



**MEDITATIONS FOR THE
TIME OF THE RETREAT
St. John Baptist de La Salle**

**Faculty Study Group Version with Discussion Questions
Mullen High School
Denver, Colorado**

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FIRST MEDITATION

That God in his Providence has established the Christian Schools

193.1 First Point

God is so good that, having created us, he wills that all of us come to the knowledge of the truth. This truth is God himself and what he has desired to reveal to us through Jesus Christ, through the holy apostles, and through his Church. This is why God wills all people to be instructed, so that their minds may be enlightened by the light of faith. We cannot be instructed in the mysteries of our holy religion unless we have the good fortune to hear about them, and we cannot have this advantage unless someone preaches the word of God. For how can people believe in someone, the Apostle says, about whom they have not heard anyone speak, and how can they hear him spoken about, if no one proclaims him to them? This is what God does by diffusing the fragrance of his teaching throughout the whole world by human ministers. Just as he commanded light to shine out of darkness, so he himself kindles a light in the hearts of those destined to announce his word to children, so that they may be able to enlighten those children by unveiling for them the glory of God. Since, then, God in his mercy has given you such a ministry, do not falsify his word but gain glory before him by unveiling his truth to those whom you are charged to instruct. Let this be your whole effort in the instructions you give them, looking upon yourselves as the ministers of God and the dispensers of his mysteries.

193.2 Second Point

One of the main duties of fathers and mothers is to bring up their children in a Christian manner and to teach them their religion. But most parents are not sufficiently enlightened in these matters; some are taken up with their daily concerns and the care of their family; others, under the constant anxiety of earning the necessities of life for themselves and their children, cannot take the time to teach their children their duties as Christians. It is characteristic of the providence of God and of his vigilance over human conduct to substitute for fathers and mothers persons who have enough knowledge and zeal to bring children to the knowledge of God and of his mysteries. According to the grace of Jesus Christ that God has given to them, they are like good architects who give all possible care and attention to lay the foundation of religion and Christian piety in the hearts of these children, a great number of whom would otherwise be abandoned. You, then, whom God has called to this ministry, work according to the grace that has been given to you to instruct by teaching and to exhort by encouraging those who are entrusted to your care and guiding them with attention and vigilance in order to fulfill toward them the principal duty of fathers and mothers toward their children.

193.3 Third Point

God wills not only that all come to the knowledge of truth, but also that all be saved. He cannot truly desire this without providing the means for it and, therefore, without giving children the teachers who will assist them in the fulfillment of his plan. This, says Saint Paul, is the field that God cultivates, the building that he is raising, and you are the ones whom he has chosen to help in this work by announcing to these children the Gospel of his Son and the truths that are contained in it. This is why you must honor your ministry and keep trying to save some of these children. Since God, according to the expression of the same Apostle, has made you his ministers in order to reconcile them to him and has entrusted to you for this purpose the word of reconciliation for them, exhort them, then, as if God were exhorting them through you, for you have been destined to cultivate these young plants by announcing to them the truths of the Gospel, and to procure for them the means of salvation appropriate to their development.

Teach them these truths not with learned words, lest the cross of Christ, source of our sanctification, become void of meaning and all you say to them would produce no fruit in their minds or hearts. For these children are simple and for the most part poorly brought up. Those who help them to save themselves must do this in so simple a manner that every word will be clear and easy for them to understand. Be faithful to this practice, then, in order to contribute as far as you are able and as God requires of you to the salvation of those whom he has entrusted to you.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does your relationship with God reveal itself in your work?
2. What does it mean to you to be a person of "knowledge and zeal" to your students?
3. What does it mean to you to "be an instrument of salvation to your students?"

SECOND MEDITATION

On the means that must be used by those who are responsible for the education of children to procure their sanctification

194.1 First Point

Consider that it is a practice only too common for the working class and the poor to allow their children to live on their own, roaming all over like vagabonds as long as they are not able to put them to some work; these parents have no concern to send their children to school because their poverty does not allow them to pay teachers, or else, obliged to look for work outside their homes, they have to abandon their children to themselves. The results of this condition are regrettable, for these poor children, accustomed to lead an idle life for many years, have great difficulty adjusting when it comes time for them to go to work. In addition, through association with bad companions they learn to commit many sins which later on are very difficult to stop, because of the persistent bad habits they have contracted over such long time. God has had the goodness to remedy so great a misfortune by the establishment of the Christian Schools, where the teaching is offered free of charge and entirely for the glory of God, where the children are kept all day, learn to read, to write, and their religion, and are always kept busy, so that when their parents want them to go to work, they are prepared for employment. Thank God, who has had the goodness to employ you to procure such an important advantage for children. Be faithful and exact to do this without any payment, so that you can say with Saint Paul, The source of my consolation is to announce the Gospel free of charge, without having it cost anything to those who hear me.

194.2 Second Point

It is not enough that children be kept in school for most of the day and be kept busy. Those who have dedicated themselves to instruct them must devote themselves especially to bring them up in the Christian spirit, which gives children the wisdom of God that none of the princes of this world have known. It is completely opposed to the spirit and wisdom of the world, for which we must inspire children with a great horror, since it serves as a cloak for sin. Children cannot be too much separated from such a great evil, because this alone can make them displeasing to God. Let this be your first concern, then, and the first effect of your vigilance in your work, to be ever attentive to your students to forestall any action that is bad or even the least improper. Help them avoid anything that has the slightest appearance of sin. It is also of great importance that your vigilance over your students serves to make them be self-controlled and reserved in church and at the exercises of piety that are performed in school. For piety is

useful in every way, and it gives a great facility for avoiding sin and for practicing other acts of virtue because of the great number of graces it brings to those who have it. Do you act in this way with your students? Adopt these practices in the future if you have not been faithful enough in the past.

194.3 Third Point

In order to bring the children whom you instruct to take on the Christian spirit, you must teach them the practical truths of faith in Jesus Christ and the maxims of the holy Gospel with at least as much care as you teach the truths that are purely doctrinal. It is true that there are a number of doctrines which are absolutely necessary for us to know in order to be saved. But what would it serve to know them, if we did not take the trouble to practice the good to which we are bound. Faith, Saint James says, without good works is dead. Saint Paul also says, "If I knew all the mysteries and had full knowledge and all the faith, such that I moved mountains from one place to another, but have not charity, (that is, sanctifying grace), I am nothing." Is your main care, then, to instruct your disciples in the maxims of the holy Gospel and the practice of the Christian virtues? Have you anything more at heart than helping them find their happiness in these practices? Do you look upon the good that you are trying to achieve in them as the foundation of all the good that they will practice for the rest of their lives? The habits of virtue that are cultivated in oneself during youth encounter less resistance in corrupt nature and form the deepest roots in the hearts of those in whom they have been formed. If you want the instructions you give those whom you have to instruct to be effective in drawing them to the practice of good, you must practice these truths yourselves, and you must be full of zeal, so that your students may be able to receive a share in the grace which is in you for doing good, and that your zeal draw upon you the Spirit of God to animate your students in the same way.

Discussion Questions:

1. How do you make your school a good place for students to be?
2. What does the word "ministry" mean to you?
3. What does it mean to you to teach your students "habits of virtue"?

THIRD MEDITATION

***That those who teach the young are cooperators
with Jesus Christ in the salvation of souls***

195.1 First Point

Although Jesus Christ died for everyone, the benefit of his death is, nevertheless, not effected in everyone, because all do not make the effort to apply it to themselves. The response of our will is necessary on our part in order to make it effective. Although the death of Jesus Christ was more than sufficient to wipe out the sins of all, and be complete reparation for them, since God has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, nevertheless the grace that Jesus merited for us effects our salvation only insofar as our will is brought to correspond with it. It is up to each of us to achieve and complete the work of our own redemption. This is what made Saint Paul say very well, speaking of himself, I accomplish what is lacking in the passion of Christ. Is there something lacking, then, in the passion of Christ? Nothing, certainly, on the part of Jesus Christ, but on the part of this holy Apostle, as well as everyone else, what was lacking was the acceptance of his will, the union of his sufferings with those of Jesus Christ as one of his members suffering in him and for him. Since you are obliged to help your disciples to save themselves, you must engage them to unite all their actions to those of Jesus Christ, our Lord,

so that their actions, made holy by his merits and by his consecration, are able to be pleasing to God and a means of salvation for them. This is how you must teach them to benefit from the death of Jesus Christ, our Lord, and to make effective in them the advantages and merits of his death.

