

*Antonio Balzario sdb*



# *Simple Hints*

*To the young Salesian to  
help him persevere in his Vocation*

*(Revised Edition)*



*Edited by*

***Rev. Fr. John Dharmanathan SDB***

*With expert assistance from*

***Rev. Fr. Pathiaraj SDB***

Book Title:

**SIMPLE HINTS**

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Published by:

**Alaihal Media Publications, Tiruchy**

Printed by:

**SIGA Press, Chennai - 10**

Design & Layout

Jualian Anand

Year:

**2024**

No. of Copies:

**2000**

*(For private circulations only)*

These hints will help you. They will teach you how to swim, now that you are thrown into the waters of life. They will teach you how to fly, as the mother bird teaches her little ones. They will teach you how to move, in a new life fraught with many obstacles. They will show you which obstacles you must avoid and which virtues you must practice.

- **Archbishop Louis Mathias SDB**

(in his Foreword to the English translation)

.....

Oh Simple Hints! This is the book that the Novice Masters would give to their novices in the past, at the completion of their novitiate, saying, 'Look my dear novices, as you go forth, this book will accompany you in my place'.

- **Rev. Fr. V.M. Thomas SDB**

Former Provincial of Guwahati

.....

Congratulations for the initiative. A historical book, yet the substance seems to be sound.

- **Rev. Fr. Ivo Coelho SDB**

The General Councillor for Formation, Rome

.....

I had read part of the Simple Hints as a novice. I liked it. I used it as a Director of Novices in various conferences. It challenges me even today and will always challenge me. It is a small book. But it is a powerful book because it takes the religious to his/her roots, basics ... and to the ultimate goal of life. It is indeed a spiritual treasure like the Imitation of Christ and the Introduction to Devout Life.

- **Rev. Fr. Pathiaraj SDB**

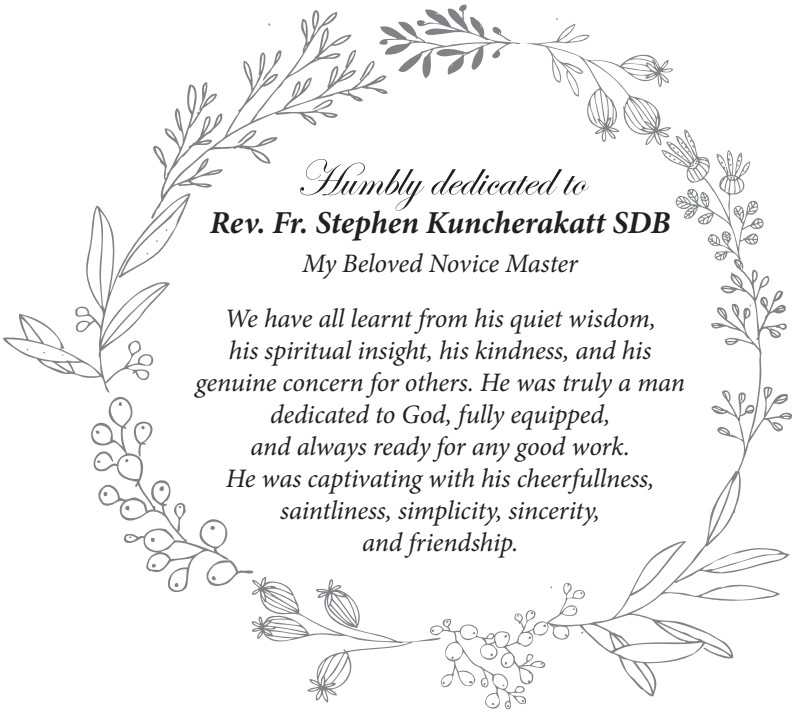
Former Novice Master and present Rector of Don Bosco Theologate in Chennai

.....

I offer you, dear Brother/Sister, these simple warnings. Read them and meditate on them carefully: everything I explain to you is taken either from the Word of God itself, or from the teaching of the saints, or is the fruit of long experience.

- **Rev. Fr. Antonio Balzario SDB**

(as in the original Foreword)



*Humbly dedicated to*  
**Rev. Fr. Stephen Kuncherakatt SDB**  
*My Beloved Novice Master*

*We have all learnt from his quiet wisdom,  
his spiritual insight, his kindness, and his  
genuine concern for others. He was truly a man  
dedicated to God, fully equipped,  
and always ready for any good work.  
He was captivating with his cheerfulness,  
saintliness, simplicity, sincerity,  
and friendship.*

## FOREWORD

**As in the 1994 English edition  
By Archbishop Louis Mathias SDB**

“Devote yourself to reading” was the advice given by St. Paul to his beloved disciple Timothy (1 Tim. 4:13). We would say to our young clerics and lay brothers: “devote yourself to the reading of these hints,” for they wish to instruct you, guide you, and safeguard your vocation from all the perils that you will meet in your new life.

You will not have your Novice Master near you any more to enlighten you and to help you. Although the Rector of the House where you will be sent will take his place, it will not be however always possible for him to take the same care your Master took of you. You are not to be fed any longer and you must stand on your feet.

These hints will help you. They will teach you how to swim now that you are thrown into the waters of life. They will teach you how to fly as the mother bird teaches her little ones. They will teach you how to move in a new life fraught with many obstacles. They will show you which obstacles you must avoid and which virtues you must practice.

Read these hints, remembering the saying of a saint that when we pray we speak to God but in good reading it is God who speaks to us; so listen to Him through these hints.

**L. Mathias, SDB,**  
Archbishop of Madras – Mylapore.



## FOREWORD

BY THE AUTHOR DON BALZARIO

Dear Brother in Jesus Christ: The enemy of the human race, as always, still continues working to destroy souls, but especially those of the young religious: and he considers it a great victory when he manages to mislead even one of them, making him abandon his vocation and return to the world.

And why so? Because a good religious takes away from the devil hundreds and even thousands of souls with his prayers and mortifications, with his examples, words, and works. Hence, by abandoning the vocation, not only will he be not able to save souls, but will also place himself in obvious danger of losing his own soul and with it, many others, by his scandals; since the religious who never abandons his vocation does more good! Don Bosco said that the priest and the religious are either saved with many, or lost with many!

To avoid such a tragedy, I offer you, dear Brother, these simple warnings. Read them and meditate on them carefully: everything I explain to you is taken either from the Word of God itself, or from the teaching of the saints, or is the fruit of long experience.

May the heart of Jesus and Mary Help of Christians, to whom I offer this work, bless these pages and communicate divine efficacy, so that every Salesian who reads them may be encouraged more and more to correspond to the grace of the vocation, and persevere until he obtains the crown of eternal glory.

**A. Balzario,**  
Sarria (Spain),  
October 1920,  
Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin of the Rosary.



## PRESENTATION

**So he said to them, “Well therefore every teacher of the Law who becomes the disciple of the kingdom is like a householder who takes out from his storeroom things both new and old.” (Mt. 13:52)**

Fragility in religious life is a hot topic today! Our own congregation has recently published the results of a survey done on the young Salesians: “Young Salesians and Accompaniment: Orientations and Guidelines”. According to Don Francesco Cereda, former Vicar General, when fragility strikes at the initial formation, it has a say on the following years too. In this context we would like to revive a very precious book, by name, *Simple Hints: To the young Salesian to help him in his Vocation*. It is indeed a Salesian classic which celebrated its first centenary of publication in 2020. The speciality of the book is its straight talk.

When we spoke about this book to some of the former provincials, one of them immediately reminisced: “Oh Simple Hints!” According to him, this is the book that the Novice Masters would give to their novices in the past, at the completion of their novitiate, saying, “Look my dear novices, as you go forth, this book will accompany you in my place.” In fact, Rev. Fr. Ivo Coelho, the General Councillor for Formation, readily appreciated the book for its good substance relevant even after a hundred years of its first publication.

When I asked Rev. Fr. Pathiaraj, former Novice Master of Chennai Province, and the present Rector of the Don Bosco Theologate in Chennai about this book, he spoke in great detail, “I had read part of the *Simple Hints* as a novice. I liked it. I used it as a Director of Novices in various conferences. It has been useful. It challenges me even today and will always challenge me. It is a small book. But it is a powerful book because it takes the religious to his/her roots, basics, beginnings, foundations, ... and counsels him/her to traverse the safe path that will

lead him/her to the ultimate goal of life, paradise, fullness of life with God, while at the same time, doing commendable service to God's people. It is indeed a spiritual treasure like the *Imitation of Christ* and the *Introduction to Devout Life*. Hence, it is a good tool book in the hands of spiritual directors in the ministry of accompanying the religious today.”

