barely four years of age, witnessed the demolition of the Church, the village presbytery deserted and the belfry destroyed. His ears heard the dreadful accounts of whispered by people huddled in his house whispers about persecution, imprisonment and exile of priests. These nightmares registered in his infancy could be gradually calmed only by the tenderness of his mother.

**QUOTES:** “Irepentfornothavingwrittenanythingaboutmymother. My God, how much I owe her. No, no, she was not an ordinary women” . And again : “I owe my *vocation* to the holiness of my mother.”

**The Mermier ‘Home’ :** God had the pride of place in the Mermier- home. Far from succumbing to the trials and misfortunes of the time, Mermier’s God-fearing and resolute parents provided shelter in their home for the priest being tracked down because of their loyalty to the Church, by the revolutionaries. On Sundays, when these priests celebrated Holy Mass in the cellar, the child Mermier was always, in admiration, beside his mother. The home also served as a classroom for the children of the neighbourhood that had their school shut down after the French invasion. With the restoration of peace in Savoy in 1800, the clergy resumed their Ministry, to the best of their ability and with meagre resources, in the parishes and schools.

**Mermier – his Spiritual and Secular Education [1801 – 1809] :** Thus, after his initial schooling under his mother in the company of children of the neighbourhood, Peter Mermier was able to continue his formal education, initially at the presbyterial college of Villy-le-Bouveret (1801) and then at the college of Sallanches housed at the capuchin convent (1802) that was subsequently shifted to the Carthusian monastery Melan. Although his father’s desire was that his son continue the family tradition as an industrious peasant, his mother had other plans for him. Divine Providence prevailed ! She was able to win over her husband.

**QUOTE :** “Sallanches and Melan were the first witnesses and the first admirers of the tender piety and the recollected penitential life of Fr. Mermier. His fellow-students were

unanimous in representing him to us as having been a model of virtue." ... adding "In him was found none of those talents which compel admiration, placing those in possession of it high above their rivals. But he had an upright spirit and a sound judgement. He was also studious, reflective, attentive to the lessons of his teachers, he was a good student who did well in class." (Fr. Gaiddon, in Jean Rey, p. 9)

**Mermier – Seminary Studies and Ecclesiastical Formation [1809 – 1813]** : His studies, the example and guidance of his mother and teachers – priests and professors – led him to the seminary where he was ordained priest in 1813.

After the death of his mother in February 1819, he felt strongly attracted towards a more complete detachment. He therefore sought to become a Jesuit. His spiritual director, **Fr. Godinot** told him : "To accept or refuse the candidates who present themselves is my obligation, but to decide for them when they themselves have not resolved is what I am not able to do". "God can call us not only to one state, but to various functions within that state. I think that without having indications of God's will we cannot go away from one path and throw ourselves into another perilous and unknown one. For your project, a simple desire is not a sufficient manifestation of the will of God" ... "I commend your good resolution ... but ;if Providence does not show you clearly that you should go elsewhere, I think you are where you ought to be" = counsel of **Fr. DesJacques**.

**Mermier – the PASTOR - His Ministry and Flock : Assistant Parish Priest, at Magland [1813 – 1816]** : Revealed in catechism classes during the day and 'indefatigable worker' who devoted much of the night to person theological study.

**Professor and Warden [1816 – 1819]** : Professor at the college of Melan, he was also Prefect of Discipline and Warden (and part- time assistant, during week-ends at Samoens). Among his students were Francis JACCARD (who suffered martyrdom in China) and Polycarp VOISIN (who served for forty years in Paris, as Procurator for the Missions, after serving as missionary in China for ten years).

**Parish Priest of Chatelard [1819 – 1822]** : While accepting the appointment, Fr. Mermier did not consent to his *installation* as he did not want to *settle down* in a parish. Yet he set to work with ardour to counter the 'spirit of ignorance, licentiousness and corruption' that was rampant among the parishioners in the aftermath of the French Revolution. This was a serious problem that preoccupies Fr. Mermier ...It is at this stage that he encountered Fr. *Joseph Marie FAVRE*, a renowned preacher and true fellow pastor of the diocese. This encounter was to change the course of his life.

He seeks the assistance of Fr. Josph-Marie FAVRE, The two were convinced of the fact : that religious ignorance and indifference in matters of religion were responsible for the decadence of Catholicism in their revered homeland. The conclusion of their exchanges is that the pastoral mission is the indispensable means of announcing the Word of God to those who have never heard it or those who have not sufficiently grasped it. This is the only means of evangelisation, as we would call it today.

In 1821, along with Fr. J-M Favre he undertook the parish mission : 'praying, preaching and inviting the people to attend the spiritual exercises'. The expected change did not take



place. Rather than give up, the two, then and there set out to pray for and do penance at the Carthusian Monastery. Realizing that the reason for the absence of the duo was because of their indifference, the parishioners “clamoured for their return” to continue the mission, which bore abundant fruit.

Fr. Mermier devoted his time to preaching missions in the different parishes of the diocese. For Fr. Favre, mission preaching would only be effective if the priest had the necessary training. Accordingly, the process must begin with the reform of the Minor and Major Seminary. In his ministry, he was quite successful but failed to get collaborators. He was considered impetuous, lacking leadership skills. Although he was able to motivate many priests to conduct missions in the parishes in the dioceses of Chambéry, Moutiers, St-Jean de Maurienne), he was impatient and not prepared to delay (as required by the bishop) the constitution of a team of preachers. For him the existing religious congregations did not respond to the needs of the times. Accordingly, he drew up Constitutions for a new “Congregation of the Oblates of SFS – for which he hoped to recruit members from all the dioceses of Savoy and the neighbouring countries. This was not to be.