195.2 Second Point

Since you are ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ in the work that you do, you must act as representing Jesus Christ himself. He wants your disciples to see him in you and receive your instructions as if he were giving them to them. They must be convinced that your instructions are the truth of Jesus Christ who speaks with your mouth, that it is only in his name that you teach, and that it is he who has given you authority over them. They must also be convinced that they themselves are a letter which Jesus Christ dictates to you, which you write each day in their hearts, not with ink, but by the Spirit of the living God, who acts in you and by you through the power of Jesus Christ. He helps you triumph over all the obstacles that oppose the salvation of these children, enlightening them in the person of Jesus Christ in order to make them avoid all that could be displeasing to him. In order for you to fulfill this duty with as much perfection and exactness as God requires of you, frequently give yourselves to the Spirit of our Lord to act in your work only under his influence, so that your own spirit may have no part in it. This Holy Spirit, then, will come upon them generously, so that they will be able to possess fully the Christian spirit.

195.3 Third Point

All your care for the children entrusted to you would be useless if Christ himself did not give the quality, the power, and the efficacy that is needed to make your care useful. As the branch of the vine cannot bear fruit of itself (our Lord says), unless it remains attached to the stem, so neither can you bear fruit, if you do not remain in me. This will be the glory of my Father, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. What Jesus Christ says to his holy apostles he also says to you that you may understand that all the good you are able to do in your work for those entrusted to you will be true and effective only insofar as Jesus Christ gives it his blessing and as you remain united with him. It is the same for you as it is for the branch of the vine, which can bear fruit only if it remains attached to the stem and draws its sap and strength from the vine. This is also the source of all the goodness of the fruit. Jesus Christ wants you to understand from this comparison that the more your work for the good of your disciples is given life by him and draws its power from him, the more it will produce good in them. This is why you must ask him earnestly that all your instructions be given life by his Spirit and draw all their power from him. Just as he is the one who enlightens everyone coming into the world, he also is the one who enlightens the minds of your students and leads them to love and to practice the good that you teach them.

Discussion Questions:

1. How do you discern God's will in your life?
2. What is "the letter which Jesus Christ dictates to you"?
3. How do you allow Jesus Christ to give life and power to your work?

FOURTH MEDITATION

What must be done to be true cooperators with Jesus Christ for the salvation of children

196.1 First Point

Be convinced of what Saint Paul says, that you plant and water the seed, but it is God through Jesus Christ who makes it grow, and brings your work to fulfillment. So, when it happens that you encounter some difficulty in the guidance of your disciples, when there are some who do not profit from your instructions and you observe a certain spirit of immorality in them, turn to God with confidence. Very insistently ask Jesus Christ to make his Spirit come alive in you, since he has chosen you to do his work. Consider Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd of the Gospel who seeks the lost sheep, places it upon his shoulders, and carries it back to restore it to the fold. Since you are taking his place, look upon yourself as obliged to do the same thing. Ask him for the grace needed to procure the conversion of their hearts. You must, then, devote yourself very much to prayer in order to succeed in your ministry. You must constantly represent the needs of your disciples to Jesus Christ, explaining to him the difficulties you have experienced in guiding them. Jesus Christ, seeing that you regard him as the one who can do everything in your work and yourself as an instrument that ought to be moved only by him, will not fail to grant you what you ask of him.

196.2 Second Point

Jesus Christ, speaking to his apostles, told them that he gave an example to them that they might do as he himself had done. He also wanted his disciples to accompany him at all the conversions he brought about, so that seeing how he acted, they could, in all they would have to do to win souls to God, be guided and formed by his conduct. This is also what you must do, since Jesus Christ has chosen you among so many others to be his cooperators in the salvation of souls. In reading the Gospel you must study the manner and the means that he used to lead his disciples to practice the truths of the Gospel. Sometimes he proposed as a happiness everything that the world holds in horror, like poverty, injuries, insults, slander, and every kind of persecution for the sake of justice, even telling his disciples that they ought to be glad and rejoice when such things happen to them. At other times he inspired horror for the sins into which people ordinarily fall, or at other times he proposed virtues to practice, such as gentleness, humility, and the like. He also made them understand that unless their justice surpassed that of the scribes and Pharisees (who bothered themselves about externals only), they would not enter the kingdom of heaven. Lastly he wanted the rich and those who have their pleasures in this world to be regarded as unfortunate. It is according to these practices and all the others of Jesus Christ that you must teach the Christian youth entrusted to you.

196.3 Third Point

In carrying out your service to children, you will not fulfill your ministry adequately if you resemble Jesus Christ only in his guidance and in his conversion of souls. You must also enter into his purposes and his goals. He came on earth, as he himself said, only that people might have life and have it to the full. This is why he said in another place that his words are spirit and life. By this he meant that his words procure the true life, which is the life of the soul, for those who hear them and, with gladness over what they have heard, act on them with love. This must be your goal when you instruct your disciples, that they live a Christian life and that your words become spirit and life for them. Your words will accomplish this, first, because they will be produced by the Spirit of God living in you and, second, because they will procure for

your disciples the Christian spirit. In possessing this spirit, which is the very Spirit of Jesus Christ, they will live that true life which is so valuable to us because it leads surely to eternal life. Guard against any human attitude toward your disciples; do not pride yourselves over what you do. These two things are capable of spoiling all the good there is in the performance of your duties. What have you in this regard that has not been given to you? And if it has been given to you, why are you boasting as if you had it on your own? Keep, then, the goals of your work as completely pure as those of Jesus Christ himself; by this means you will draw upon yourselves and all your labors his blessing and grace.

Discussion Questions:

1. How do you take special care with the students who are most astray or who are least attractive to you or others?
2. Do you study the Gospel so as to make it come alive in your work?
3. How do you bring your students and work to prayer each day?

FIFTH MEDITATION

That those chosen by Providence for the education of children must fulfill the functions of Guardian Angels for them

197.1 First Point

It can be said that children at birth are like a mass of flesh. Their minds do not emerge from the matter in them except with time, and become refined only little by little. As an unavoidable consequence, those who are ordinarily instructed in the schools are not yet able by themselves to understand easily the Christian truths and maxims. They need good guides and visible angels to help them learn these things. Angels have this advantage over us, that they are not bound to a body and to all the functions of the senses, without which ordinarily our minds rarely operate. Angels, therefore, have intelligence far superior to ours, and can contribute much to our understanding, no matter how very unsullied the level of our minds might be. The angels who guide us share with us the understanding and the knowledge they have of the true good. By this sharing of the enlightenment of the Guardian Angels we can have a more penetrating knowledge of God, of his perfections, of all that is related to God, and the means of going to him. If that is true of all of us, it is incomparably more true of children, whose minds are more dull because they are less free of their senses and of matter. They need someone to develop the Christian truths for them in a more concrete fashion and harmonious with the limitations of their minds, for these truths are hidden from the human mind. If this help is not given, they often remain all their lives insensitive and opposed to thoughts of God and incapable of knowing and appreciating them. For this purpose the goodness of God has provided children with teachers who will instruct them in all these things. Admire this goodness of God, providing for all the needs of his creatures, taking the means to procure for us the knowledge of the true good, that is, the salvation of our souls. Offer yourselves to him for this purpose, to assist the children entrusted to you as far as he will require of you.

197.2 Second Point

To be saved it does not suffice to be instructed in the Christian truths that are purely doctrinal. As we have said already, faith without works is dead; it is like a body without a soul; consequently it is not sufficient to help us achieve our salvation. It is, then, not enough to procure for children the Christian spirit and teach them the mysteries and doctrines of our religion. You must also teach them the practical maxims that are found throughout the holy

Gospel. But since their minds are not yet sufficiently able to understand and practice these maxims by themselves, you must serve as visible angels for them in two things. First, you must help them understand the maxims as they are set forth in the holy Gospel. Second, you must guide their steps along the way that leads them to put these maxims into practice. For this they need visible angels who by their instructions and by their good example will encourage them to appreciate and practice these maxims. By these two means, then, these holy maxims will make a strong impression on their minds and hearts. Such is the function you ought to perform for your disciples. It is your duty to act toward them as your Guardian Angels act toward you. You must win them to practice the maxims of the holy Gospel and to this end you must give them means which are easy and accommodated to their age. Gradually accustomed to this practice in their childhood, they will be able when older to have acquired them as a kind of habit and practice them without great difficulty.