The book was originally written in Spanish by Fr. Antonio Balzario SDB in the year 1920. He was a missionary then in Ecuador. That took us to search for the original, and we were able to get a copy of it from Spain, thanks to Rev. Fr. Pathiaraj who went out of his way and succeeded in it. The purpose was to revisit the existing English translation with the Spanish original in hand. In fact, the last reprint of it in English was actually in 1994, by the Salesian Province of Chennai. It needed, therefore, some update. Once again Fr. Pathiaraj came willingly forward to give a helping hand in this too. Thanks to him again.

We thank sincerely Rev. Fr. Don Bosco Lourdusamy SDB, the Provincial of Chennai for permitting us to publish this revised version. Thanks also to the SIGA Printers for printing it. In reading this book we assure you of an Emmaus experience, “Were not our hearts burning within us...?” (Lk. 24:32).

This year being the Silver Jubilee of our Tiruchy Annai Velankanni Province, and also the Silver Jubilee of my Priestly Ordination, I thank the Lord Jesus, the eternal High Priest, His Blessed Mother Mary Help of Christians and St. John Bosco for their countless mercies in my life.



**John Dharman SDB,**  
Don Bosco Youth Village, Keeranur,  
02-02-2024.  
World Day for Consecrated Life





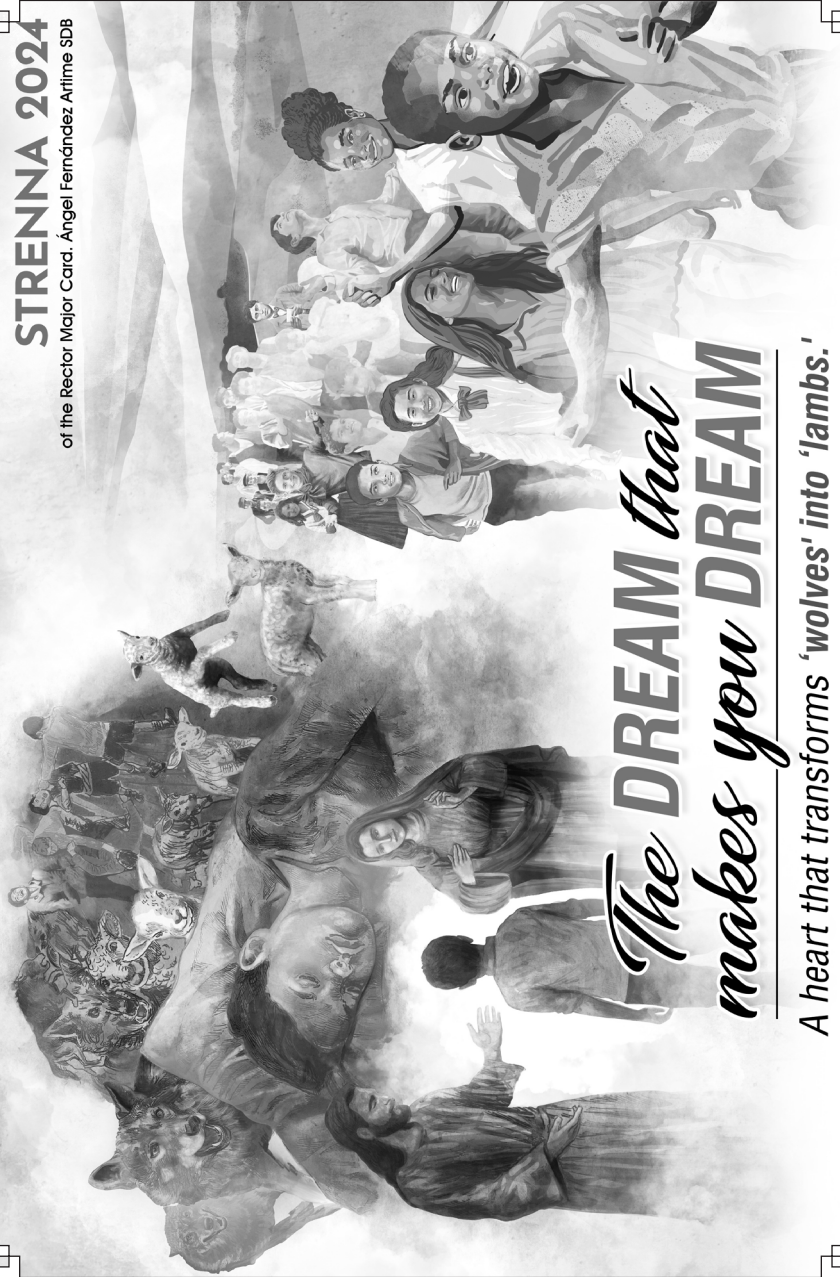
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**STRENNA 2024**

of the Rector Major Card. Ángel Fernández Artime SDB



*The DREAM that*  
**makes you DREAM**

A heart that transforms 'wolves' into 'lams.'



## HINT 1

### WHY THESE HINTS?

Strangely enough it happens frequently that a newly professed religious, just fresh from the studentate of Philosophy or from the novitiate, a short while after going to the houses, begins to relax and grow lax in the practice of virtues. He altogether forgets the great obligation which he took upon himself on the day of his profession: to strive after perfection by means of his vows and the Holy Rule.

One enquires: “But was he not a fervent novice, exact in obedience, faithful in little things, frank and open with his superiors, obedient to whatever was demanded of him, earnest at his spiritual progress and anxious to work for the salvation of souls? Did he not give us a feeling that he was a promising young candidate?” Certainly yes, and we can really expect much from him as long as he perseveres in his fervour and in his spirit of faith as well as in his efforts to keep focused on his perfection.

But here is the trouble: “Why should he become dispirited and careless in his love for Jesus who has lavished so many graces on him? Has God perchance changed? No, that is not likely. On the contrary, the God who has given him the gift of vocation is sure to ask him for an account of it. Then why should he be so careless? Why should he abandon the virtues acquired in the novitiate? Should he not rather strive to deepen them and let them shine?”

“Unfortunately,” a serious author remarks, “there are lightheaded and unstable young ones who begin well but have no courage to persevere in their former dispositions.” They seem to find nothing hard during the novitiate, rather seem fervent. They maintain this fervour during the first year of their profession. But then... they grow lax very soon. Little

by little they lose their spirit of faith, they forget the presence of God, they no longer feel attracted to prayer, they hardly practice modesty and continence, their heart dries up; and slowly the taste for perfection and obedience is lost. It is then that, left to themselves, they become weak and powerless so as not to be able to bear any longer the sweet yoke of the Lord. Oh! How sad that after having set hand to the plough they should look back again (Lk. 9:62), risking to deserve the terrible condemnation threatened by Our Lord in the Holy Gospel!

My dear brother, may God preserve you from such misfortune. May what St. Paul said to Galatians be never said of you: “How can you be so foolish? You begin with the Spirit and end up with the flesh!” (Gal. 3:3).

Remember that those who finish well will be crowned, and not those who only start well. Remember that God does not change. He has taken note of your vow on the day of your profession and one day He will demand it either for your reward or for your punishment. Do not slacken, pray every day for fortitude and fidelity, so that you may obtain the gift of perseverance.



## **HINT 2**

### **THE CRITICAL PERIOD**

Experience teaches us that the two or three years following the novitiate or the philosophate are the most dangerous. It is a critical period on which the entire life depends. “Those who go” says St. Ignatius, “from a warm room to a cold and damp place easily get a chill if they do not take precautions.”

In the same way those who go from the novitiate to communities are exposed to the danger of losing their fervour in no time. The work on virtue initiated in the novitiate and philosophate, should be sustained by making a habit out of it by constant repetition. If one does not do that, it weakens and disappears altogether.

Nothing frightened St. Vincent de Paul so much as to see his novices lose their fervour when leaving the novitiate. “The passage, indeed,” – he used to say – “from spiritual exercises to active life is always dangerous for all those who do not keep a great vigilance over themselves.”

The one who is too much worried about material things, who neglects prayer and the practice of the presence of God; the one who is not open and frank with his superiors, who voluntarily permits shortcomings, acts of vanity and little sensual gratifications in himself; the one who for want of humility and excess of self love does not welcome advice and corrections; the one who persists in ignoring the system of education bequeathed to us by our Holy Founder; the one who indulges in criticism and backbiting, will soon experience distaste and aridity and will soon leave himself open to dangerous temptations.