He parted ways with Mermier, who focused initially on the diocese of Annecy and patiently abided by the directives of the Bishop. Their friendship, however continued. He offered pertinent critical advice (cf. p.38-41). [The MSFS archives has 43 letters addressed by him to Mermier between 1823 and 1831; the latter’s replies to him unfortunately have disappeared]

**Spiritual Director of Seminarians** (1822- ) : In 1822, with the restoration of the diocese of Annecy, (two ‘missioners’ had to part way) Fr. Mermier was appointed spiritual director of the Major Seminary in Annecy, and, Fr. Favre, was relieved of his teaching assignment at the college and was appointed full-time mission preacher in the diocese of Chambéry. But this restricted avenue of mission preaching satisfied neither the *zeal* of Fr. Mermier nor the *ardour* of Fr. Favre. Both, in their own way, relentlessly pursued their apostolate. He applied himself, besides preaching missions, to preparing for his seminarists a Rule of Life, Meditation points, Recollection and Retreat notes.

**MISSION PREACHER:** The experience gained as Pastor in Chatelard impressed on Fr. Mermier that for lasting effect, the parish missions need to have a multi-pronged approach : catechism of the children, focus on the youth, faith formation of the adults that take the form of family visits, counselling and redressal of grievances, ... For this Sunday sermons were not enough, what was necessary was necessary was the concerted and sustained effort of a band of missioners.

For this there is need to organize the exercises of the Mission (sermons, devotions, ritual, etc) according a well-prepared corpus that would respond to the successive stages of conversion of the faithful (reflection, meditation, examination of conscience, reconciliation. The mission should surpass the boundaries of individual parishes. He set to work towards realizing this **vision**. This was not to happen in a hurry.

**- Rev. Fr. Noel Rebello MSFS**

## NOVENA IN PREPARATION FOR THE FOUNDER'S DAY

### DAY ONE - FORMING ONESELF IN HOLINESS

Mt 5:48 : "Be holy as your Heavenly Father is Holy".

Jn. 10/10 : "I came that they may have life and live it to the full."

1 Thes 4: 3 : "What God wants is for you all to be holy".

#### Reflections from the Life & Works of SFS :

St. Francis de Sales (SFS) terms the pursuit of Holiness, as *DEVOTION*, which he defines thus: "In so far as divine love enriches us it is called grace, which makes us pleasing to God. In so far as it gives us the strength to do good, it is called charity. But when it grows to such a degree of perfection that it makes us not only to do good but rather moves us to do it carefully, frequently, and promptly, it is called *devotion*." ... "In conclusion, charity and devotion are not more different from each other than the flame from the fire, all the more so because charity is a spiritual fire which when it burns with intense flames is called devotion. In fact, devotion adds to the fire of charity only the flame which makes charity prompt, active and diligent not only to keep God's commandments but also to put into practice his counsels and inspirations. [III,15,16; IDL, Pt I, ch. 1, pg. 36, 37]

"Sugar sweetens fruits that are not quite ripe and puts right anything unpleasant or harmful in those that are fully ripe. Indeed, devotion is the true spiritual sugar, removing unpleasantness from mortifications, ... Devotion takes away discontent from the poor and anxiety from the rich, despair from the oppressed and arrogance from the powerful, sadness from the lonely, ... [III,18; IDL, Pt I, ch. 2, pg. 36]

We are mistaken if we presume that perfection is an art; that we discover its magic formula, we could attain perfection instantly and without much effort. Indeed, the secret of perfection lies the practice the love of God simply yet assiduously, intent on union with the Beloved". [VI, 151-152, Conf. 18, SC II, p. 29]

There is nothing so blessed as a devout religious, nothing so miserable as a religious without devotion. [Mackey IV. p. 33]

#### Reflections from the Life & Writings of PMM:

Many forget their sanctification, their salvation, their own perfection, and their excuse is that they are busy with the salvation of others, with works of zeal. What madness! As if we are indispensable, as if the Almighty cannot realize His plans without us. Besides, what good can we do for others when we are good-for-nothing ourselves. (Let to Fr.FrancisSermet, 6-07-1849)

If we desire to ignite the fire of God's love in the hearts of others, we need to be burning with divine ardour ourselves. If we wish that sinners weep over their sins, we ought to weep over ourselves and over the sins of others. It is only zeal for one's own sanctification that can lead to zeal towards others. [Fr. J. LAVOREL, Kamptee, 28-07-1852]

May God's name be made holy, may his kingdom come and not ours, may his will be done, and not ours. Everything else is temptation, sin and unhappiness". [Let to Fr. Dupont, 24-03-1852]

## DAY TWO - PRAYING CONTINUALLY

- Mt. 7:7 : "Ask, and it will be given to you seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ... If you, then, who are evil know, how to give your children what is good, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"
- Mt. 26:40-41 : "Then Jesus returned to the disciples and found them sleeping. "Were you not able to keep watch with Me for one hour?" He asked Peter. "Watch and pray so that you will not enter into temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak.""
- Jn. 15:16 : "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you."