197.3 Third Point

You encounter so many obstacles to salvation in this life that it is impossible to avoid them if you are left to yourselves and your own guidance. This is why God has given you Guardian Angels to watch over you, as the prophet says, to prevent you from falling by tripping against some stone, that is, some obstacle to your salvation. Your angels inspire you and help to keep you away from the path where you might encounter any obstacle. How much easier it is for children to fall over some precipice, because they are weak in mind as well as body, and have little understanding of what is for their own good. Therefore they need the light of watchful guides to lead them on the path of salvation, guides who have an adequate understanding of things concerning piety, and knowledge of the ordinary faults of young people. Thus they will be able to help them to be aware of pitfalls and keep away from them. This is what God has provided in giving children teachers whom he has charged with this care, and to whom he has given the care and the vigilance not only to prevent anything whatsoever harmful to their salvation from capturing their hearts, but also to guide the children through all the dangers they meet in the world, so that under the guidance of these attentive leaders, and under the protection of God, the devil does not even dare approach them. Ask God today for the grace of watching so well over the children confided to you, that you will take every possible precaution to shield them from serious faults. Ask him to be such good guides for them through the light which you will procure for yourselves by recourse to God, and by the fidelity with which you do your work, that you will see well every obstacle to the good of their souls, and keep away from the path of their salvation everything that could harm them. This is the principal care you must have for the children entrusted to you, it is the main reason why God has entrusted you with so holy a ministry, and it is on this that he will call you to give a very exact account on the day of judgment.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does it mean to you to do whatever God "requires of you" to secure your students' well-being?
2. What means do you give to your students to help them to understand, appreciate, and practice the maxims of the Gospel?
3. What does practicing "care and vigilance" mean to you?

SIXTH MEDITATION

How in the education of youth the function of the Guardian Angels is fulfilled

198.1 First Point

Guardian Angels, being very enlightened and knowing the good as it is, it is through them that God makes known this good and the secrets of his holy will to those whom he has predestined to be his adopted children in Jesus Christ, by whom he has called them to be his heirs. By the light these angels share with those who are called, they teach them the good that ought to be practiced, and what they ought to do to become heirs. This was symbolized by the ladder which Jacob saw in a dream when he was going to Mesopotamia. Angels were going up and coming down the ladder. They were going up to God to make known to him the needs of those for whom he made them responsible and to receive his orders for them. They were coming down to teach those whom they were guiding the will of God concerning their salvation. You must do the same thing for the children entrusted to your care. It is your duty to go up to God every day by prayer to learn from him all that you must teach your children, and then come down to them by accommodating yourself to their level in order to instruct them about what God has communicated to you for them in your prayer as well as in the Holy Scriptures, which contain the truths of religion and the maxims of the holy Gospel. You must for this purpose not only know all these truths in general, but it is also important that you have such a grasp on all of them that you are able to expand on them sufficiently to make them understood clearly and in detail by your disciples. Have you studied well all these truths up to the present, and have you been thoroughly committed to impress them firmly on the minds of these children? Have you regarded this responsibility as the most important in your work? From this moment take the steps to make it your main concern to instruct perfectly those who are entrusted to you concerning the truths of the faith and the practical maxims of the holy Gospel.

198.2 Second Point

The holy Guardian Angels are not satisfied with illuminating the minds of those under their guidance with the light needed to know God's will for them and be saved. They also inspire their charges and procure for them the means to do the good that is proper to them. God uses the angels not only to deliver those entrusted to them from the powers of darkness, and make them grow in the knowledge of God, but also to help them lead a life worthy of God, so that they will be pleasing to him in every way and produce good works of every sort. The angels are zealous for the good of those in their care because of the commission they have received from God, the Father of light and of all good. They contribute, as far as they are able, to make those in their care worthy to share the lot of the saints. You share in the ministry of the Guardian Angels by making known to children the truths of the Gospel, which you have been chosen by God to announce. You must teach them how to put these truths into practice and you must have a very great zeal to procure the accomplishment of this practice for them. You must, in imitation of the great apostle, encourage them to live in a manner worthy of God, since he has called them to his kingdom and his glory. Your zeal must go so far in this that in order to achieve it, you are ready to give your very life, so dear to you are the children entrusted to you. It is your duty, then, to admonish the unruly, and to do this in such a way that they give up their former way of life, you must rouse up those who lack courage, support the weak, and be patient toward all. Your purpose is to be in a position to stop and curb their corrupt inclinations in such a way, and to establish them in such a way in the practice of good, that they give the demon no entrance to them. Is this the guidance you have maintained toward your disciples up to now? Have you been helping them practice the good that is appropriate to their years? Have

you shown concern that they practice piety, especially at prayer and in Church, and that they receive the sacraments frequently? You must watch over them a great deal to procure for them the practice of good and a horror for sin, which are two very useful ways to help them achieve their salvation.

198.3 Third Point

If you want to accomplish your ministry as Guardian Angels for the children whom you instruct, to build up with them the body of Christ and to make them holy and perfect, you must work to inspire them with the same sentiments and to put them in the same dispositions in which Saint Paul tried to place the Ephesians through the letter he wrote to them. First, that they not sadden the Holy Spirit of God, with whom they have been marked in baptism and in confirmation as by a seal for the day of redemption. Second, you would be deserving of blame if you did not engage them to renounce their former way of life; you must, therefore, lead them with the same zeal to renounce lying and to speak the truth to their neighbor at all times. Third, you must help them to be gentle and to have a tenderness for one another, mutually forgiving, as God has forgiven them in Jesus Christ, and love one another even as Jesus Christ has loved them. Is this the way you have instructed your disciples up to now? Are these the maxims with which you have inspired them? Have you had enough vigilance over them and has your zeal been ardent enough to bring them to practice these maxims? Bring all your efforts to be faithful in this for the future.

Discussion Questions:

1. How are your prayer and your work linked in your life?
2. What does it mean to you to be "zealous for the good of those in your care"?
3. Which of the dispositions listed in the third point do you find the hardest to inspire in your students?

SEVENTH MEDITATION

That the care of instructing youth is one of the most necessary works in the Church

199.1 First Point

God, having chosen and destined Saint Paul, as he himself says to preach the Gospel to the nations, gave him such knowledge of the mysteries of Jesus Christ, that he was enabled like a good architect to lay the foundation for the building of the faith and of the religion which God raised up in the cities where Saint Paul announced the Gospel, according to the grace which God had given him; he was the first of all to preach in these places; that is why he says quite justly that those to whom he announced the Gospel are his work, and that he has begotten them in Jesus Christ. Without comparing yourself to this great saint (and keeping in mind the due proportion between your work and his), you can say that you are doing the same thing, and that you are fulfilling the same ministry in your profession. You must, then, look upon your work as one of the most important and most necessary services in the Church, one which has been entrusted to you by pastors, by fathers and mothers. This means that you are called to lay the foundation for the building of the Church when you instruct children in the mystery of the most Holy Trinity and the mysteries accomplished by Jesus Christ when he was on earth. For, according to Saint Paul, without faith it is impossible to please God and consequently be saved and enter the homeland of heaven because faith is the foundation of the hope that we have. The knowledge, then, that each must have of the faith, the instruction that must be given concerning the faith to those who are ignorant of it, is one of the most important things in our

religion. How much, then, you must consider yourselves honored by the church, to have been assigned by her to such a holy and exalted work, to be chosen by her to procure for children the knowledge of our religion and the Christian spirit. Pray God that he will make you fit to fulfill such a ministry in a manner worthy of him.

199.2 Second Point

The importance of this ministry is seen in the fact that the holy shops of the early Church looked upon it as their main duty and even considered it an honor to instruct the catechumens and new Christians and to teach catechism to them. Saint Cyril, patriarch of Jerusalem, and Saint Augustine have left us catechisms which they wrote and taught themselves, and which they also caused to be taught by the priests who helped them in their pastoral duties. Saint Jerome, whose knowledge was so profound, testifies in his letter to Leta that he considered it a greater honor to teach catechism to a young child than to be a tutor to a great emperor. Gerson, the great chancellor of the University of Paris, had such high esteem for this ministry that he practiced it himself. These great saints acted this way because teaching was the first ministry Jesus Christ gave his holy apostles, a fact Saint Luke reports when he says that as soon as Jesus had chosen his apostles, he sent them forth to proclaim the Kingdom of God. This is also what Jesus Christ requested of his apostles very clearly just before he departed from them, telling them, Go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. This is likewise the first thing Saint Peter did in the temple of Jerusalem after the descent of the Holy Spirit, with the immediate result that three thousand people began to embrace the faith in Jesus Christ. This was also the special work of Saint Paul, as is evident in his discourses in the Areopagus and those that he gave before Felix and Festus as reported in the Acts of the Apostles. Saint Paul testifies to the Corinthians that it would even be painful to him, if he had to come to them without being useful by instructing and catechizing them. But Jesus Christ did not limit himself to entrusting to his apostles the work of teaching catechism. He did this work himself and taught the principal truths of our religion, as reported in a great number of places in his Gospel where he tells his apostles, I must announce the Gospel of the kingdom of God because this is why I have been sent. Say the same thing, that this is why Jesus Christ has sent you and why the Church, whose ministers you are, employs you. Bring all the care needed, then, to fulfill this function with as much zeal and success as the saints have had fulfilling it.