Note here that the more fervent a young religious is during the time of his novitiate, the more will he feel inclined to get rid of every irksome obligation later on. Now that he is no longer in the novitiate, everything seems permitted to him. Unaware of the dangers under his feet, he becomes careless, while he actually needs to be all the more careful. “Watch and pray, so that you may not fall into temptation.” (Mk. 14:38) These words of Jesus are more important in this stage than ever.



### HINT 3

#### GOODWILL - THE CONDITION TO PROGRESS

You have been pious and fervent in your novitiate. You must persevere in your good dispositions. You must seek your salvation with fear and trembling. That is why St. Paul would say: "Therefore, my dear friends... continue working out your salvation with fear and trembling." (Phil. 2:12)

Experience teaches us that on the road of virtue, the religious grows rather lax than enthusiastic as time passes, if he has no generosity. Even those who were the best at the beginning often go backward rather than forward. For every saint who day by day advances in virtues, there is a multitude of cowards who retreat.

"If every year we rooted out one vice," the Imitation of Christ says, "we should soon become perfect men." (Book 1, Chapter 11). The truth is that we would always find that the fervor we had at the first moment of our call has been greater than after several years of our profession. Our duty is to grow daily in fervour and virtue. It is indeed a challenge to keep a spark of our initial fervour alive. God alone can help us in this regard.

"As a rule beginners are fervent," the great Massillon says, "we lay the foundations of the saintly life with a zeal and activity that would seemingly never falter. We do not allow ourselves even the legitimate satisfactions; we have a horror of the slightest infidelities; we take giant strides along the way of the Lord; nothing is laborious; we easily swallow the bitterness of obedience; we do not notice the burden of our Rule; we rush to the call of duty, whatever that be. In one word, nothing is too much for the zeal and fervour of a beginner."

"Yet as some time passes, what happens? One thinks himself to be entitled to a spell of rest. Gone is that rigorous



precision ('that is only for novices', he says); he thinks relaxation is a privilege of age and seniority. He indulges in a mode of life more favorable to the senses and his own self-interests; he readily allows himself some omissions in those which he used to be scrupulous; finally he convinces himself that the time for fervor is over and that the scrupulous observance of the Rules is only for beginners."

What a deception! And what are the consequences? With lack of fervour and regularity, happiness and peace of soul vanish. Instead, a sense of sadness and uneasiness torture the heart of the inconstant religious.



#### **HINT 4**

#### **TO ONE NEWLY PROFESSED**

#### **HOW TO ACT WHEN BEING SENT TO THE HOUSES**

1. Do not forget, my dear confrere, that if in the novitiate you have laid the foundations of the spiritual edifice, in the houses you should relentlessly work to raise it up. But what is meant by the spiritual edifice? Christian Perfection, of course. The religious has bound himself to strive after it. He must always aim at an increasingly high degree of sanctity. He must strenuously work at getting rid of his defects and growing from good to better. "The religious," says St. Eusebius of Emessa, "who does not care for perfection runs a great risk of being lost forever." And St. Thomas adds: "The name and the life must agree, because it is not the hood and habit that makes the monk." "You are lost," says St. Augustine to the religious, "if you think you have done enough and stop without taking

any trouble to progress in perfection.” To seek to remain in the same stage without becoming either worse or better is as ridiculous as to want a boat in a swift current to stand still, without taking the trouble of rowing. Either progress or regression; that is the law.

2. You must then go to the houses with a great desire to become a saint and with a good stock of the spirit of prayer. This desire will make you find the means thereof, and prayer will fetch you the necessary graces. Of course, this is not a day’s work but a life’s toil. Just go step by step and you will reach your goal.

In addition you must have a good stock of humility as to consider yourself as the last and least of all, as the servant of your confreres and of your superiors.

You should have special attention for them all; to offend none and to be offended by nothing; to look upon your superiors as the representatives of God; to let them guide you without any presumption on your side, even if you perchance happen to have more theoretical knowledge in matters of education; indeed the difficulties met with in the practical life are such that they can only be resolved by the Rector or the other local superiors. Unless you do so, you will never be able to practise the Salesian system of education; you will rather build up a system of your own, which because it does not bear the hallmark of our Holy Founder will not only lose the blessings of God, but will rather be doomed to barrenness or even bring forth fruits of perdition.

3. You must be well equipped with a great spirit of sacrifice, which is indeed as indispensable as salt in food. You must be ready to carry out whatever occupation is entrusted to you, without being downhearted for the difficulties encountered.

4. You must place all your trust in God and perform your practices of piety with the greatest exactness, endeavouring to keep such a demeanour in the church, in the community, in the classroom or in the workshop, as to spread around you, as St. Paul wanted, the sweet fragrance of Christ (2Cor. 2:14-16).

5. Full of charity and sweetness in your dealings with all, you must keep your eyes wide open to see only the good and firmly closed to anything nonedifying. And if charity compels you to speak about the latter, you will only speak with the superiors.

6. You should be constantly obedient, modest and silent, with the burning desire of doing much good and saving many souls. Lastly, you must be fully convinced that your virtues are very shaky and that the least of danger and the smallest of trials may prove fatal unless you keep a constant watch over yourself and fulfill the advice of your superiors and the Holy Rule with the greatest fidelity.

Happy will be the Salesian who goes to the houses with such dispositions! Examine yourself to see if you have these dispositions.



## **HINT 5**

### **“I AM NO LONGER A NOVICE!”**

#### **WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?**

Phrases such as 'I am no longer a novice', 'I am not a novice!' or 'I am no more a novice!' are sometimes on the lips of confreres. True enough, you are no longer a novice! But what does it mean and what does it imply? "I am no longer in the novitiate" implies that you have taken upon yourself far more important obligations than when you were in the

novitiate. What is it? In the novitiate you had the obligation of being good, but now because of the vows, you have the obligation of being a saint!

Having devoted one full year to learning what religious life is, you can no longer plead ignorance. It means that you have got to practise now what you have learned. Isn't it a disrepute or discredit to spend months and years without making any progress in the spiritual life? How deplorable would it be that after so many Confessions, Communions, Meditations, Sermons and other countless graces, you should go back instead of going forward? "Along the way of the Lord not to go forward is to go backwards," says St. Augustine.

Some people think that being admitted to Profession is just like promotion in the army with just one difference, that in religious life, at least as some think, it confers the right to command with no duty of submitting to others except to those of one's own choice! Those 'good' people are completely mistaken and very clearly do not understand in the least, the essence of Profession. They should realize that if they were submissive and obedient before their Profession, they must be so with greater perfection afterwards. They must understand that Profession confers a burden rather than an honour. Therefore, rather than concentrating on the rights they obtain, they should think of the resultant duties. Our rights are "frozen" in this life and will be effective in the next if we are faithful, whereas the duties are binding at present.

In order to keep alive the desire for progress in virtue, make your meditation and your examination of conscience well. Never look on what has been done, but on what is still left (*nil actum si quid agendum*). Renew often your resolutions of sanctity as though you were just beginning. Remember often the reason why you came in to the Congregation, addressing to

yourself St. Bernard's famous question, "Bernard, Bernard, why have you come to religious life?"

My dear brother! We have promised God great things, but God has promised us greater things! Let us keep ours and let us long for His!



## **HINT 6**

### **PERSEVERANCE AND RELAXATION**

#### **A CONTRAST**

Look at the difference between the professed who perseveres and the one who does not: both had been called by God; both had advanced along the path of perfection during their novitiate; both had been sent to work in the houses; but lo! one walks faithfully on the way chosen, while the other goes astray.

What could have happened to them in these few years?

The first mistrusts himself but trusts in God; he lets himself be guided by his superiors from whom he conceals nothing; he goes on with caution; if he incurs any shortcoming he does not get downhearted but accuses himself, humbles himself and picks himself up readily; he performs his practices of piety with constant effort; in meditation and examen he finds the spark that keeps alive his fervour; he advances along the path of virtue; he keeps within himself a growing desire to strive after his sanctification and that of his neighbour. Duty and obedience are for him magic words that set him to act with generosity and boldness for the love of God.

Imitating St. John Berchmans, he keeps his rules meticulously and therefore his merits are multiplied and he abounds in consolation; his conscience is like a continual banquet “*the happy heart is always feasting*” (Prov. 15:15). Sorrows and hardships are not wanting, of course, but he just lays them at the foot of the cross where they lose their bitterness. He is loved by his pupils, esteemed by his confreres, honoured with the confidence of his superiors and blessed by God. He goes on doing good and preparing a rich harvest in Heaven.

