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RHEIMS '89

CONCLUDING REMARKS

**Brother John Johnston, FSC
Superior General**

Rheims'89 days of celebration – days of study and reflection – days of sharing experiences as Lasallians – days of evaluation – days of renewed commitment.

We bring RHEIMS'89 to an official close in this magnificent basilica of St. Remi, a place, as we all know, of great importance and significance in the life of John Baptist de La Salle.

The Preparatory Commission has invited me to give the conclusions and the parting word. I am not sure that it is really appropriate for me to give the conclusions. I think that you and you alone can formulate the conclusions, that is to say, capture succinctly what these days have meant to you and what difference these days are going to make in your life in the days ahead.

What I can do, however, is offer you some concluding thoughts and leave with you what I hope will be an appropriate parting word. Almost immediately after I began to reflect upon the content of my remarks, I decided to take as my point of departure the meditation which De La Salle wrote for the feast of St. Remi.

In that meditation our Founder says that we Brothers –and, I would say, all Lasallians today– must search for and desire "the plenitude of God's Spirit in order to live" up to our vocation.

Search for and desire the plenitude of God's Spirit in order to live. Our first impulse might be to dismiss this remark as pious exaggeration, the

kind of comment one expects from a saint! But to take lightly this remark would be to reveal an inadequate grasp of De La Salle's understanding of the vocation of the Christian teacher.

The founder's starting point was always youth, especially poor and neglected youth. God loves young people, he would say, and wants them to know truth and be saved. But for this purpose, human ministers are needed. Therefore God kindles a light in the hearts of certain people, calling them to be his ministers. De La Salle would say to his first disciples, "Brothers, you are such people. God has chosen you. He has kindled a light in your hearts, calling you to be his ministers, his ambassadors, his co-workers. The founder goes so far as to tell the Brothers that they are to represent Jesus Christ, to RE-present him, to make his loving and saving presence a vivid and effective reality among young people.

De La Salle wasn't satisfied that the Brother be a capable teacher. He wanted him to be so united to Christ that he could serve as his co-worker, as his presence. Although De La Salle prepared these particular thoughts primarily for the use of the Brothers during their annual retreat, the title page indicates clearly that the meditations were intended also for "the use of all persons involved in the education of youth".

These reflections seem, perhaps, to be "too much" –too idealistic– well beyond the realm of probability if not possibility. If that indeed is your reaction, I don't think that De La Salle would have

been surprised. He knew that the Christian teachers he was addressing were normal human persons, but he wanted to propose to them an ideal towards which they should strive. The ideal he proposes is indeed high: it is nothing less than **TO BE CHRIST FOR OTHERS**. For those who wish to make progress towards this ideal, the founder has practical advice: if you wish to be the persons that God wants you to be, give yourself totally to the Lord, beseeching him to fill you with the plenitude of his Spirit. He knew well that to be ministers, ambassadors, co-workers –to be the presence of Jesus Christ– the Christian teacher needs the plenitude of the Holy Spirit.

In the light of these thoughts, we can interpret that fundamental idea expressed in the meditation for the feast of St. Remi: to live our vocation well, we need the plenitude of God's Spirit. For this purpose, the founder continues, you should apply yourself very fervently to mental prayer.

The fruit of prayer, according to St. De La Salle, is the Holy Spirit. And, he adds, one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit is zeal. After reflecting on the extraordinary zeal of St. Remi, De La Salle says, "You exercise an employment which requires great zeal... When a man who is called to an apostolic mission first fills himself with God and His Holy Spirit, he can accomplish anything."

De La Salle concludes his meditation insisting that the vocation of the Christian teacher is to help young people live according to the Christian spirit. But, he says, that we may impart the spirit of Christianity to others, we must possess it ourselves.

I make these thoughts of John Baptist de La Salle my own. I present them to you as the concluding thoughts of RHEIMS'89. All of us in this basilica –Brothers, lay teachers, priests and sisters, parents, staff members, board members, friends, benefactors, and young people– all of us are, in one way or in another, disciples of De La Salle. Our call as Lasallians is to make Christ's loving presence a reality for others, especially for the poor. Our mission is to give ourselves with zeal and enthusiasm to the service of others. To be faithful to our call, we need the power of the Spirit of God. To receive that Spirit we must turn to the Lord in earnest prayer.

Here in this magnificent basilica, where our Father and Founder spent so many hours, even entire nights, praying fervently for the Spirit of the Lord, let us resolve to be men and women of prayer. And, aware of the Lord's presence among us in this sacred house of prayer, let us ask him for the grace we need to be faithful to that commitment.

Finally, Brothers, ladies, gentlemen, young people, let me leave with you a parting word. The expression I have chosen is not original. It is the invocation which has long been the signal of our community, the signal that reminds us that to **BE** true Lasallians, we must be so united to Christ that we are able to say that he lives in our hearts. For this reason, as we go forth from this assembly, let us proclaim with faith, hope, and love, that beautiful invocation: "Live Jesus in our hearts! For ever!"

Rheims, July 4th 1989