199.3 Third Point

There is no need to be astonished if the first bishops of the early Church, and if the holy apostles, had such an esteem for the function of instructing the catechumens and the new Christians, and if Saint Paul especially gloried in being sent to preach the Gospel, not with learned words, for fear that the cross of Jesus Christ would be destroyed, since God turned the wisdom of the world into folly. Saint Paul, enlightened by God's wisdom and inspiration, says that the world did not recognize God through its wisdom, so it pleased God through the folly of the preaching of the Gospel to save those who accept the faith. The reason that Saint Paul gives for this is that God's secret plan was unveiled to him, and he had received the grace of unveiling to the nations the incomprehensible riches of Jesus Christ so that those who previously were deprived of Jesus Christ, and were strangers to the covenant of God, without hope in his promises, now belong to Jesus Christ, and are strangers no longer, but have become fellow citizens with the saints and servants of God's household, they are the structure which has been built on the foundation of the Apostles and raised up by Jesus Christ; they have become the sanctuary where God dwells through his Holy Spirit. Such is the result accomplished

in the Church by the instructions given after the holy apostles by the great bishops and pastors of the Church who devoted themselves to instructing those who wanted to become Christians. This is why this work seemed so important to them, and why they devoted themselves to it with such care. This is also what ought to engage you to have an altogether special esteem for the Christian instruction and education of children since it is a means of helping them become true children of God and citizens of heaven. This is the very foundation and support of their piety and of all the other good that takes place in the Church. Thank God for the grace he has given you in your work, of sharing in the ministry of the holy apostles and the principal bishops and pastors of the Church. Honor your ministry by making yourselves, as Saint Paul says, worthy ministers of the New Testament.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does it mean to you that your work "has been entrusted to you by pastors, by fathers and mothers"?
2. Do you see yourself as a person in a line of persons doing God's work of salvation that goes back to the Apostles themselves?
3. What does it mean to you that your work is entirely dependant on the grace of God?

EIGHTH MEDITATION

On what must be done to make your ministry useful to the Church

200.1 First Point

Consider that since you should be working in your ministry for the building of the Church on the foundation which has been laid by the holy apostles by the instruction you are giving to the children whom God has entrusted to your care and who are entering into the construction of this building, you must do your work as the apostles carried out their ministry. As told in the Acts of the Apostles, every day both in the temple and in homes, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming Jesus Christ. It followed that every day the Lord increased the number of faithful and the union of those who were being saved. The zeal that the holy apostles had to announce the teaching of Jesus Christ caused the number of disciples to increase, so they chose seven deacons to distribute the alms to the faithful and take care of their other needs, so greatly did these holy apostles fear to find any obstacles able to distract them from preaching the word of God. If the holy apostles acted this way, it was because Jesus Christ had given them the example, for it is said of him that he was teaching every day in the temple where all the people listened to him with attention, and at night he would withdraw and go to pray on the Mount of Olives. You, then, who have succeeded the apostles in their work of catechizing and instructing the poor, if you want to make your ministry as useful to the Church as it can be, you must every day, teach them catechism, helping them learn the basic truths of our religion, following the example of the apostles, which is that of Jesus Christ himself, who devoted himself every day to this task. Like them, also, you must afterwards withdraw in order to devote yourselves to reading and prayer, to instruct yourselves thoroughly in the truths and the holy maxims which you wish to teach, and to draw upon yourselves by prayer the grace of God that you need to do this work according to the Spirit and the intention of the Church, which entrusts it to you.

200.2 Second Point

It would have been of little use if the holy apostles had instructed the first Christians in the essential truths of our religion, if they did not lead them to live the Christian way of life and

conform to what they themselves had lived with Jesus Christ. The apostles were not satisfied with teaching doctrine, but they had a marvelous care to bring the first Christians to practice their religion. God blessed their care in such a way that it is said that those who first received the faith persevered in the teaching of the apostles, in the communion of the breaking of bread, and in prayers, and they continued to go to the temple every day united in the same spirit. In other words, after they were baptized they were living in harmony with the teaching of the apostles. Following his conversion Saint Paul did the same, for it is said of him that after instructing the people of Ephesus for three months in the Jewish synagogue, he then taught every day in the school of a man named Tyrannus, and continued this practice for two years, with the result that the disciples of that city were baptized in the name of the Lord and received the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. The chief care, then, of the apostles, after instructing the first faithful, was to have them receive the sacraments, assemble for prayer together, and live according to the Christian spirit. Above everything else, this is what you are obliged to do in your work. In imitation of the apostles you must give an altogether special care that those whom you instruct receive the sacraments, in particular, that they are made ready to receive Confirmation with the proper dispositions in order to be filled with the Holy Spirit and the graces which this sacrament produces. You must see to it that they go to confession often after learning how to do this well. You must dispose them to receive their first Communion with holy dispositions and to receive Communion frequently thereafter in order to be able to preserve the grace they received the first time they performed this action. Oh! If you knew the great good that you do for them by procuring the preservation and increase of grace by their frequent use of the sacraments, you would never let up instructing them about this!

200.3 Third Point

Saint James says, If someone says that he has the faith and that he does not have the works, of what use to him is his faith; can it save him? What would it benefit you, then, to teach your disciples the truths of the faith, if you do not teach them to practice good works? For faith that is not accompanied by works is dead. It will not, then, be enough for you to have instructed your disciples about the mysteries and the truths of our holy religion, if you have not helped them learn the chief Christian virtues, and if you have not taken an altogether special care to help them put these virtues into practice, as well as all the good of which they are capable at their age. For no matter how much faith they may have, nor how lively it may be, if they do not commit themselves to practice good works, their faith will be of no use to them. You must especially teach this maxim to those whom you instruct if you want to put them on the road to heaven, so that you are able to say to them, you have acted in a way that is beyond reproach and it is this that has given consolation to us. Inspire them also with piety and self-control in church and in the exercises of piety you have them perform in the schools. Instill in them the innocence and humility that Our Lord recommends so strongly in the Gospel. Do not forget to help them acquire gentleness, patience, love and respect for their parents, and all the conduct that is proper to a Christian child, in a word, all that our religion demands of them.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does it mean to you to "catechize and instruct the poor"?
2. How do you lead your students to "receive the sacraments, assemble for prayer together, and live according to the Christian spirit"?
3. What does it mean to you to "put students on the road to heaven"?

NINTH MEDITATION

On the obligation of those who instruct youth to have much zeal to fulfill well so holy a work

201.1 First Point

Reflect on what Saint Paul says, that it is God who has established in the Church apostles, prophets, and teachers, and you will be convinced that he has also established you in your work. The same saint gives you another expression of this when he says that there are diverse ministries but there are different operations, and the Holy Spirit manifests himself in each of these gifts for the common good, that is to say, for the good of the Church. One receives by the Spirit the gift to speak with wisdom, another the gift of faith by the same Spirit. You must not doubt that it is a great gift of God, this grace he has given you to be entrusted with the instruction of children, to announce the Gospel to them and to bring them up in the spirit of religion. But in calling you to this holy ministry, God demands that you fulfill it with an ardent zeal for their salvation, because this is the work of God and he curses the one who does his work carelessly. Let it be clear, then, in all your conduct towards the children who are entrusted to you that you look upon yourselves as ministers of God, carrying out your ministry with love and a sincere and true zeal accepting with much patience the difficulties you have to suffer, willing to be despised by men and to be persecuted, even to give your life for Jesus in the fulfillment of your ministry. The zeal that ought to inspire you is meant to give you these dispositions, recognizing that it is God who has called you, who has destined you for this work, and who has sent you to work in his vineyard. Do this, then, with all the affection of your heart, working entirely for him.