The other, on the contrary, loses his fervour; he becomes lightheaded, given to dissipation, vain, touchy, neglectful in the fulfillment of his duties; he cannot bear advice or corrections; the least confrontation or humiliation puts him out; his practices of piety, done out of routine or of necessity, leave him cold; meditation does not touch him at all; vocal prayer has no charm for him; and his communions, routine and lukewarm to say the least, do not give him either satisfaction or strength for his betterment. What an unfortunate soul! With the loss of piety, peace and happiness have vanished as well.

He is a ghost of a religious; there is nothing real about him; his heart is elsewhere; he is just like a stranger in an establishment who finds no interest in his surroundings. Whether the rule is kept or broken, it does not matter to him; whether his duties are done well or badly, he does not care; whether his superiors advise him or not, he gives little heed. Assistance is a burden and he neglects it; teaching is a trouble and he lacks interest for his class; he lets his pupils have their own ways, or perhaps, following the impulse of his temper, he scolds them with harshness and ill-treats them.

He may be compared to one of those idols about which the Psalmist speaks - that have eyes and see not, have ears and hear not, have feet and walk not (Ps. 115:5). What a pitiful state! Who could bear such a burden for long?

That poor confrere could find a plank of salvation in his superiors; but far from letting them know his miserable state, he hypocritically conceals it even with lies. He does not see his vocation from the standpoint of faith, but as an unbearable yoke. Meanwhile his conscience has lost its sensibility. Remorse has been hushed up, his heart has grown hard, and his faults are ostensibly growing. Not finding consolation in God, he seeks it in creatures, in the gratification of his senses and his self-love, leaving aside the most important prescription of the Rule, scandalizing his confreres, frustrating the hopes that his superiors had laid on him.

Once that poor Salesian rejoiced at making his profession: he was happy because he was a religious. Now he often repeats, "I wish I had never made my profession"; he deems himself unhappy and he is indeed worse off than what he thinks, because he is just on the brink of the abyss; and in Heaven the frightening words of Isaiah are being written against him: "in the land of the Saints he has done wicked deeds: he shall not see the glory of the Lord." (Is 26:10) We could exclaim with Jeremiah, "How tarnished the gold has become! The fine gold has lost its lustre. The stones of the sanctuary lie strewn at every street corner!" (Lam. 4:1). It is truly astonishing, my dear brother, to see the change that takes place in a negligent Religious. The one who once dreaded the shadow of evil is now seen running blindly along the path of perdition.

But where does it all come from? It simply comes from a sensual affection not nipped in the bud, from a self-love not well subdued, from a prayer omitted, from a duty neglected. But how did it come to grow like this? By resisting the inspirations of grace, by choking the remorse of conscience!

And what will be the end of it all? A frightful blindness, a complete insensibility accompanied by grievous faults, which, if God does not stop it, will soon be followed by the loss of his vocation and then by that of his soul.

That is the sad story that made St. Augustine exclaim: “Since I began to serve the Lord, I have come to know by experience that, as there are no better Christians, than those who practise virtue in religious houses, so too there are no worse Christians than those who give themselves to sin in them.”

Therefore, my dear brother, if you don’t want to fall into such a deplorable state, dread the slightest fault, because “he who is careless in small things will soon fall,” (Sir. 19:1). These are the words of God!

St. Alphonsus and St. Gregory say that a religious is called to be saved as a saint, so that if he does not try that way, he will not even save himself.

“If a religious wants to follow the ordinary path, he will be left to himself,” says St. Angela.



## HINT 7

### SYMPTOMS OF LAXITY IN A SALESIAN

Note that not all the symptoms described below need not necessarily be found together to indicate the presence of laxity. The presence of any one of them should put a Salesian on the watch and cause in him a salutary fear.

And here they are:

1. Neglect in keeping the resolution taken in the novitiate; gradual giving up of the pious practices then decided upon.
2. Remarkable negligence of meditation, not fixing to oneself any definite purpose, not taking any resolutions, or perhaps doing so in a vague way



without giving any thought to them during the day, or may be “wasting half an hour every day by making an act of bodily presence at meditation.”

3. Hiding one's faults, covering one's defects, not admitting one's wrongs, taking badly the corrections of the superiors, neutralizing the scope of manifestation by want of sincerity or of fidelity in fulfilling the counsels received therein.
4. Carelessness regarding the Holy Sacraments, going for Confession and Communion as though they were ordinary acts; doing so out of routine or not to call the attention of the others.
5. Being in the Church without praying, saying one's prayers without attention and devotion; showing tiredness, carelessness and restlessness during the practices of piety with no external sign of devotion whatsoever.
6. Not giving that respect, submission and confidence prescribed by our Rules to one's superior; seeing in him not the representative of God, but the man with more or less learning and with more or less virtue. Maliciously to spy upon his ways, criticize his actions and thinking badly and speaking about him; readily listening to those who disapprove of his behaviour.
7. Completely omitting the general and particular examination of conscience, not using it to combat the ruling passion, so rendering useless this powerful means of sanctification.
8. Not worrying about venial sins; to commit them cold bloodedly and without any remorse.
9. Stifling the inspirations of grace, ignoring the good impulses, the attractions towards good, hushing up the salutary remorses; falling in this way, due

to the abuse of graces, into a state of blindness and insensibility that will be hard to change.

10. Though full of defects, doing nothing in order to get rid of them; receiving badly the advice of the good confreres and of the superiors, showing as if they are in the wrong.
11. Not devoting oneself to the duties of one's state; wasting time, neglecting the religious instruction of the pupils, not caring for Salesian assistance; or rather working with great interest, but only led by human motives.
12. Wanting to be popular; lack of modesty in looks; wishing to be liked, giving for this purpose an air of affectation and worldliness in his dress and gait.
13. Not caring for the Preventive System left to us by our father Don Bosco and which is founded on reason and charity; beating and ill-treating the boys, creating in this way an atmosphere of hatred, that will be fatal to them for the whole of their life and – God forbid! – perhaps the cause of their eternal damnation!
14. And last but not the least, indulging in sensual friendships which degrade the educator, destroy charity and scandalize and ruin vocations.



## HINT 8

### TO A SALESIAN WHO IS GROWING LAX

- After having so cheerfully borne the yoke of the Lord, are you going to slacken from your former fervour?
- Having commenced in the spirit are you going to end up in the flesh?

- Is God less lovable, less worthy of respect, of honour and of obedience than when you consecrated yourself to His service?
- Are you happier because you are less generous?
- Have you ever reflected where this wide road of laxity is leading you to?
- Tepidity has struck down the cedars of Lebanon! And you, a weak little shrub, how are you going to stand erect?
- Going from negligence to negligence, from fault to fault you will fall into the abyss of sin and you will lose your vocation.
- You will be lost as many others have been lost.
- Learn at the expense of others and let not others be tutored by your sad experience.
- Apply to yourself those terrible words that the Apostle St. John, on God's orders, jabbed at the Bishop of Ephesus: "I have this complaint against you: you have lost your first love. Realize from where you have fallen. Repent, and do what you used to do before. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place; this I will do, unless you repent," (Rev.2:4-5).
- Examine your conscience: you can still stop the rotting; soon it may not be possible. You have been warned! Think it over... Read *Imitation of Christ* (Book 1, Chapter 25).



## HINT 9

### ON PERSEVERANCE IN GENERAL

In the construction of a building what matters is not the laying of the foundation stone but the placing of the last stone. It is no use beginning well if you are going to finish badly. St. Paul began badly but ended well. Judas began well but ended disastrously!

The eternal crown is promised to those who strive lawfully up to the end of life.

“For ninety years I have served Jesus,” St. Polycarp the martyr answered the persecutor, “and he has never done me any wrong. Am I going to abandon Him just now? Am I going to stop serving Him? No, no; one thousand times no.”

You should use the same words in the critical moments of your life. But if you had the misfortune of falling back after having so generously begun, just imagine that one day you will be summoned to the presence of the One, “who shall disown before His heavenly Father whoever has disowned Him before men,” (Mt. 10:33).

You may justify your infidelity: “But obedience was too hard! They had no consideration for me. I had to bear too many humiliations, injustices and hardships. My job was simply unbearable. I was exposed to calumny and persecutions.”

Yes, yes; good excuses to be brought to a God who was stripped of everything, who was scourged, crowned with thorns and nailed to the Cross!