### Reflections from the Life & Works of SFS:

For SFS: "*Prayer* is the opening of our understanding to God's brightness and light and exposing our will to the warmth of his love. ... In prayer, God provides us with His shower of blessings: its **waters** quench the heart's thirst for love, wash away imperfections, and make the plants of our good desires blossom and bear colourful flowers." [IDL II, ch.1, pg. 85];

*Prayer* is the means by which we ascend to God; sacraments are the channels by which God descends to us.[VI, 337-339, Conf. 18, SC II, p.1]

Thinking, study, meditation, contemplation are all similar acts. Thinking that is an act of the mind may be compared to the activity of flies; study to the work of drones; meditation to that of bees; contemplation to the flight of the queen bee. The first two activities are of no great consequence. The third and fourth are acts of prayer. The objective of prayer is union with God. God has no need of our prayers. We need prayer, however, to transform our soul. Our prayer will continue even in heaven. [VIII,166-168,Serm. 105]

"That prayer is perfect when it involves the tongue, the mind, the life, the entire person himself" [VIII, 407,Serm. 156]

As Bread (*rice, rotis*) accompanies every dish, so does the "bread of heaven" accompany every prayer and action[IDL, II, ch.1, 86]

I strongly recommend to your *prayer of the mind and of the heart*, and especially that based on the life and passion of our Lord. By looking at him often in meditation, your whole being will be filled with him... You will learn his *attitudes* and model your actions on his. [IDL II, ch.1, pg.85]

### Reflections from the Life & Writings of PMM:

Our first duty is to be formed in *piety* by means of the faithful observance of our spiritual exercises: retreats, meditations, examination of conscience, spiritual reading, and, habitual recollection and purity of conscience. These should not be compromised by a multiplicity of activities that we needlessly undertake. St. Bernard calls them 'cursed', because they become an obstacle to the first duty prescribed to us. A well-ordered charity places on us the obligation to take care of our soul before everything else: "what does it profit a man, if

he gains the whole world, ..." "In vain does the hungry child suck the milk-less breast of a languid mother for sustenance. (Let to Fr. Francis Decompoix, Vizag, 3-06-1850)

**Dangers of Lukewarmness:** After the exercises of a well-made retreat are brought to a close, the subjects resume their ordinary course. We neglect the daily exercises; we fall into routine and dissipation. Oh, what a misery, what an abuse of grace! Living in this manner, how can one gain the apostolic spirit which is the spirit of zeal, of fervour? How to create this total renewal, a New man who is created in justice and holiness of truth. How to deepen (the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ) with life almost sensual where the body weighs down the soul? ... The knowledge of Jesus Christ is essentially practical, imitation not in words but in the power of God. (I Cor. 4/20) [Document : dispatched on 25-06-1848]

"The spiritual exercises and especially the examination of conscience and meditation, are really our two eyes, two arms, two feet. They are like the compass of our external operations; they are the family sanctuary where God speaks to the heart the secret language which is not heard elsewhere. "It is there that the heart feels the effects of the promise which Our Lord makes in these words of the Prophet: "I will lead the soul to the secret place and there speak to her heart". [let to Sr. Jeanne Grandchamp, 29-12-1857]

### DAY THREE - IMITATING ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

1 Cor 11: 1 : "Take me for your model, as I take Christ".

Jn. 13: 13-17 : "You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do."

Lk. 6: 38b-40 : "For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you. And he told them a parable: 'Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit? No disciple is superior to the teacher, but when fully trained, every disciple will be like his teacher'".

#### Personal Testimony of SFS and Eulogy of his Devotees:

I desire to possess just a few things; what I cherish, however, I do so for love of God. I have almost no desires; but if I were to be born again, I would not have any or I would not want to have any at all. If God came to me and favoured me with the intimate feeling of His presence, I would go to him and cherish his graces. If, however, it was His will not to come to me, I would stay where I am and not seek to go towards Him – content with the simple understanding that faith offers me". [VI, Conf. XXI, 383, SC II, p.46]

All I seek is the glory of God. Indeed, if I should find anything to the contrary, I would forthwith banish it from my heart. XIII, 373-377, Let. 436, to Mme Chantal, Rumilly 7/3/08]

There is a small miracle that God works every evening when I retire I can neither move my body nor my mind, I am so tired everywhere; and in the morning I am as lively as ever. [XIII, 221-222, Let. 365, to Mme. Chantal, Bonneville 2/10/06]

**St. John Bosco:** "Oh, the sweetness and charity of St. Francis de Sales! Guide me in everything".



## Reflections from the Life & Writings of PMM :

The solemn approval of our Congregation which confirms our name as the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales, places on us a stricter obligation to learn about him, to be filled with his spirit, to acquire and to imitate his virtues. (Let to Cardinal Gabriele Della GengaSermattei. Rome. 29-05-1857)

May the members of our Congregation obtain from the perfect model, the Holy Apostle of the Chablais, a little of that zeal and gentleness which will make us die to ourselves in order to live only for God and for the welfare of the people, like other St. Francis de Sales. [Circular to confrères in India, 17-04-1852]

I want to have a little of the patience and the gentleness of St. Francis de Sales. I wish them for You and earnestly ask our Holy Patron to inspire you with them, to obtain them for you so that we may become like him, worthy servants of Jesus Christ. (*Letter to Fr.Cheminal, Jan. 29, 1843*)

## DAY FOUR - LIVING OUR CONSTITUTIONS

Jn. 1: 1; 17: 3 : “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” ... “And this is eternal life that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent”

Mt. 4: 4 : “Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”

Jn. 8: 31-32 : “To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

## Reflections from the Life & Works of SFS:

Just as to propel a boat each rower needs to work according to a set pattern, rhythmically, so also novices should be well trained and formed in the authentic charism of the congregation so that they learn to live in the right spirit. [VI,236, Conf. 13, SC II, p. 90]

The daughters of the Visitation have very few rules concerning external behaviour, few exterior mortifications, few ceremonies, and a short community prayer. Therefore, they are expected to apply themselves to these minimum obligations, willingly and with much love. Ensure therefore that your exterior actions radiate your inner disposition, and, that the interior is strengthened by externals; just as fire produces ashes and ashes protect the fire. [VI,13, conf. 1, SC I, 162]

Let Martha remain active in her endeavours; but she should not interfere with Mary. Let Mary pursue her contemplation; but she should not despise Martha. Remember, the Lord will always take the side of the underdog. [VI,17, conf. 1, SC I, 166]

## Reflections from the Life & Writings of PMM:

The spirit in which Fr. Mermier sought the approbation of the Holy See for the Congregation: “I acknowledge that I possess a mediocre intelligence and knowledge. I am without virtue and merit, yet it has pleased divine Wisdom and my superiors, to assign me to the Missions; although fully unworthy, I have thought of the Rules and Constitutions without which there can neither be order nor sanctification of the Missionaries, or a fruitful work”. [cf.