201.2 Second Point

What ought to engage you further to have great zeal in your state is the fact that you are not only the ministers of God, but also of Jesus Christ and of the Church. This is what Saint Paul says when he expresses the wish that everyone should regard those who announce the Gospel as ministers of Jesus Christ, who write the letter which he has dictated not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh which are the hearts of children. For this reason, and in this spirit, you must have the love and the glory of God as your single aim in the instruction of these children for the love of God ought to impel you, because Jesus Christ died for all so that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who died for them. This is what your zeal must inspire in your disciples, as if God himself were appealing through you, since you are ambassadors for Jesus Christ. You must also show the Church what love you have for her and give her proof of your zeal, since it is for the Church (which is the body of Jesus Christ) that you work. You have become her ministers according to the order God has given you to dispense his word. Since the Church has a great zeal for the sanctification of her children, it is your duty to share in her zeal, so that you can say to God as the holy King David, the zeal of your house has consumed me. For this house is none other than the Church, since the faithful form this building which has been built on the foundation of the apostles, and raised up by Jesus Christ who is the main cornerstone. Act in such a way through your zeal that you give tangible proof that you love those whom God has entrusted to you, just as Jesus Christ has loved his Church. Help them enter truly into the structure of this building, and be in condition to appear one day before Jesus Christ full of glory, without stain, without wrinkle, without blemish. This will make known to future ages the abundant riches of the grace that God has given them by procuring for them the help of

instruction, and the grace he has given you to instruct them and educate them, so that they may one day become heirs of the kingdom of God and of Jesus Christ Our Lord.

201.3 Third Point

Since your ministry has for its purpose to procure the salvation of souls, the first concern you ought to have is to procure this goal as far as you are able. You must in this imitate God to some extent, for he so loved the souls he created that when he saw them involved in sin and unable to be freed from sin by themselves, the zeal and affection that he had for their salvation led him to send his own Son to rescue them from their miserable condition. This is what made Jesus Christ say that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him may not die, but may have eternal life. See what God and Jesus Christ have done to restore souls to the grace they had lost. What must you not do for them in your ministry if you have a zeal for their salvation! How much you must be disposed toward them as Saint Paul was toward those to whom he preached the Gospel, to whom he wrote that he was not seeking anything they had, but that he was seeking only their souls. The zeal you are obliged to have in your work must be so active and so alive that you are able to tell the parents of the children entrusted to your care what is said in Scripture: Give us their souls, keep everything else for yourselves, that is, what we have undertaken is to work for the salvation of their souls. It is also the only reason you have committed yourselves to take responsibility to guide and instruct them. Tell the parents, too, what Jesus Christ said about the sheep of which he is the shepherd and which must be saved by him: I came, he said, that they might have life and have it to the full. For this had to be the kind of ardent zeal you had for the salvation of those you have to instruct, when you were led to sacrifice yourself and to spend your whole life to give these children a Christian education and to procure for them the life of grace in this world and eternal life in the next.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does it mean to you that "God has established you in your work"?
2. How do you "have the love and the glory of God as your single aim in the instruction of these children"?
3. What does it mean for you to tell parents, "Give us their souls, keep everything else for yourselves"?

TENTH MEDITATION

How a Brother of the Christian Schools ought to show zeal in his work

202.1 First Point

Consider that the purpose of the coming of the Son of God into this world was to destroy sin. This must also be the main purpose of the establishment of the Christian Schools and therefore the first object of your zeal. It must lead you to allow nothing in the children under your guidance which could displease God. If you observe in them something that offends God, you must immediately do all that you are able to remedy the problem. That is why, following the example of the prophet Elias, you must show your zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of your disciples. I have been roused with a very great zeal for the Lord God of armies, he says, because the children of Israel have broken the covenant which they had made with God. If you have zeal for the children for whom you have responsibility, and if you have committed yourselves to keep them from sin which is your duty, you must take on this spirit of the prophet Elias when they fall into some fault, and driven by this same holy ardor that roused this

prophet, you must say to your disciples: I am so zealous for the glory of my God that I cannot see you renounce the covenant you made with him in baptism, nor the dignity of children of God which you received in that sacrament. Often urge your disciples to avoid sin with as much speed as they would flee the presence of a snake. Let your first attention be given especially to inspire them with a horror for impurity, lack of reverence in church and at prayer, stealing, lying, disobedience, lack of respect for their parents, and for other faults in regard to their companions. Help them understand that those who fall into these kinds of sins will not possess the kingdom of heaven.

202.2 Second Point

You must not be satisfied with keeping the children in your care from doing evil. You must also lead them to practice well all the good of which they are capable. Take care of this, then, and see to it that they always speak the truth, and that when they want to affirm something they limit themselves to saying that it is or is not so. Help them understand that they will be believed more readily when they use few words than when they swear great oaths, because people will consider that it is in a Christian spirit that they do not use more words. Help them put into practice what Our Lord says when he commands us to love our enemies, to do good to those who do evil to us, who persecute us and speak unjustly against us. Help them completely avoid rendering evil for evil, injury for injury, and taking revenge. You must encourage them, in accord with the teaching of Jesus Christ, not to be satisfied with doing good actions but also avoid doing them before others to be esteemed and honored, because those who act this way have already received their reward. It is important that you teach them to pray to God, as Our Lord taught those who followed him, and to pray with much piety and in secret, that is, with much recollection, getting rid of all thoughts that could distract their minds during the time of prayer, so that they will be occupied solely with God and easily obtain what they ask of him. Since the majority of your disciples are born poor, you must encourage them to despise riches and to love poverty, because Our Lord was born poor and loved the poor, with whom he was also glad to be present, and even said that the poor are blessed because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them. These are the kinds of maxims and practices you must continually inspire in your disciples if you have any zeal for their salvation. This will be the way you will show yourselves zealous for the glory of God; since these maxims can come only from God (being contrary to human inclination), it is a mark of zeal for the honor and glory of God to inspire children to put them in practice.

202.3 Third Point

Your zeal for the children you instruct would not go very far and would not have much result or success if it limited itself only to words. To make it effective it is necessary that your example support your instructions, and this is one of the main signs of your zeal. Saint Paul, speaking to the Philippians, after teaching them different maxims, adds, "Act according to the same maxims and so be imitators of me, and look to those who live according to the example that I have given you; do the things that I have taught you, what I have said to you, what I have written to you, and of which I have given you the example." So, the ardent zeal of this great saint for the salvation of souls was to have them observe what he practiced himself. This is also the way that Our Lord acted, of whom it is said that he began to do and then to teach, and speaking to his apostles about himself after he had washed their feet, he says, I have given you an example, so that you may do as I have done to you. It is easy to conclude from these examples that your zeal for the children who are under your guidance would be very imperfect if you exercised it only by instructing them; it will only become perfect if you practice yourselves what

you are teaching them. Example makes a much greater impression on the mind and heart than words especially for children, since they do not yet have minds sufficiently able to reflect, and they ordinarily model themselves on the example of their teachers. They are led more readily to do what they see done for them than what they hear told to them, above all when the teachers' words are not in harmony with their actions.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does it mean to you that the main purpose of the establishment of the Christian Schools was the destruction of sin?
2. What does it mean for you to inspire your students to "love poverty"?
3. How do you make sure that your words to your students are in harmony with your actions?

ELEVENTH MEDITATION

On the obligation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools to reprove and correct the faults committed by those whom they are charged to instruct

203.1 First Point

One of the characteristics and one of the effects of the zeal persons have for the well-being and salvation of souls is to reprove and correct those in their care when they fall into some fault. This is how Jesus Christ often made his zeal for the Jews manifest in the temple, when he went there and drove out those who were buying and selling the things needed for the sacrifices. At the time he made a whip of cords that he used to chase them. Jesus acted similarly toward the Pharisees because he could not tolerate their hypocrisy, false piety, much less their pride which led them to esteem and praise their own actions while belittling and blaming the behavior of others. He condemned all their conduct because they satisfied themselves with teaching others but took no pains to practice what they taught. In all these encounters Jesus Christ rebuked and blamed them publicly. See what Jesus Christ did not only to the Pharisees but also to others on several occasions. Saint Paul with similar freedom reproved the Corinthians for tolerating an incestuous person among them, telling them that they should have handed him over to the devil to be tormented in his body so that his soul might be saved. You too must reprove and correct your disciples when they commit some fault, the more so because it is typical of children that they often make mistakes by doing many things without thinking. The reproofs and corrections give them time to reflect on what they have to do and cause them to watch over themselves in order not to be making the same mistakes. Be exact, then, not to allow considerable faults in them without providing this remedy for them.