“It was fitting that Christ should suffer” (Heb. 2:10) and so enter into His glory -- and will you not suffer anything? Will the disciple be above his master? Will the saintly religious perhaps repent in Heaven for having sacrificed freedom,

pleasure and honour? And those who are lost forever in Hell for the passing and deceitful enjoyments of this world, what, in your opinion, will they be thinking now?

Ask yourself in the day of temptation: "At the moment of death what would I desire to have done now?" If you don't want to falter in the Judgement, remember the reward that is to follow. The labourer would lose his courage if it were not for the thought of his wages. You too think of the great reward that God prepares for you and so you will consider as little all that you have to suffer.

Look at Heaven: do not exchange it for the earth.

Look at Jesus Christ: do not abandon Him for the world.

Look at eternity: do not lose it for one fleeting moment.  
(Fr. De Ravignan SJ)

"So, run in such a way as to obtain the prize." (1 Cor. 9:24)

"Remain faithful even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life," (Rev. 2:10).



## HINT 10

### PERSEVERE IN THE VOWS AND THE VOCATION

My dear brother, listen to our good God who wishes your eternal salvation. His words are friendly and at the same time severe: "If you have vowed anything to God, defer not to pay it: for an unfaithful and foolish promise displeases Him," (Eccl. 5:4).

It is much better not to make any vow than to make it and not keep it: "It is dangerous for a man to retract after making a vow," (Prov. 20:25). The Lord curses through

prophet Malachi the liar who does not fulfill what he has promised (Mal. 1:14).

The loss of vocation is in fact a crime without excuse; a crime which is hateful and deplorable to all those who still keep a sense of honour. Remember, my dear brother that a vow is a promise made *to God*: to God mind you - and, if you do not keep your word to God, to whom will you keep it? To believe in a most just, all knowing, all powerful God and then to be too much at ease with Him, treating Him with such impudence, is just to play with Him, is just to forget that *Deus non irridetur*: God is not mocked (Gal. 6:7-8).

No amount of justification can explain away your failing to keep your word. God has recorded your obligation and will certainly demand it either to reward you or to punish you. One day, out of resentment and disgust you will irritably say: "I go away!" Of course, we know that man changes his will as easily as he does his dress; but God does not change. God is immutable: "I am the Lord and I change not," (Mal. 3:6).

Our saintly father Don Bosco, in his so-called Last Will or Spiritual Testament to the Salesians says: "Make firm and efficacious resolutions to remain staunch in your vocation until death. Be on the watch, so that neither the love of the world, nor the affection of parents, nor the desire of a more agreeable life induce you to make the great mistake of profaning the sacred vows and so transgressing the religious profession by which you are consecrated to God. Let none of us take back that which we have given to God."

And Don Rua in a circular says: "Those who tread underfoot their holy vows and cause tears to their mother the Congregation, who has undergone such sacrifices to bring them up, have a thousand motives to fear the punishments of God!"

By the way, I must warn you here that after the Decree *Auctis admodum*, the bishops are very careful before incardinating into their dioceses any ex-member of religious orders and congregations. We have seen instances of Salesian priests who, deaf to the voice of their superiors went forth from their congregation and had to spend months and years without finding a bishop to receive them. They were deprived of the celebration of Holy Mass, left to live in misery and being for all a matter of contempt. Still more: I recollect two Salesian priests who in the prime of their youth, after several years of pressure, obtained from their bishop of origin to be admitted into his secular clergy. But what happened? Before they could exercise any ministry, struck by sudden illness, they had to appear before the tribunal of God and render an account of their defection. It must be a terrible thing to be summoned by God in such a state.

The one who has no esteem for the grace of his religious vocation must fear eternal damnation. I would not speak like that by myself: but I am just quoting St. Bernard. Listen to what this Saint writes to a friend of his, who, having become a religious had passed to another religious order. He does not hesitate to threaten him with eternal damnation. He says “his soul for which Christ had died would perish; that he was guilty of an enormous crime.”

Do not think that you are okay because you have the apostolic indult, you really deserve divine verdict: "whoever has put his hand to the plough and looks back is not fit for the kingdom of God," (Lk. 9:62).

Consider what St. Alphonsus tells his religious exhorting them to persevere<sup>1</sup>: “Let us not forfeit that splendid crown that I can see prepared for all those who live in observance and

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<sup>1</sup> *The frightening statements on this subject, to be found here and specially in Hint 13, are to be tempered with, or, at any rate, viewed in the light of the observation made by Don Albera in his masterful letter on Vocations (Cir. Lett. Circ. Di Don P. Albera, page 449).*

die in the congregation. The one who abandons or loses his vocation signs with his own hand his sentence of damnation.”

“The eternal salvation of a religious is linked with his perseverance and his vocation.”

“I doubt much about the perseverance of those religious who do not possess a very special devotion to Our Lady.”

“To a crown of graces must correspond a crown of prayer and mortification.”

The holy Doctor used to call the dispensation formularies the passport to hell.

Do not be astonished that a saint spoke like that; reflect that those words are just an echo of those tremendous words of Our Saviour, reported above: “whoever has put his hand to the plough,” etc. It is the same as to say: “The one who loses his vocation runs the risk of losing his heaven as well.” And what should we answer to those who say, “Oh, when I made my profession I was a child: I did not know all the implication.” This is the eternal refrain repeated in all tones by those who try to justify their perjury.

A poor excuse indeed! In fact, the Church has forestalled it enjoining that there should be one full year of novitiate, and declaring invalid those vows made before the age of 16. What you have now, my dear brother, is not more knowledge but more malice. You dropped prayer, you neglected your duties, you tore to pieces the angelic virtue; you have not corresponded to your vocation, and God has withdrawn from you. Do not say, then, that you have no vocation; rather say that you have cast it away and that you have become unworthy of it.

The apples that fall from the tree before season are almost always worm-eaten.



Someone might say: “I am all right. I have been lawfully dispensed and therefore I have nothing to fear.”

Well, ordinarily the cases of applying for dispensation for a legitimate reason are rare. In most cases the Church grants a dispensation in order that those unfortunate souls should not become the scourge and the scandal for their community, just as Moses granted to the Israelites the issuing of the divorce notice because of the hardness of their hearts. “*Ad duritiam cordis.*”

It is just like the permission that the father in Our Lord’s parable granted to the prodigal son. It is just a camouflaged infidelity: some excuses were found for dispensations, so hiding a bad behaviour. Man can deceive himself and other men, but God cannot be deceived. “*Deus intuetur cor.*”



## HINT 11

### ON THE SAME SUBJECT

It was an adage of the monks of old: “*Semel monachus, semper monachus,*” which means that, once you are consecrated to God, the agreement remains for ever; as long as God will be God.

And yet there are some who, for, some motive or other, put at stake their vocation as though it were a trifle, subject to one’s own whims. This will not do; the matter of vocation was resolved and decided upon once and for all when we professed.

The vow of obedience and the commitment to remain a Religious until death should not be made to depend on the condition that our superiors are infallible or impeccable.

“The congregation,” someone else says, “does not know how to make the most of my talents. I am kept ‘under the bushel’ in humble jobs. I know myself and I think I am capable of higher things.”

Good heavens! Where on earth did you get such a profound humility, my dear brother? Have you forgotten that the dignity and the greatness of a religious consist first of all in being humble and faithful to his vocation? Don’t you know that nobody is necessary to God? But on the contrary, we are in need of fulfilling His Will as shown by our superiors, if we want to enter Heaven?

“The honour of a religious” St. Theresa says “is to shun every honour.” The honour of a religious consists in imitating the humiliations of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who licked the dust for the love of us and was filled with humiliations.

“But what do you want, Father”- a third one says- “when we are fed up we burst!”

You may be very much fed up! I tell you: you know that you have promised and sworn to God to be at His service; if duty and God forbid you to break away, what can justify your action? The one who is aware of the sacredness of his vows remains at his post; and if strength fails him, he will appeal to the most sublime and generous feelings of his heart. He will appeal first of all to the spirit of faith and to prayer. He will seek strength in meditation and in the contemplation of Our Lord’s sufferings. Very often, no doubt, He too was (may we be permitted in all reverence to say if) fed up and very much, and yet He did not relinquish His post. “Let Him get down from His Cross” they were shouting to Him. But His vocation of Redeemer demanded from Him that He should remain on the Cross and He did remain: “obedient unto death, even death on a cross.” (Phil. 2:8).

No doubt the life of a good religious is a cross, but a cross, as the Imitation of Christ tells us, that leads to Heaven. Our saintly Father clearly hints at this in his dream of the bower of roses.