Jean REY, "Fr. Peter Mermier", 1960, p. 70] The RULE is for us the cream of the Gospel; the key of Paradise. [let to Fr. Dupont, Yanam, June 1849]

"During these four months, we observed our Rules better than ever, like in a Novitiate. We made our Annual Retreat from 13<sup>th</sup>. to 21<sup>st</sup>. November. It showed us the way to be followed: self-abnegation ... 'If anyone wishes to be my disciple ...' [Let. of Fr. Jacques Martin, to Fr. Mermier, 9<sup>th</sup>. January 1846]

During the retreat I gave recently to our confreres, I spent two Exercises daily to explain the Rules. They seemed to understand. I hope we shall become more regular in the observance of the Rules, otherwise, my poor conscience would not be at peace. Yes, after the vows, the essential for men devoted to the Apostolate is the exercise of abnegation, as it is mentioned in the Rules. ... In spite of some remarks, I found much good-will in our dear confreres, whose only defect is that they have not received sufficient formation. [Let to Bishop Neyret, 30-06-1849]

## DAY FIVE - BECOMING DEDICATED MISSIONARIES

Mk. 3 : 14 : So they came to him and he appointed twelve; they were to be his companions and to be sent out to preach, with power to cast out devils.

Jn. 15: 14-16 : "You are my friends, if you do what I command you, ... You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last,"

1 Cor 9: 16 : Not that I boast of preaching the gospel, since it is a duty which has been laid on me; I should be punished if I did not preach it.

### Reflections from the Life & Works of SFS:

Many are **called** by God to enter religious life; however, only a few persevere in their vocation... There are others who were not really called; but because they came, they were **chosen**, and their vocation rendered pleasing and acceptable to God. There are yet others who are driven by the boredom and dissatisfaction they experience in the world, enter religious life. Even these are **called** and **chosen**... God utilizes various means to draw men and women to His service. The vocation of some is the result of preaching: the words of the preacher are the seeds sown in the receptive heart of the listener... Others are touched by the reading of good books, or by hearing the holy words of the Gospel being proclaimed... Yet others are led to despise the world and embrace religious life as a result of sufferings that struck them and misfortunes they experienced... Very often such persons have rendered significant service to God and have grown to become great saints – even greater – than those who may have been drawn to religious life through regular motives. [VI,316-7, footnote (o), Conf. 17, SC II, p. 52-53]

How mysterious and inscrutable are the ways of God!!! Some people disgusted with the world enter and faithfully persevere in the religious life they have embraced; while others who respond faithfully to a call to join the convent, and begin with great fervour, end up disastrously and abandon everything. [VI, 311- 323, *passim*, Conf. 17, SC II, p.48, 52-53, 60]

### Reflections from the Life & Writings of PMM:

Usually the Missionaries are looked upon as extraordinary people destined to combat the greatest disorders, to correct the greatest abuses and to remedy the greatest evils. This

opinion of the people should be fostered and even increased, if possible. For this, it is necessary to have well-prepared men, men well exercised for a long time and men well tested from all angles. To have such men, thus chosen, and well prepared a Congregation is necessary. [Mermier, *Memoirs* p. 18]

We now have thirteen missionaries, and four more are expected. I foresee however, that it will be difficult to choose *four* missionaries out of that number to be sent to India, since extraordinary vocations are rare. I need the spirit of discernment to make the right choice. We are praying. Pray with us and for us. [let to J-M. Tissot, 12-09-1947]

Without self-knowledge (of one's defects and weaknesses), a missionary is like a reed shaken by the wind, a tower built on shifting sand. The totality of qualities which make a Missionary, though necessary, is rarely found blended together in one person. They need to be nurtured and imbibed through prayer and self-discipline. I am convinced more than ever of the need to have missionaries who are filled with the Spirit of God, who pray, who study, who mortify themselves, who love their brethren. [MERMIER, Personal Diary when in Rome (1842-43), quoted in Moget, op. cit, p. 43]

## DAY SIX - PRACTICING LITTLE VIRTUES

Mt. 10: 42 : "Anyone who gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple, then I tell you solemnly, he will most certainly not lose his reward."

Mt. 11: 28, 29 : "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

James 1: 22 : "Do not deceive yourselves by just listening to His Word; instead, put it into practice" (Jam.1,22)

### Reflections from the Life & Works of SFS:

God has endowed us with two kinds of qualities: one that leads us to humble ourselves and the other that leads us to glorify God. Thus, while we must acknowledge our lowliness and misery, we should also recognize the goodness and dignity that God has endowed us with, which leads us to union with Him in whom lies our true and eternal happiness. [VI,76, Conf. 5, SC I, pp. 78-79]

I would rather that you possess more of humility and less of other virtues, than that you have more of other virtues and be wanting in humility. [VI,130, Conf. 8, SC I, p. 59]

Among the beggars, the one whose misery is most evident and appalling the receives more sympathy and alms. So, it is with the mercy of God – showered on the most humble. ... Such humility will also serve to preserve chastity. ... External acts of humility are only the skin that covers the fruit. [XIII, 392<sup>a</sup>-392<sup>e</sup>, let. 238bis, to Mme. Chantal, Annecy, 1/11/1604]