203.2 Second Point

People are naturally so inclined to sin that they seem to find no other pleasure than committing it. This is seen especially in children, because their minds have not developed yet and they are not capable of much serious reflection. They seem to have no other inclination than to please their passions and their senses, and to satisfy their nature. This is why the Holy Spirit says that it is as if folly is tied to the neck of children, and correction is the only way to cure them. The way to free the souls of children from hell, then, is to make use of this remedy which will procure wisdom for them. Otherwise, if they are abandoned to their own will, they will run the risk of ruining themselves and causing much sorrow to their parents. The reason for this is because the faults turn into a habit which will be very difficult to correct. The good and bad habits contracted in childhood and maintained over a period of time ordinarily become part of

nature. This is why those who guide young children must reprove them, as Saint Paul says, with all the force of authority to make them return from their wandering and rescue them from the snares of the demon who holds them captive to his will. In effect, it can be said with reason that a child who has acquired a habit of sin has in some sense lost his freedom and has made himself a miserable captive, according to what Jesus Christ says, the one who commits sin is the slave of sin. It is for you who are teachers of those you guide to take all possible care to bring those under your guidance into that liberty of the children of God which Jesus Christ obtained for us by dying for us. To do this you need to have two qualities in your relationship with them. The first is gentleness and patience. The second is prudence in your reproofs and corrections.

203.3 Third Point

What ought to animate you the more to reprove and correct the faults of your disciples, is the fact that if you fail in this you yourselves will be reprehensible before God, who will punish you for your weakness and neglect in this matter. Since you are substitutes for their fathers and mothers and their pastors, you are obliged to keep watch over these children as the one who is accountable for their souls. So, if you do not watch over their conduct, you must realize that, since these children are not able to guide themselves, you will render an account to God for the faults they commit just as if you yourselves had committed them. The high priest Eli is a very clear example, and a frightening one as well, of this truth. Because he allowed bad behavior in his children God announced to him through Samuel that he was condemning his house for all eternity because of his sin: and because, though knowing that his sons were behaving in an unworthy manner, he did not correct them. As a result God swore that this fault could not be expiated by sacrifices or offerings to the Lord, so great was the sin considered by God. You, who hold the place of fathers and pastors of souls, fear that God will act the same way toward you, if you neglect to reprove and correct your disciples when it is needed, for you would have neglected the service with which God honored you when he put you in charge of guiding these children. He has entrusted you especially with the care of their souls which is what God had most at heart when he made you the guides and guardians of these young children. Fear that your negligence may not be pardoned any more than that of the high priest Eli, if you have not been sufficiently faithful to God in your work of striving to preserve in the grace of God these souls entrusted to your guidance.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does it mean to you to correct your students out of a desire for their well-being and salvation?
2. What does it mean to you that "folly is tied to the neck of children"?
3. What does it mean to you to be "accountable for students' souls"?

TWELFTH MEDITATION

On the way in which we must reprove and correct the faults of those whom we are guiding

204. 1 First Point

It would be of little value to make reproofs and corrections, if those who make them do not take the right steps to make them well. The first thing to which we must pay attention is not to undertake reproofs and corrections except under the guidance of the Spirit of God. This is why,

before undertaking them, it is proper to become interiorly recollected, to give ourselves up to God's Spirit, and to be disposed to make the reproof or undertake the correction with the greatest possible wisdom and in a manner best suited to make them useful to the one to whom we intend to make it. For people, and even children, are endowed with reason and must not be corrected like animals, but like reasonable persons. We must reprove and correct with justice, by helping the children to recognize the wrong they have done, and what correction the fault they have committed deserves, and we must try to have them accept it. Also, since they are Christians, we must be disposed to make the reproof or correction in such a way that God may be pleased with it, and that the children accept it as a remedy for their fault, and as a means of becoming more wise. For this is the result which the Holy Spirit says correction must produce in children. It is proper also to consider before God what sort of correction the fault deserves, whether the one at fault is truly determined to receive it with submission, or whether it is necessary to try to dispose him to be submissive. There is no need to fear that corrections will have a bad result if we have acted prudently in making them. On the contrary, teachers who reprove and correct those who commit faults draw upon themselves the praise of people, the blessing of God, and the gratitude of those who have been corrected. For you will have done them more good in that way than if you had flattered them with beautiful words, which only serve to deceive them and maintain them in their faults and disorderly conduct. Have you up to the present paid attention to yourself so that you correct your disciples only with God in view? Have you not corrected them with exaggerated zeal, and perhaps with impatience and anger? Was that to help them change their conduct, or was it not rather to punish them for some annoyance they caused you? Has charity guided you in this behavior, or have you not acted rather to vent your bad humor on them? Pay close attention to this in the future, so that you will conduct yourself in this important matter only with the desire to please God.

204.2 Second Point

Although Saint Paul warned his disciple Titus to admonish with vigor those who live without obedience, lest they corrupt their faith, and also he told Timothy to do the same thing to cause fear in others, he wrote to him at the same time that he ought to be patient and moderate in correcting those who offer resistance, because perhaps God will give them the spirit of repentance. In fact this is one of the best ways to win and touch the hearts of those who have fallen into fault and to dispose them to be converted. This is the way the prophet Nathan went about it, when he was sent by God to King David, in order to get David to enter into himself and become aware of the two sins, adultery and murder, which he had committed. The prophet began by telling him a parable about a rich man who had a great number of sheep, and stole the only sheep owned by a poor man. This simple story of terrible injustice told by Nathan aroused the anger of David against the guilty man and made him say that he was deserving of death and that he would not grant him any pardon. At this Nathan answered him, "You are that very man!", and immediately applied his story to the two crimes that David had committed, representing to him in God's name the graces that God had given him, and how he had abused them. This is the sort of method you must use with those you instruct when they fall into some fault and you have to correct them. If it happens that you have been aroused by some passion, avoid making any correction while you experience this emotion, because then the correction would be very harmful to your disciples as well as yourself. In those situations enter into yourself and allow the time of anger to pass without showing it exteriorly. Then, when you feel that you are completely free of passion, you will be able to abandon yourself to God's Spirit and make the correction you planned with all the moderation of which you are capable. Have you

acted this way in the past? Pray God never to allow you to be carried away by any outburst of anger when you have to punish any of your disciples.

204.3 Third Point

The result which the wise reproof of Nathan produced in David ought to make you realize how much good the corrections you give your disciples will profit them, when they are given with gentleness and charity. David became angry at the man Nathan described in his parable, and when he realized that he was the one for whom the parable was told, he had no other response but the words, I have sinned; at once he took upon himself a severe penance. When the child born of his adultery died, David adored God and made it clear that he accepted his holy will. That is how the wise and restrained manner of the prophet toward the sinful David softened the king's heart: he acknowledged his two sins, asked God's pardon for them, and was truly sorry. The result of a wise correction is that those receiving it are disposed to correct their faults, whereas when correction is administered through passion and without God in view, it serves only to turn the disciple against his teacher and to arouse in him feelings of revenge and ill will, which sometimes last a long time, because results are generally related and similar to the cause that produces them. If, then, you want your corrections to have the results they ought to have, administer them in a way that can please God and those who receive them. Take care, above all, that it be charity and zeal for the salvation of the souls of your pupils that lead you to correct them. Show them so much kindness when you give corrections that, though you may cause them pain, they not only will not be angry at you but will show you gratitude for the good you have done for them, a great regret for their faults, and a firm intention not to commit them again. From this very moment put yourself in the disposition to use the means needed to carry out this resolution.

Discussion Questions:

1. How do you prevent anger and impatience from entering into your correction of students?
2. Do you bring the day's corrections of your students to prayer?
3. What do you believe are the results that corrections of your students "ought to have"?

THIRTEENTH MEDITATION

***That as a teacher you must give an account to God
on the way you have done your work***

205.1 First Point

You cooperate with God in his work says Saint Paul, and the souls of the children whom you teach are the field that he cultivates through you. Since he is the One who has given you the ministry you exercise, when all of you appear before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ, each will give his own account to God of what he has done as a minister of God and as a dispenser of his mysteries for children. Jesus Christ, having been appointed by God to be your judge will say to you as the owner said to his manager, "Give me an account of your administration." He will then look into the very depths of your heart to examine whether you have been faithful managers of the wealth he has entrusted to you and of the talents which he has given you to work in his service. The good or bad use you have made of those gifts will then become clear, for the Lord who judges you will unveil what is most hidden and most secret in the depths of your hearts. If you want to prevent the account which you must give from becoming heavier

with the passage of time, make it everyday to yourself. Examine before God how you are conducting yourself in your work and whether you are failing in any of your duties. Come to see yourself clearly. Find fault with yourself accurately, unsparingly, so that when Jesus Christ comes to judge you, you will be able to face his judgment without being afraid. For when he comes he will find nothing to condemn in you, because you will have anticipated his judgment not only regarding your own person but also regarding the talents and graces you have received from God to fulfill well the service that he himself gave you. For he has made you the guardians and guides of children who belong to him, over whom he has acquired the right of father not only by creation but also by holy baptism, whereby they are all consecrated to him.