And what when one's health causes doubt about vocation? Want of health is no motive at all to justify want of perseverance. St. Alphonsus gives us a safe rule; place yourself in the hands of your superiors, and do not return to the world unless your superiors do not insistently advise you - allowing is not enough - to take such step. What matters, my dear brother, is that you should not be a religious by halves. A half-hearted religious will soon be no religious at all. The one who is a religious by half runs the risk of some day or other throwing his habit to the thistles. When one ceases officially to be a religious, it shows that he had long before ceased being a religious in his heart or was hardly a religious.

The contrary happens to the one who is a religious in truth. For him such a temptation involves no danger, because either it never comes, or he throws it off at once without difficulty. Let us then be truthful religious and we shall have nothing to fear.



## HINT 12

### **SOME REFLECTIONS TO HELP YOU TO PERSEVERE**

#### **(How to deal with temptations against your vocation)**

1. God in His infinite mercy has given you the grace of your vocation that you may become a Saint, and save many souls. The recipient of such extraordinary graces must render a rigorous account of them; and if he does not correspond, God might easily abandon him to his “reproachable behaviour.” This made St. Paul cry, “With fear and trembling work out your salvation,” (Phil. 2:12).

2. Remember that “No man putting his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the Kingdom of God,” (Lk. 9:62). These are the words of Our Divine Master, who said also: “He that loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me,” (Mt. 10:37).

3. All the expenses incurred for your sake by the Congregation would be of no use for the salvation of souls. It can be considered as a sacrilegious theft that will be never made good.

4. Ask yourself if those ideas of abandoning your vocation come after Communion or after a fervent prayer. See whether, on the contrary, they are not caused by lukewarmness, by the neglect of your duties, by infidelity to grace, by some serious fault!

5. Ask from yourself what at the moment of death you will like to have done now. Think what a strict account you will have to render if you are unfaithful to your vocation.

6. Inform the superior frankly and immediately about your temptations against vocation; do not wait to do so until the evil is already irreparable.

7. Do not take any sudden decision under the influence of a strong emotion or of a severe confusion; but rather pray, receive the Sacraments, implore the grace of God, and look at things through the prism of faith.

8. Do not listen to wicked and blind self-love that wants you to turn on your heels. Thus you will avoid the irreparable consequences of an imprudent and unwarranted step.

9. If the religious state seems hard to you, think of what Jesus suffered for you. Think of the shortness of life and the length of the eternal reward.

10. If the pleasures and goods of the world seduce you, try to realize how ephemeral, vain, and short-lived those pleasures and goods are.

11. In difficult moments think of the serious consequences of abandoning your vocation, think of the advantages of religious life, of the dangers of the world, of the necessity of fulfilling God's will, of the last things, and of the love that Jesus bears for us.

12. Remember the motives that moved you to enter religious life, the sentiments you experienced, the good dispositions in which you received the holy habit and uttered your holy vows.

13. It will help you much to bear in mind that all founders beginning with St. Benedict and St. Bernard have guaranteed eternal salvation to their sons if they persevere faithfully in religious life till the end. And our dear father St. John Bosco said on a solemn occasion these words; "Our Lady assured me that She will look with a special benevolence upon the sons

of this Oratory and She will save all those who shall belong to our Congregation.”

14. Daily thank Our Good Lord for having called you to the Salesian life. Often invoke Our Lady Help of Christians, St. Joseph, St. Aloysius, St. John Bosco and your Guardian Angel in order to obtain the grace of living and dying a saintly Salesian. Often repeat with the Prophet: “One thing I have asked of the Lord, this will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,” (Ps. 26: 4).



### **HINT 13**

#### **DOCTRINE OF THE SAINTS ON THE NECESSITY OF PERSEVERANCE**

##### **WHAT A MISFORTUNE IT IS TO LOSE OUR VOCATION!**

1. St. Gregory, writing to some monks who were about to abandon their holy state and re-enter the world, says: “Pray and reflect before God and you will surely harbour other feelings. None but the devil could have put into your mind the thoughts that are troubling you. Indeed to be about to relinquish that state in which God’s mercy has placed you is just to renounce your eternal salvation.”

2. The abandonment of our vocation is the devil’s strongest move for the damnation of a soul. That is why he tries so openly to discourage the young religious. (St. Alphonsus)

3. To be voluntarily unfaithful to one’s vocation is tantamount to throwing oneself off the way to salvation. A

man in such circumstances is like a fish out of water, like a soldier without a weapon, like a flock without a shepherd.

4. According to St. Alphonsus, vocation and predestination is practically the same thing; and he adds: “To be called to the religious life is not an ordinary grace, but almost extraordinary favour.”

Let us then pray to Our Lord to make us understand its value; for not to correspond with this divine calling is to expose ourselves to eternal damnation.

5. Even in this life, the Lord severely punishes those who abandon the state to which they are called. St. Alphonsus says, “I shall never grow tired of repeating how many are those who have damned themselves, for not being faithful to their vocation!” When the chain of graces is broken, only ruin ensues.

6. Infidelity in vocation is a sign of condemnation. “No man putting his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the Kingdom of Heaven,” Our Lord says.

St. Lawrence Justinian writes: “As the call to the religious life is a sign of being chosen for heaven, so is its abandonment a sign of reprobation, because the one who separates himself from the communion of Saints on earth will be excluded from the glory of the Saints in Heaven.”

7. “The wind does not carry away the wheat, but the chaff; the storm does not root out well-rooted trees, but those that are not. So too good religious do not leave their communities,” says St. Cyprian, “only those who are spoiled or have lost the use of reason are capable of such madness.”

8. Three disastrous consequences follow the abandonment of vocation, Tronson says:

- The forfeiture of the graces of state.
- A great number of grievous sins and a miserable life.
- Great probability of eternal damnation.

Temptations against vocation may grow very strong amongst tenderfoot religious. This need not cast you down. They are just a trial and a test of your vocation; the devil tries to lead astray those whom he knows to have been called.

“Three things,” St. Leo says, “are necessary for a young religious so tempted in order to ensure his perseverance: humility, obedience and the opening of his heart to his superiors.” The devil can neither drag down the humble, nor deceive the obedient, nor disturb the simple heart that unveils his temptations to his superiors.

9. Infidelity to vocation brings about an upsetting of God’s plans.

In fact God had called that confrere to religious life in order that he might give Christian education to a number of boys devoid of such benefit. Now, if that confrere is unfaithful to his vocation, if he abandons it or changes it, what will happen to those poor boys whose salvation was linked to his faithfulness? This thought made St. Paul cry: “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!” and made St. Francis Xavier exclaim: “I would not believe I could avoid Hell if I refused to go to preach the Gospel in Japan.”

10. Listen to the teachings of St. Francis de Sales on this matter: “We must remain in the boat where we are, in order to finish our voyage to our eternal life; we must remain therein voluntarily and with love even though it might appear to us that we have been put on board by the hand of man and not by God Himself. In fact God wants us to remain voluntarily once we are established therein.”



“For Heaven’s sake, beware of going away, as there is no choice, and as your abandoning the ship would mean your perdition.”

“Look upon whatsoever induces you to change place as a temptation of the devil, because as long as you are looking elsewhere than your present place you will never put yourself to do the good you ought to.”

“This point is of such importance that I would readily write it in my own blood.”

“There is no vocation without troubles, displeasures and hardships. The one who does not reconcile himself to all these will never enjoy any rest. Those who have fever do not find any place comfortable. A quarter of an hour in one bed and they would change it already for other. It is not their bed but their fever that is constantly torturing them.”

“How are we going to show our love to the One Who suffered so much for us except in adversities, oppositions and rejections?”

“We must put on our head between the thorns of difficulties; we must let our heart be pierced by the spear of contradiction; we must drink gall and vinegar; we must taste absinth and aloes because God wants it.”

“Therefore if you are tempted regarding your vocation, do not move one inch before having looked to eternity, before having taken advice from some servant of God. In this way the devil will not deceive you. Deal with these temptations as one would with that of heresy, of despair or of impurity. Do not listen. Combat it with repeated protests of life-long fidelity to your vocation,” (Letters of St. Francis de Sales).



## HINT 14

### CO-OPERATE FAITHFULLY WITH GRACE

“Being God’s co-workers, we beg you; let it not be in vain that you receive the grace of God” (2Cor. 6:1). In order to follow this advice of St. Paul, understand that our guilt as well as our danger comes more from the abuse of grace than from anything else.