With God's grace, I shall never fail to practice the maxim which states: Order your lives according to the light of the Gospel, never on the basis of human prudence. Live in peace by combating evil through goodness and overcoming bitterness through gentleness. [XX, 299, let. 1911, to Mme. Chantal, Annecy, April 1622]

Discipline is meant to provide order in our lives, not to cause problems; and so I would have no scruples in changing my lifestyle and routine if the care of my flock so demands. [XII, 403, let. 248, to Bishop AndreFremyot, 1604]

### Reflections from the Life & Writings of PMM:

What is more important is the spirit of the Rule: self-denial; the sacrifice of our comfort and facilities; becoming all to all, everywhere, always, in the least things; to 'be like the grain of wheat buried in the soil. Charity and gentleness towards our neighbour are the daughters of God's love. (Let to Fr. Jean-Marie Tissot, in Vizag, 06-07-1849]

People generally speak of the gentleness of St. Francis de Sales; and they are right. But according to me it does not bring out fully his characteristic trait. His gentleness appears to me to be but a means of exercising his zeal. His characteristic trait is zeal.

You are right to take as your motto: "To God alone be honour and glory" (*Soli Deo honor et Gloria*) Along with gentleness have a strong zeal against vice.

I recommend to you as much knowledge as virtue. You can have zeal without knowledge, but this zeal is incapable of doing any good; it certainly is not what can do any lasting good". [Register of La Feuillette, pp.26-27, Preserved in the MSFS Central Archives]

## DAY SEVEN - PURIFYING OUR MOTIVES

Micah 6: 8 : "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Psalms 116: 6 : "The LORD preserves the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me."

Lk. 16: 13 : "No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

Mt. 6: 33 : "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

### Reflections from the Life & Works of SFS:

There are persons of high social standing and learned who were vanity shops in the world that choose to enter religious life not so much as to humiliate themselves but with the intention of dominating everyone by assuming the charge of teachers of philosophy and theology. Such persons should be carefully scrutinized and admitted only if they show definite signs of desiring to respond to God's transforming grace. If they do so, they will indeed change into humility-shops in religious life from being vanity shops in the world. [VI, conf. 17, p. 327-328, SC II, p. 65]

The purpose of **prayer** is to unite oneself with God. This requires that we have the right intention, that we devote the required attention and that we proceed with due reverence. To ensure these conditions, we require to be poor through humility, rich in hope, and to be united with our Lord on the Cross. This means that in prayer we must always ask the Lord to increase our faith, hope and charity. [VI, 403, app. C]



## Reflections from the Life & Writings of PMM:

"Here is a counsel which I give you: be on your guard against the poison of vainglory. Continue in the same way without looking back. Always apply yourself to be more and more simple (*"Be simple as doves"*) Purify your intentions more and more *"If your eyes were simple,* ... Yes, according to manner of St. Francis de Sales. ... *"How important is this second article of our Rules: 'Each one will strive to cultivate the purest intention of pleasing God alone'. Pray for your Superior, that he may try at least to begin, even if so late, to practice what he preaches. (namely, conformity to God's Will)"* [let. to Fr. J-M. Tissot, in Yanam, 12-09-1847]

We do much when we do little, if we do it for God, when and as He wants. On the contrary, we do little or even nothing when we achieve much without right and pure intentions. 'They have received their reward.' How consoling this doctrine for humble souls! How dumbfounding it is for vain and ambitious me... St. Francis de Sales used to say. Offer yourself generously to His Holy Will as a willing holocaust. Such is the means to attract on you and your mission the most abundant blessings. ... [let. to Fr. A. Delalex, at Yanam, end of April 1855]

How great a person is when he wills only what God wills, when He wills it, and, in relation to whomsoever He wills it. [let. to Fr. Cheminal, 05-01-1843]

"I resign myself perfectly and joyfully to the Holy Will of God, who wishes me to be here (at Rome). I am sincerely grateful to it. [let. to Bishop Rendu, 28-03-1843]

What the Lord wants from us is a. right and pure intention, fidelity in all that we do: Not *how much*, but *how well*. The sovereign Judge considers not the weight but the value of our work. ... The less there is of ourselves in our actions, the more there is of God.

## DAY EIGHT - BEING OPEN TO FRATERNAL CORRECTION

- Mt. 18: 1 : "If your brother sins, go to him and show him his fault. But do it privately, just between yourselves."
- Mt 12: 33-37 : "I tell you this: on the judgment day you will have to give an account of any useless word you have spoken. Your own words will declare you either innocent or guilty."
- Eph 4: 1-11 : "Be humble, kind, patient, and bear with one another in love."
- 1 Jam1:19-21 : "Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger, for human anger does not bring about what is right before God."

## Reflections from the Life & Works of SFS:

Laxity, whether of spirit or body, is one of the greatest obstacles to Religious Life. Persons who do not make an effort to rid themselves of it should not be admitted to the convent. [VI, conf. 17, p. 331, SC II, p. 69]

Do not be disturbed when people speak about the faults we commit or about the virtues we lack. Rather, let us thank God for having shown us the way to acquire those virtues or to correct those faults. [VI, conf. 18, p.344, SC II, p. 7]

We may enter religious life with our bad habits, passions and inclination to evil. We may not however allow these to rule our life. Rather we require to earnestly strive to overcome these imperfections by being guided by right reason, by living according to the Constitutions and through obedience to our Superiors. [VI, conf. 20, p. 377, SC II, p. 41]