205.2 Second Point

Consider that the account you will have to give to God will not be inconsequential, because it concerns the salvation of the souls of children whom God has entrusted to your care, for on the day of judgment, you will answer for them as much as for yourself. You must be convinced of this, that God will begin by making you give an account of their souls before making you give an account of your own. For when you took responsibility for them, you committed yourself at the same time to procure their salvation with as much diligence as your own, for you engaged yourself to work entirely for the salvation of their souls. This is what Saint Paul brings to your attention, when he says that those who have been put in charge of others must render an account of them to God. He does not say that they will render an account of their own souls, but of the souls of those for whom they are responsible and it is over those souls that they must watch because they are obliged to render an account to God for them. The basic reason for this is, that when they carry out well the service of guides and leaders of the souls entrusted to them, they fulfill at the same time their own duties before God. God will fill them with so much grace that they themselves will be made holy while they are contributing as far as they are able to the salvation of others. Have you up to the present looked upon the salvation of your students as your personal responsibility during the whole time that they are under your guidance? You have exercises which are arranged for your own sanctification, but if you have an ardent zeal for the salvation of those whom you are called to instruct, you will not fail to perform them and to relate them to this intention. In doing this you will draw on your students the graces needed to contribute to their salvation, and you can be assured that if you act this way for their salvation, God himself will take responsibility for yours. Take on this spirit for the future.

205.3 Third Point

In making you responsible for the instruction of children and their formation in piety, Jesus Christ entrusted to you the task of building up his body which is the Church. You are likewise responsible, as far as you are able, to make her holy, and to purify her by the word of life, so that she may be able to appear before him full of glory without stain, without wrinkle, and without any defect, but completely pure and completely beautiful. It is for this that he wants you to give him an exact account when he calls for it, for he holds this responsibility very much at heart, having loved his Church so much that he gave himself up for her. Since children are the most innocent part of the Church, and usually the best disposed to receive the impressions of grace, Jesus Christ desires that you fulfill so well your task of making them holy, that all of them will come to the age of the perfect man and the fullness of Jesus Christ, so that they are no longer like children tossed here and there, no longer turned around by every wind of doctrine, by deceit, and trickery, whether through the companions with whom they associate or

men leading them into falsehood by their evil proposals. Rather, in all things they are growing up in Jesus Christ, who is their head, through whom the whole body of the Church holds its structure and its union, so that they may always be so united with the Church and in her that, by the hidden power which Jesus Christ furnishes to all his members, they will share in the promises of God in Jesus Christ. Put yourself, then, in the position to be able, when he questions you, to tell him that you have acquitted yourself well of all these duties. Be assured that the best way to do this and to be pleasing to Jesus Christ, when he judges you, will be to present to him all those children you have instructed as part of the building of the Church and have brought by your care into its structure to become the sanctuary where God dwells by the Holy Spirit. This is how you will show Jesus Christ that you have truly fulfilled your ministry and that you have worked effectively to build up and sustain the Church, as Jesus Christ has engaged you to do.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you examine yourself and your work before God?
2. Do you understand that devoting yourself to the salvation of your students is also how you work out your own salvation?
3. Do you understand how your work with your students also builds up the Church?

FOURTEENTH MEDITATION

***On matters related to his work on which
a Brother of the Christian Schools must give an account to God***

206.1 First Point

Since God has called you to your ministry in order to procure his glory and to give children the spirit of wisdom, the insight to know him, and to enlighten the eyes of their hearts, you will give account how well you have instructed those who have been under your guidance. This is an inescapable obligation for you, and you will be punished for their ignorance in these matters (if it is your fault), just as you yourselves had been ignorant of them. You will give account to God whether you have been exact to teach catechism, and whether you have taught it on all the days and for all the time prescribed for you; whether you have taught your disciples the things in the catechism that they should know according to their age and ability; whether you have not neglected some students because they were the slowest, perhaps also the poorest; and whether you did not show favoritism toward others because they were rich, or pleasant, or naturally possessing more lovable qualities than the others. You will give account whether you have instructed them well how to assist at Holy Mass and to confess their sins well; whether you have not preferred to teach secular subjects, such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, though you must not neglect these, since they are strictly required of you; nevertheless, those lessons that contribute to the support of religion are of much greater importance; whether during all the time available for your assignments you have not wasted some on useless activities, or even on useful ones that were not your duty, finally, whether you have taken care to instruct yourselves (during the time assigned to you for this) about the things you are obliged to teach those for whom you are responsible. Are your accounts in good order and are you ready to give them? If that is not the case, put them in order without delay, and examine yourself seriously on what your conduct has been in this regard. If there has been any negligence in your conduct, take a firm resolution to correct yourself. Before God be determined to do better in the future so that death will not surprise you in such an unfortunate condition.

206.2 Second Point

When you appear before God, it will not be sufficient for you to have instructed the children entrusted to you, but you will be found guilty if you have not watched over their conduct. For it is your duty to watch over them exactly, as obliged to give an account to God for their souls. Have you considered carefully what it means to give account to God for the salvation of a soul that is damned, because you did not take care to lead it to what is right and assist it to live accordingly? Are you convinced that you are obliged to take care of your disciples during all the time they are in church as much as when they are in school, in order to prevent them from doing anything even the least displeasing to God? Is it not also your responsibility to be attentive during the prayers you have them say, in order that they do so with the great piety, decorum, and respect as speaking to God? Do you believe, perhaps, that you are responsible for your disciples only during the time of school, that your vigilance need not extend to their behavior outside of school, to help them as far as you are able to live everywhere in a Christian manner, that they not associate with bad companions during the entire time they are under your guidance? For to say give account for their souls means to give account for everything that concerns their salvation, and to watch exactly means to watch over everything with diligence, omitting nothing, neglecting nothing. If you have not applied yourself to all these things, consider yourself guilty before God and have a great fear to appear before God at the moment of your death after you have lived in such negligence of all that concerns his service.

206.3 Third Point

What you say and do need not be as great a concern in the account you will have to render to God as the intention and the manner of these actions. For the faults of speaking and acting are usually more tangible and come more readily to your mind. Of intention Saint Paul says that whether we speak or whether we act, we must do all things in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, not in order to please men but to please God. This is the purpose you must have and the sole motive that God wants you to have in your work. Is it not true that often you have hardly thought of this at all, that usually you have had no intention whatsoever, or if you have had one it was purely natural and human? This single fault, then, would have corrupted all that you did, however good it might have been in itself and would have blocked God's blessing on your action. You will give God no less an account concerning your ministry, whether you have worked with wisdom and seriousness, without undue familiarity with those whom you teach. This seriousness is what Saint Paul recommended so strongly to Titus, his disciple, for a minister of the Gospel, and which he believed more necessary for him than any other good quality. After zeal for instruction and purity of morals, this serious self-control is one of the most useful virtues for those who are responsible for instructing youth. Nevertheless, do not overlook the account you will have to give of your patience and the control of your passions. This again is a very important point to which you must be very attentive, especially when the children in your care do something out of order, and you are required to reprove or correct them. There is nothing you must be more on your guard against than somehow allowing your passions to run away with you. This must be one of the main points of the examination you ought to make regarding the account that God will ask of you concerning your work. Consider this very seriously.

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think it means to "procure God's glory and to give children the spirit of wisdom, the insight to know him, and to enlighten the eyes of their hearts"?

2. How is it possible for your responsibility for your students to extend beyond classroom instruction?
3. What is the significance of "the intention and the manner" of what you say and do to your students?

FIFTEENTH MEDITATION

***On the reward that those can expect even in this life
who have instructed children and have fulfilled this duty well***

207.1 First Point

God is so good that he does not leave unrewarded the good work that is done for him and the service that is rendered to him, especially for the salvation of souls. If it is true that God rewards so generously even in this world those who have left all things for him, that they receive a hundredfold in this life, with how much more reason will he reward even in this present time those who have devoted themselves with zeal to spread his kingdom! To reward so great a good work and a service which he regards so highly, God gives two kinds of reward in this world to those who commit themselves untiringly to the work of the salvation of souls. First, he gives them an abundance of grace; second, he gives them a more extended ministry and a greater ability to procure the conversion of souls. The first of these rewards is set forth in the parable of the man who distributes his funds to his servants and gives one of them five talents in order to make a profit from them. When he learns later that one servant has made another five, in order to reward him he orders that the one talent given to the servant who has not made any profit be taken away and given to the one who now has ten. For those who have will be given more, the Savior says, and they will be given riches in abundance. Saint Luke expresses well the second kind of reward, the larger field of ministry, in the parable of the lord taking account of the money which he has given his servants. He rewards the first servant, who told him that his money had increased tenfold, by giving him the government of ten villages. Oh, how fortunate you ought to consider yourselves, to be working in the field of the Lord, since Our Lord says that the reaper will infallibly receive his reward! For the future, then, devote yourself with zeal and affection to your work, since it will be one of the most helpful ways to assure your salvation.