Indeed nothing can be compared to the dignity of grace. Grace is the gift of God *par excellence*. It is the spring source of all virtues and the principle of all merits; it is the support of our weak nature, the pledge of our glory, the precious seed of a happy eternity; it is the prize of the sufferings of a God, and the fruit of the blood of Jesus; so that all the grace we receive are just like drops of that adorable blood flowing on us.

In the religious state graces are most abundant and precious. But never forget that: “of every one will be demanded in proportion to what he has received,” (Lk. 12:48). Do you often think of the account that you will have to render of all the graces that He has lavished on you for your eternal salvation in the Religious life?

God will tell you: “I sent you bright lights to illumine the path of your duties; did you follow them?”

“I have whispered so many instructions regarding your practice of virtue and being united with me; did you obey?”

“How often you heard my words! How many readings and meditations, how much good advice you heard and holy examples you witnessed! Did you profit by them? How many confessions you made and how many communions you received! Did they make you any better?”

To resist so many graces for the sake of some slight miserable satisfaction, is it not a want of fidelity to divine goodness? Is it not a terrible fault? Does it not deserve the terrible reproach that Our Lord addressed to the ungrateful cities? “Alas for you Chorazin and Bethsaida! If the miracles worked in you had taken place in Tyre and Sidon, the people there would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.” (Mt. 11:21)

The abuse of grace constitutes not only a great fault, but also a grave danger. One of the most tremendous ways God has for punishing unfaithful souls is the same punishment that is meant for those who abuse grace. They become insensible, grace abandons them and yet they sleep unconcerned in their tepidity and lethargy. This is the most terrible, the most just and the most frequent punishment of God.

Moses, David, the prophets and all the holy writers often quote threats similar to these: “Oh, Israel I have spoken to you and you have not listened; I have called you and you have not answered. Now my time has come. I shall hand you over to the desires of your heart. I shall order the clouds not to pour their rain on you, not to send the heavenly dew on the ungrateful land. I shall remove the lampstand from the altar. The Kingdom of God will be taken away from you.”

It is amazing to see how God bears with such patience so many sinners and tepid souls. Examine your heart and see whether you have not at some time deserved that God should withdraw His graces from you. Often reflect on these important matters and renew your sincere resolutions to cooperate with grace promptly, generously and constantly.



## HINT 15

### KEEP YOUR RULE FAITHFULLY

A religious will be faithful and fervent, will esteem his vocation and will faithfully fulfill his duties, as long as he keeps the Rules. He will not grow lax or get lost as long as he does not neglect the Rules.

Without doubt the Rules are the most meritorious, the safest, and the easiest of the penances.

They are the most meritorious because they do not allow a religious to belong to himself. They place him in the necessity of conforming always to the holy Will of God.

They are the safest, because they are not dependent on our whims, nor are they exposed to vain glory and consequently are illusion-proof.

They are the easiest, inasmuch as they require only one grain of goodwill to be properly kept. And so the exercise of self-denial becomes possible even to the weakest and least energetic character. That is the meaning of St. Berchman's well known expression: "The common life is the most perfect of all mortifications." And St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi teaches the same doctrine in these words: "Esteem obedience and regular life more than the highest contemplation, because every action in religious life is ordained and regulated by the Holy Spirit, and therefore, when practising them you are sure that you are doing the holy Will of God; whereas when doing other particular exercises (no matter how good and holy they are) you cannot enjoy this advantage."

Jesus told St. Margaret Alacoque: "You can please Me in no better way than by following with constant and simple fidelity the path of the Holy Rule. In fact the slightest faults against it are of much weight in My presence. The religious

betrays himself and goes far from Me when he starts another path to reach Me than that of the exact observance of his Rules. Once you understand this happiness of being sure of doing the Will of God, your love for the Rule will know no bounds.”

The words of our Lord that “those who are faithful in small things will be faithful in great things, as well as those who are unfaithful in little things will be unfaithful in great things” (Lk. 16:10) will make you detest the slightest breach of your Rules and Regulations. If Judas could reach such a degree of perdition, and if so many religious have been lost, it is because they took no account of little faults. Every voluntary and unjustified breach of the Rule causes a diminution or subtraction of the divine grace. On the contrary every fulfillment of the smallest detail of the rule entails an increase of grace and of merit for heaven.

Moreover it is in small things the fidelity of a good servant is most evident. That is why the Lord, on the Last Day, will tell those who have served Him faithfully: “Well done, good and faithful servant, since you have been faithful in little things, I will entrust much more to you. Come and share the joy of your master” (Mt. 25:21). Show your generosity then towards God by meticulously keeping even the most insignificant rules; for instance, that of silence, punctuality in getting up from bed, in going for the practices of piety, never neglecting assistance, never keeping any money with you, etc. God who cannot be surpassed in generosity will eventually reward you as He has promised.

“How many hours of life do the doctors give me?” asked Don Rua on the last day of his life. “Three hours, Father,” they told him. “Well then,” he added, “let somebody come and read the meditation to me; I have not

made it yet. It will be the last.” What regularity! That is, my dear brother, the best way to sanctify yourself, to edify those around you, to persevere in your vocation and to have a happy death.

St. Francis de Sales puts his seal on the subject saying that the peace and the salvation of a religious are linked to the faithful observance of the Rule.



## **HINT 16**

### **PRESERVE THE SPIRIT OF PIETY**

St. Paul says, “Piety is useful in every way, holding promise for the present life and for the life to come,” (I Tim. 4:8). A pious Salesian excels in the exact performance of his religious practices: at prayer time you can see in him a man who is absorbed in what he is praying; the reception of the Sacraments is always for him an all important affair; all that is connected with religion is for him an object of veneration and love. You can make it out by observing how he makes the sign of the cross, how he takes Holy Water, how he kisses a medal, or venerates a statue or an image; his demeanour in the church is a matter of edification for the casual onlooker. He is so familiar to raising his heart to God by means of ejaculatory prayer that his whole day becomes a constant prayer.

Without piety you cannot keep your vocation; without piety you will neither have the consolations of your state, nor fulfill your duties.

Without piety you will not be able to practice the virtues that the Lord expects from you.

Without piety you will never succeed in doing the good you ought to, because only a pious Salesian can have a special influence on the youth.

Without piety you will certainly not persevere in your holy state.

What Solomon said of wisdom can be said of piety: "All good things came along together with it."

Piety wins over the esteem of men and brings down the blessings of God. It makes us affable, selfless, humble, charitable and ready for everything. A pious Salesian is that tree of which the Prophet speaks: "A tree that, planted by the stream of water, bears fruit at all seasons," (Ps. 1:3).

"Piety," says St. Francis de Sales, "is the perfection of charity." "If charity is milk, piety is its cream. If charity is a plant, then piety is its flower; if the former is a precious stone, the latter is the brightness of its facets; if charity is an excellent perfume, piety is its fragrance. It is indeed a fragrance of such sweetness that by it men are comforted and Angels are made to rejoice."

A pious Salesian is a treasure in his community. He spreads around him the sweet fragrance of Christ; he is a source of edification for his confreres and pupils; he is the consolation and the hope of his superiors.

How happy is the Salesian who has received from God the gift and spirit of prayer! What a treasure it is in all his needs! What a comfort in his tribulations! What a powerful weapon in his struggles! What a shelter in his danger! What a sure remedy in all his troubles! What a rich source of consolation and peace in the midst of his trials!

Piety is the greatest of all goods. It looms far above all talents and all external qualities, for, in the words of Bossuet, "Piety is the whole of man."

But do not deceive yourself. Unless you keep piety with great care and feed it constantly, it will, very soon, die out. You have to feed your piety by approaching the Sacraments with fervor, by performing your practices of piety with diligence, by practicing mortification with generosity, by being recollected and silent; and by walking in the presence of God and carrying out all your actions with the spirit of faith.



## **HINT 17**

### **DILIGENCE IN YOUR PRACTICES OF PIETY**

Never has it been known that a Salesian grew lax and abandoned virtue if he performed his practices of piety well. But, as soon as indifference makes a breach the virus of laxity begins to spread. You must, then, set your practices of piety in the first place and never allow any negligence or omission in this regard.

Sometimes we hear people say: “I cannot make my meditation or my spiritual reading because duty takes my time, or obedience keeps me busy.” My dear brother, it is not obedience that made you drop those practices of piety, but your negligence and laziness. The practices must be fulfilled or made up for in some other way. We can always fit in meals and sleep. For these things we can always find time. Your superior does not want you to omit your practices of piety; but, at most, when they are crowded out by your duty or by the exercise of charity, they may be delayed; but, at any rate, they must be made up for.