## Reflections from the Life & Writings of PMM:

"... you ask me pardon. You think that I want to punish you by my silence. My friend, if it is my thought, it is too much. ..It has never entered into my spirit. I have nothing but thanksgiving, blessings, words of encouragement and comfort for you but they do not reach you. What a terrible disposition of the divine Providence. We had taken every kind of precaution, we had stamped our letters, some of them till ... and everything is in vain whereas we receive regularly all your letters in around 40 days. ... If there is my fault, the correction is severe ... But may God be blessed and may his most loving will be done; may our beloved deceased (Fr. Martin) rest in the peace of the Lord." [ Let. to Fr. J-M. Tissot, 23-07-1846]

I desire that our missionaries in India should make the greatest efforts and sacrifices for an exact observance of the Rules as far as their duties allow. Fraternal correction should be made every month when they are only two in a station. ... [Let to Bishop Neyret, 30-06-1849]

All our fathers and brothers must practice every month, fraternal correction in public or in private. Here, in Annecy, we do it in private. This is how we proceed: on the last or the first day of the month, every religious goes to his superior and asks for correction. This practice is of greatest importance for the knowledge of defects for the practice of self-denial, for exercises of abnegation – the only means of acquiring humility. [Let. to Fr. J-M. Tissot, at Vizag, 06-07-1849]

## DAY NINE - CARRYING ONE'S CROSS

- Mark 8:34 : He summoned the crowd with his disciples and said to them, whoever wishes to come after me, must deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.
- Mk 10:38 : And whoever does not take up his cross, and follow after me, is not worthy of me.
- Gal. 2:19b-20 : I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith in the Son of God, who has loved me, and given himself up for me.
- Heb 2: 18 : Because he himself was tested through suffering; he is able to help those who are being tested."

## Reflections from the Life & Works of SFS:

The name and term 'Cross': A word and object that was dreaded and despised, the Cross, assumed dignity and respect, through the suffering and crucifixion of Christ. In the Gospels, [Mt. 10/38; Lk. 9/23] Christ Himself says: "He who does not take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me". Accordingly, the word *Cross* refers to the trials and tribulations one requires to assume in order to obtain salvation. It also serves to remind one of the instruments of punishment meted out to noted criminals, and, an instrument of torture. ... [II, 31,33, Defence of the Standard of the Cross, Ch. I]

God has testified to the power of the Crucifix and the Cross by the chastisement meted out to those who have by word or deed denigrated it. ... To honour the Cross is to honour the Crucified. Disrespect to the Cross is disrespect to the Crucified. Thus, the Jews, Turks, and such heathens who were unable to slight Jesus in person, do so by desecrating his images. [II, 240, Defence of the Standard of the Cross, ch. 14]

When God chooses to place heavy crosses on your shoulder, He provides you with greater strength to bear them. [XIII, 17, let. 276, Let. to Mme. Chantal, end February 1605] Unite your little crosses with the Cross of the Saviour. When the Lord took up His cross, the crosses of humanity of all times were added to its weight. [XIII, 281, let. 394, to Mme. Chantal, 14/4/07]

### Reflections from the Life & Writings of PMM:

On the day assigned for erecting the Cross, as was customary during the course of the parish missions, the object of his sermon was to make people understand that it is not enough to bear the cross; in order to honour it worthily, but that it must be borne with honour and pride; and that one must consider oneself privileged to follow the divine Master under His banner." [Jean REY, 1960, p. 71]

Consider all your worries and doubts as crosses, gifts of God. They are the treasures given to you by the Lord. They are the barren field which you have to cultivate at the sweat of your brow, assiduously and with patiently. [let. Fr. Francis Decompoix, April 1855]

Interior sorrows are an excellent cross which we should carry in a spirit of resignation and even of joy. ... When St. Paul tells us to rejoice, he adds: 'in the Lord.' True joy is never without thorns and without sacrifices". [letter to Sister, Louise MERMIER, 18-04-1851]

To a confrere recovering from illness: "Providence has to make you go through trials in order to form that new man in you which makes you like Jesus Christ. Your path of sickness has greatly edified me. I have suffered with you and I have thanked God with you." [to Fr. Guillermin, April 1855]

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## WEBINAR

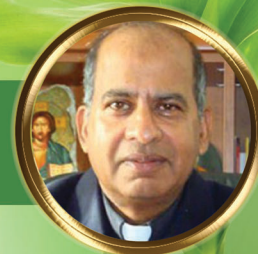
**DE SALES and MERMIER (DSM) SPIRITUAL INSIGHTS**

**24<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2020**

**FOUNDATION DAY**

**VERY REV. FR. AGNELO FERNANDES MSFS**

**FORMER SUPERIOR GENERAL**



TOPIC

**REFLECTIONS ON THE FOUNDATION OF MSFS  
AND ITS FOUNDATIONAL CHARISM**

# WEBINAR

(The first Webinar talk on 21st August, 2020)

## THE INFLUENCE AND RELEVANCE OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES TODAY

It's a joy to be with you and to have you all for this WEBINAR. Today is August 21, 2020. We celebrate the 453<sup>rd</sup> birth anniversary of our heavenly Patron and spiritual master, St. Francis de Sales. On this day, we begin a new venture, a WEBINAR on *DE SALES AND MERMIER INSIGHTS OR DSM INSIGHTS*.

The Webinar's objective is to educate and enlighten us on our spiritual and missionary heritage and to disseminate the spirituality of St. Francis de Sales.

Our venerable founder Fr. Peter Mermier presented to us St. Francis de Sales as our Patron and model. He wanted us to become more like Christ after the example of St. Francis de Sales. While signing the decree and giving canonical approval for the Rules of our Congregation, Bishop Joseph Rey shared his thoughts on: Who is an MSFS? What is the essence of an MSFS Vocation? He said: *Yours is a triple task: to study SFS, to imitate his virtue, and to use his method of guiding people as your own, i.e., extreme gentleness with poor sinners.*

*DSM INSIGHTS* is a program envisaged to fulfill this triple task. *DSM Insights* is a unique program organized by De Sales and Mermier Resource and Innovative Centre in Hyderabad in association with the General Secretariat for Social Apostolate and Innovative Ministries.