207.2 Second Point

Another reward in this life which they receive who work for the salvation of souls, is the consolation they have to see God served well by those whom they have instructed, and that their work has not been useless but served to save those whom they were called upon to instruct. It is in this spirit that Saint Paul writes to the Corinthians, to whom he preached the Gospel, that he has begotten them in Jesus Christ and that they are his work in our Lord. Similarly he finds joy to learn of their good will and this is what makes him boast about them because many persons have been stirred by their zeal. He adds that he hopes that the increase of their faith will attain so much glory that it will extend farther and farther to win souls through the proclamation of the Gospel. Yet it is in our Lord that he boasts. It is only in Jesus Christ, he says, that I lay hold to some glory for what I have done for God. It was, then, the spread of God's glory by the preaching of the Gospel that made up all the consolation of this great apostle, and this must be yours as well, to make God and his Son Jesus Christ known to the flock confided to you. Oh! What glory for you to have this resemblance to that chosen vessel of election! With joy, then, say as he does, that the greatest cause of your joy in this life is to

proclaim the Gospel free of charge, without having it cost anything to those who hear it. It is indeed a great glory for you to instruct your disciples about the truths of the Gospel solely for the love of God. It was this thought that made the Teacher of the Nations always find consolation and according to the testimony he has given, filled him with overflowing joy in the midst of his afflictions. You, too, must consider it great reward for yourselves, the consolation you feel at the bottom of your hearts, that the children whom you instruct are well-behaved, know their religion well, and live a life of piety. Thank God with all your heart for all these kinds of rewards that he gives you in advance in this life.

207.3 Third Point

You can expect yet another reward which God will give you in advance in this life if you devote yourselves generously to your duty and, if through zeal and the grace of your state, you have known well how to give your disciples a foundation in the Christian spirit. This is the very special satisfaction you will have when they grow up and you see them living with justice and piety, keeping free from evil associates, and performing good deeds. For the instructions you have given them have not consisted in words only, but have been accompanied by a great abundance of grace for those who have profited from them, which will maintain them in the practice of good. Their perseverance in piety will be a great cause of consolation for you when you call to mind the result of their faith and of your instruction, knowing that this makes them dear to God and places them in the number of his elect. What a joy it will be to see that they have received the word of God in your catechism lessons not as the word of men but as the word of God which is powerfully at work in them, as will be dearly apparent in the virtuous lives they continue to live. For this reason, in the consolation you have to see their perseverance in piety, you will be able to say that they are your hope, your joy, and your crown of glory before our Lord Jesus Christ. Look upon this, then, as a considerable reward that God gives you even in this world, to see that religion and piety are increased among the faithful, especially among the working class and the poor, by means of the establishment of the schools which have been placed by God under your guidance. Thank God every day, through Jesus Christ our Lord, that he has been pleased to establish this benefit and to give this support to the Church. Ask him fervently, too, that he will be pleased to make your Institute grow and produce good day by day, so that, as Saint Paul says, the hearts of the faithful may be strengthened in holiness and in justice.

Discussion Questions:

1. Are you content that the rewards mentioned in the first point are sufficient for the unconditional commitment that you are asked to make to the service of your students?
2. Is it enough for you if those that you teach lead lives of value and worth?
3. What do De La Salle's words in the third point say to you about the relationship between faith and Lasallian ministry?

SIXTEENTH MEDITATION

***On the reward that a Brother of the Christian Schools should expect in heaven,
if he is faithful in his work***

208.1 First Point

Saint Paul complained because some of the Corinthians said they belonged to Paul while others said they belonged to Apollo. He told them that each of them would receive his reward in proportion to his labor. This should make you realize that your happiness in heaven will be

greater than what will be enjoyed by those who have worked only for their own salvation, and it will be much greater in proportion to the number of children you have instructed and won over to God. The work of each one, that is of those who have labored on the building of the Church, says the Apostle, will be made known on the day of the Lord, because fire will be the test of the work of each one, (especially those who have instructed children and formed them to piety); those who have formed them in the Christian spirit will be seen, and those who have procured for them a solid piety. Such teachers will easily be distinguished from others who will not have trained their disciples in any good practice, and who will have been negligent in guiding them. The one whose work will survive, says the Apostle, that is, the one whose disciples will have acquired a strong piety through the teacher's effort and concern, will be rewarded in proportion to his work. Consider, then, that your reward in heaven will be all the greater as you will have accomplished more good in the souls of the children who are entrusted to your care. It is in this spirit that Saint Paul told the Corinthians: You will be our glory in the time to come on the day of Our Lord Jesus Christ. You can say the same thing of your disciples, namely, that on the day of judgment they will be your glory, if you have instructed them well and if they have profited from your instructions, because the lessons you have given them and the profit they have made from them will be unveiled before the whole world. Not only on that day, but throughout all eternity you will receive the glory of having instructed them well, because the glory that you have procured for them will reflect on you. Fulfill the duties of your work so well, then, that you may be able to enjoy this blessing.

208.2 Second Point

What a consolation for those who have procured the salvation of souls, to see in heaven a great number whom they have helped to obtain the advantage of enjoying so great a happiness! This will happen to those who have instructed many persons about the truths of religion, as an angel said to the prophet Daniel: Those who instruct many persons in Christian justice will shine like stars throughout all eternity. They will shine, indeed, in the midst of those whom they have instructed, who will eternally bear witness to the great gratitude they have for so many instructions they received from their teachers, whom they will regard as the cause, after God, of their salvation. Oh! What joy a Brother of the Christian Schools will have when he sees a great number of his students in possession of eternal happiness, for which they are indebted to him by the grace of Jesus Christ! What a sharing of joy there will be between the teacher and his disciples! What a special union with one another there will be in the presence of God! It will be for them a great satisfaction, sharing together the blessings for which the call of God had given them hope, the wealth of the glorious heritage of God in the dwelling of the saints. Put yourself in such a position in the future by fidelity to your duty, so that at the moment of your death you will possess such a great happiness, and be able to see your disciples likewise, after they have ended their days, possess this happiness along with you.

208.3 Third Point

The holy King David says that he will be filled with gladness when God will grant him the grace to see him and to enjoy the glory of heaven. For the sight of God fills all the powers of a person's soul in such a way that all consciousness of self is lost, so to speak. The person is entirely present within the divinity and totally penetrated with God himself. This is the happiness that will be possessed in heaven by those who have procured the salvation of souls, who have done this in a way that has been useful to the good of the Church, who have by their care restored the robe of innocence to a great number of their disciples that may have lost it through sin, and have helped to preserve the innocence of many others who have never lost it.

This will happen to those who have carried out the role of Guardian Angels for the children whom Providence has entrusted to them, who have had an ardent zeal in their work, who have practiced this zeal continually, and who have saved a great number of these children. Ah! what a thrill of joy you will have when you hear the voices of those whom you have led as if by the hand into heaven, who will say to you on the day of judgment, as well as in heaven itself, what the girl delivered from the devil by Saint Paul said to the Apostle and those who were with him, these men are servants of the great God, who have proclaimed to us the way of salvation. Then they will represent the good you have done among them. Some will represent to Jesus Christ on the day of judgment the robe of innocence you helped them keep in all its purity. Others who have committed sin, and who with your help have washed away their sins in the blood of the Lamb, will represent to him the trouble you took to lead them back on the path of salvation. All of them will join their voices to obtain for you a favorable judgment from Jesus Christ, praying him not to delay putting you in possession of the happiness you procured for them by your work and your concern. Oh! What glory there will be for those persons who have instructed youth, when their zeal and devotion to procure the salvation of children will be made public before all people! All heaven will resound with the thanksgiving which these blessed children will render to those who have taught them the road to heaven! Act, then, in such a way by your good and wise guidance of those who are entrusted to you, that you will procure all these blessings and all this glory for yourself.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you see your ultimate happiness and fulfillment as vitally connected to the work that you do with your students?
2. How do you see the state of your present commitment to your Lasallian ministry?
3. What do you see as the future of your association with the Lasallian mission?