I congratulate and thank Fr. Suresh Babu, General Secretary for Formation and Director of DSM, Hyderabad and Fr. J. Stephen, General Secretary for Social Apostolate and Innovative Ministries and the Director of De SIFMA, Chennai, India. On this day, on the 453<sup>rd</sup> birth anniversary of St. Francis de Sales, I am delighted, honored, and privileged to declare the WEBINAR on *DSM INSIGHTS* inaugurated.

A cordial welcome to all of you to the WEBINAR! Please stay tuned once every three weeks and other special days on the MSFS Calendar for the WEBINAR.

Have you heard of three men who died on the same day and went to heaven? One was a Baptist, the other a Catholic, and the third a Charismatic. As they were waiting at the door of heaven, St. Peter stepped up and told them. I am sorry, your rooms are not ready. Please wait.

Meanwhile, St. Peter contacted Satan. Could you take care of them as I get their rooms available for them? Satan voluntarily agreed. But after 2 hours, Satan came up to St. Peter and said, sorry, man, I can't handle them. The Baptist is saving everyone, the Catholic forgives everyone, and the Charismatic has raised enough air conditioning money. Come and get these guys. All 3 of them influenced everyone and made themselves relevant.

Today, we focus on the influence and relevance of St. Francis de Sales in our modern times. What is happening today? We live in a world of the Internet, Instagram, Twitter, Smart phones, and Android phones. We live in a culture where information Technology is exploding with thousands of television channels and a billion websites in our living rooms. The sexual revolution has radically changed the way we see life, commitment, marriage, family, priesthood, and religious life. Political and religious extremism have divided communities and countries based on race, color, caste, tribe, and nationalities. Faith and church attendance have fallen sharply, and more people are uncertain about what they believe.



With the pandemic Covid-19 disrupting our lives, we enter a new world that we have not lived before. But remember, we are in this world not to survive but to flourish and find meaning for our lives. We are in this world for a mission. We are not bad people. We are sincere people. We are seeking for something concrete. We are seeking for an ideology and wisdom to find a road map for our faith journey. Without a road map, our journey can lead us to dead ends and take us nowhere.

St. Francis de Sale's relevance and influence are that he provides a road map for our faith journey in a confusing world. He knew what it meant to live in a confusing world because he lived in a confusing world in France in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

What is the road map? What is the road map for our faith-journey that SFS offers? It is the 'spirituality of the heart.' It is all about what you do with the fire in your heart, the longing in your heart, those instincts in your nature, the ache, emptiness, and the unconsummated pain in your heart. External practices cannot adequately satisfy the longings of our hearts.

In the first book of the *TREATIES ON THE LOVE OF GOD*, SFS powerfully and plainly states that there is an undeniable and inescapable tendency or inclination for God in every human heart. There is a natural appetite for God in every human spirit, which cannot be satisfied by anything on earth but God. It is not only SFS, but most of the secular thinkers and spiritual writers, poets and philosophers, and films and dramas speak about the deepest longing of the human heart, unquenchable fire in the human spirit, a wildness in the human nature, the restlessness, the ache, the emptiness or the nagging feeling of "something is missing in my life."

Sigmund Freud, the father of modern psychology, spoke about this fire burning at the center of our heart as ID – the energy in us that pushes us out to pursue pleasure. The restless in us is for sexual pleasure. Carl Jung spoke of this irresistible and untamable energy in us as the energy that pushes us to find meaning and fulfillment in life. Erik Erikson said of this restlessness as the restlessness of the ego for self-identity. C. S. Lewis calls it an old ache, which will not go away. It is not meant to go away. This ache is too great to be filled with anything but God. St. Augustine spoke of this restlessness when he said: 'O God, you have made us for Yourself. Our hearts are restless until they rest in you'. St. Francis de Sales spoke of this longing of the human heart as a longing to belong to God. God has placed this longing in our hearts. This longing is part of our DNA. For SFS, holiness is primarily to discover this longing in our hearts and accept that we belong to God and God alone.

What do you do with the unquenchable fire? Spirituality is about how you channelize the longing of your heart. You have a healthy spirituality if you channelize this longing for communion with God, others, and nature. If not, it is unhealthy.

SFS uses various images in the *Treatise on the Love of God* to demonstrate the appetite, the inclination, and the longing of the human heart for God. He speaks of a tremendous attraction between the human spirit and God, like the attraction of iron pieces to a magnet. There is an incredible attraction between the human soul and God.

Francis uses the image of the breasts of a nursing mother. Her breasts are full, swelled with milk, and engorged with milk. Milk is abundant. The child drinks the milk with great hunger and is satisfied, and the mother is relieved. The mother gives from her abundance of milk.

Similarly, *Theotimus* (the name given to a human spirit that desires devotion), our human nature is empty and full of longing for something. Something is missing. We need to be

filled with the divine. God's abundance gains nothing by letting us drink the milk. But, we are satisfied, and our emptiness is filled.

He uses another image of an eagle. Eagles are powerful birds. They have a healthy heart and strong wings. But their eyes are more powerful than their hearts and wings. Eagle can see far beyond when they are flying. They have a sharp and clear vision.

In the same way, Theotimus, our human spirit is invigorated by its natural inclination for God. Our human spirit has more clarity and sharpness to see how lovable God is. But our human spirit is weakened by the lack of strength in our will. Sin saps our human will. Sin blinds our human understanding. The appetites of the senses trouble the mind.

Another image is that of a palm tree. Our human nature, wounded by sin, is like a palm tree. A palm tree produces less tasty and imperfect fruits if they are not planted in a warm place. But if they are grown in a warm place, they make delicious dates. Similarly, Theotimus, the human spirit cannot produce delicious fruits if it has a weak and paralyzed will. The paralyzed man in the Gospel of John, Chapter 5, waited for 38 years before Jesus cured him. He could see the healthy pool, but he had no strength to jump into it. In the same way, we have a natural desire and longing for God, we can see how lovable and loving God is, but we cannot jump into God's abundance and drink the milk. We have clarity and sharpness of vision to see how loveable God is, but we cannot love God above all other things with all our hearts, mind, strength, and soul.

This is the challenge that we face in our spiritual journey. This is the inner conflict in us. The challenge is that we have a natural inclination and longing for God, but our frail nature, wounded by sin, does not have the vigor and enthusiasm to love God above all things. This is the crisis in the vocation to married life, single life, or priesthood and religious life.

Our wounded human nature creates emotional, psychological, and spiritual blocks and takes away our inner freedom. According to research by the Gregorian Institute for Psychology, emotional and spiritual blocks or unconscious inconsistencies influence 60-80 % of priests and religious. In our formation houses, the challenge in formation is to help the candidates identify the blocks and address them to have the inner freedom to interiorize the values and ideals of the priesthood and religious life. The same applies to those in married life or single life.

SFS gives us a road map to address our spiritual and emotional blocks and journey toward holiness. For him, every baptized Christian is called to holiness. There is only one call – the call to holiness. Holiness is the longing to belong to God. God uses this longing in our hearts to gently draw us and pull us to himself. God uses this longing as a string to hold us with his divine goodness and bind us to himself. God uses this longing in our hearts and has reserved this right to take us back to himself.

Are you happy to allow yourselves to be led by him? Are you ready to allow yourself to be led Him? Are you willing to permit to be led by the divine love? If you give consent to be led by his divine goodness, he desires to transform you. If you are ready and willing, God will use the longing in your heart to change you. The spirituality of the heart helps us to permit God to embrace us and make us drink from the abundance of God's love.

**Live JESUS!**

**- Very Rev. Fr. Abraham Vettuvélil MSFS**  
Superior General



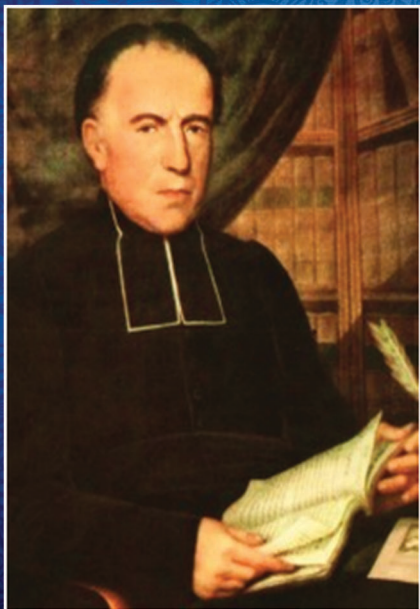


*Happy Feast  
of the*

**MOTHER OF  
SORROWS**



15<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2020



*Happy*  
**FOUNDER'S  
DAY**

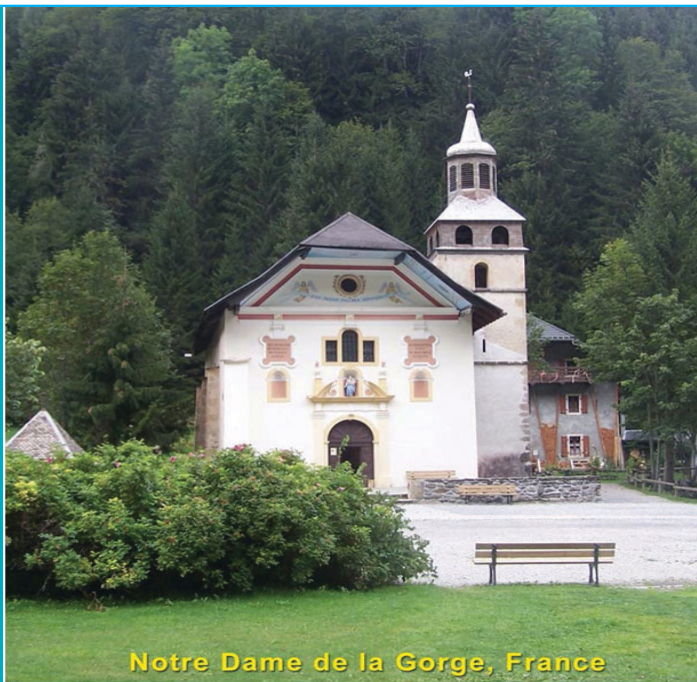


30<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2020



True wisdom  
does not  
consist in doing  
many things  
but in doing  
them well.

Fr. Mermier

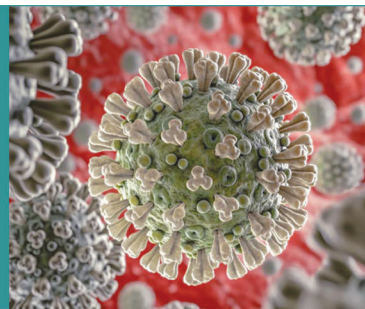


Notre Dame de la Gorge, France

*Dear Confreres, Brothers & Sisters*

In this challenging times of Covid-19,  
let us **TAKE CARE,**  
**MAINTAIN DISTANCE & KEEP SAFE.**

*May God Bless us.*



DSM Bulletin is your bulletin. We need your comments, observations, suggestions for its improvement. Write in short to the editors at the earliest.

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