That is why I tell you that if at the slightest provocation you are ready to drop or shorten them; if you do not bring any fervor to them; if your willingness to please God is practically



nil, then you have already fallen into a deplorable state of laxity.

Ask that Salesian who, after having set his hands to the plough looks behind: "Brother, earlier you have been so obedient, so humble, so mortified and modest, you readily corrected your defects. Earlier you used to have so much delicacy of conscience and so much zeal in teaching catechism to your students. And above all, you used to be so cheerful and happy in your vocation. How was it possible then?"

And he will answer: "Because then I prayed."

My dear brother, it is a great truth, proven by experience, that a pious Salesian means a good religious, and vice versa.

"The one who prays well will be saved," says St. Alphonsus, "and one who does not pray will be lost." In the same way we can say that the Salesian who prays sanctifies himself and the Salesian who does not pray will lose his vocation and his soul. As the brook stops flowing down when the spring dries up; as the fire goes out when the fuel runs short, so too when there is no prayer, grace does not come down from Heaven.

What water is for the fish and air for the birds and root for the trees prayer is for the Salesian.

Therefore, examine yourself on all these important points and put yourself to your practices of piety as in the time of your novitiate. In fact they are more necessary now to you than then, because your needs have grown and your spiritual resources have diminished.

With exactitude, try to be with the community at the beginning of every practice of piety; do not shun the community; never allow yourself any useless talk or joke during such a precious time; never omit any of them without the permission of your superior; do not overlook the fact that amongst your daily duties this is the first and the most

essential. Do not forget that prayer honours you, that it places you in touch with the best of Masters, with the most tender of Fathers; that prayer is the channel through which abundant graces for all your needs will flow in to your soul.

And in order that prayer may bring about such a happy result, perform it attentively and devoutly, with faith, with humility, and with perseverance. To overcome repugnance and dryness, take practical resolutions and see in what way you can put them into practice.

Let me finish this hint with a telling saying of St. John Bosco: *“Do not expect great things from one who does not know how to speak with God.”*



## **HINT 18**

### **HAVE COMPLETE CONFIDENCE IN THE SUPERIOR**

Your heart must be as transparent as crystal to your superiors. If you make yourself known to your superiors who have the obligation to guide you; if you bring to them with frank simplicity all your difficulties, troubles and temptations and then practice with docile humility the hints and counsels they give you, your perseverance is assured.

In no stage of life is manifestation so necessary as in the first years of your Salesian life. Weak and inexperienced as you are, you need a guide, a consoler, a support.

Do not pay attention to the natural dislike or to the illusions of self-love. The devil knows that this is a powerful weapon to smash all the temptations. So he does his best to make manifestation appear disgusting and irksome.

But conquer yourself with generosity. This act of mortification and humility will draw heavenly blessing on you.

How many have been lost on account of this want of confidence in their Rector! Those who pretend to be a guide unto themselves and do not let their superiors guide them will certainly fall. They need no devil to tempt them as they are devils unto themselves.

Moreover constant experience has proved that those wanting in confidence with their superiors often confide in some companion who, usually, does not happen to be one of the most exemplary. And as that ‘counselor’ does not possess the grace of state, rather than advising them well, by flattering them he pushes them further to their ruin.

Thus arises much ill-humour, countless murmurings, open rebellions and scandals in the community.

Therefore if you want to persevere in your vocation, make your manifestation well. Do not wait for the time allotted to you to speak about your soul; go to see your Rector as often as the interests of your soul demand it.

Canon Law says that religious are not bound to declare in manifestation matters of conscience, that is to say that which is a matter of confession. But they are not forbidden to do so; rather, on the contrary, they are earnestly advised to, as this practice is of enormous value for perfection.

These are the words of Pope Benedict XV, the promulgator of the Code of Canon Law, to the superiors of the Society of Jesus, “It was not our intention to forbid, or in any way disapprove of this practice of giving an account of one’s conscience to one’s superior. This practice indeed is highly recommended by such illustrious saints as your founder, St. Ignatius. We ardently desire that all religious should keep a practice so profitable for spiritual advancement. What is

not our intention is to impose it as compulsory. The Superior indeed cannot demand such a manifestation of conscience.”

Then, if the Holy See, in the Code of Canon Law, praises manifestation, whoever recommends it conforms himself to the mind of the Church, but there is no compulsion.

Rev. Fr. Ferreres, the theologian, thus winds up the matter: “As anyone can see, it is only forbidden to the superior – not to the spiritual father or to the Novice Master, if a priest - to induce the subjects to make their manifestation of conscience. The manifestation being a good thing according to Canon Law, anyone who is not a Superior could exhort and recommend it provided it is not done under the direct or indirect pressure of the superior.”

“The more you are in touch with your superiors,” Don Bosco says, “the more useful and easy your manifestation of conscience will be.”

In order to render your manifestation ever easier and more profitable, try your best to root out every obstacle that the devil may suggest to you against the Superior. Drive away any judgment contrary to his and check every internal or external criticism of his orders. Overcome the repugnance and check any opposition you may feel against his advice. Do not tolerate spurious reasons, pretexts or tricks to take the upper hand to dodge his desires. All this would be the ruin of obedience, the end of peace, of spiritual joy, and of union of hearts; in one word, this would be the plague of your community. Don Bosco used to say: “I tremble for the future of our Congregation if this most important point so essential for the upkeep of religious spirit among Salesians, comes to be forgotten.



## HINT 19

### **PRACTISE HUMILITY EARNESTLY**

Want of humility has driven out many from religious life. Do you really want to cooperate with grace and attain the purpose of your vocation? Be humble.

Through humility God came into the world, and through humility will man go to God. Through pride heaven remained empty and through humility it must be filled again. Humility is most esteemed by God, because humility is truth and justice and consequently it gives the greatest glory to Him. That is why a Saint says: "In three places God dwells in a particular way: In heaven, in the Holy Eucharist and in a humble heart." In fact, when we humble ourselves we empty our heart of our selfishness, thereby making room for God to dwell in it. And God's dwelling therein is the cause why so many extraordinary graces are given to the humble, so that he soon is enriched with every virtue, with true peace and with a right to heaven.

Pride, on the contrary, takes us away from God and deprives us of his grace. God resists the proud. Pride makes it impossible for us to practice other virtues, it prepares us for most shameful falls, vitiates all the good we do, enslaves us to the devil, robs us of our peace and seriously endangers our eternal happiness.

Saint Gregory has written a sentence that should make us tremble: "The clearest sign of condemnation is pride." And the Holy Spirit says in the Book of Proverbs: "Every proud man is an abomination to the Lord." (Prov. 16:5)

Fight, then, such a dangerous foe with all the energy of your soul. Ward off any thought or word infected with pride. If, when about to start some work you discover that it is prompted by pride, drop it. If the work is good or compulsory, purify your intention in order not to lose its merit.

Get accustomed never to speak about yourself, whether for good or evil. Train yourself to bear, without frowning, contradiction, reproach and contempt. To believe we are humble whilst having a horror for humiliation is an extreme self-deception.

If pride is your ruling passion, take it as the subject of your particular examen for a long time. Do not let one meditation, or visit, or Communion pass without insistently begging from God, through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians, the gift of true humility.

Be persuaded, my dear Brother, that, if you give way to pride, there will be no joy in your piety; you will find yourself cold and dry, an easy prey to discouragement, rash and presumptuous, foolishly vain, touchy, obstinate, jealous and ambitious, tenacious in your resentments and open indeed to every vice; whereas if you are truly humble there will be no end to your consolation and heavenly blessings.

Do not imitate those who believe themselves as to be something, even claiming attention and privileges on account of some ability of theirs or of some success in their work. Poor people! In this they precisely show that they have little sense because “to glory in some ability received from God is just like priding oneself on borrowed money,” says St. Gregory, “and to be proud over some success is as though a brush should glory itself on some masterpiece it has painted.” “Wisdom resides with the humble” says the Holy Spirit (Prov. 11:2). Humility is the thermometer of sanctity. The Salesian who is superior in humility is superior in everything.

“You are neither better because they praise you nor worse because they blame you,” says St. Francis of Assisi, “What you are in God’s esteem, that is what you really are, and nothing more.”



## HINT 20

### WELCOME CORRECTION AND PROFIT BY IT

The acid test for the humility of a Salesian is his reaction to correction; if he admits his faults and is ready to make them good. For many the stumbling block is their inability to accept well the corrections given by the Superiors; they have lots of excuses to oppose them; they answer with resentment and sarcasm, and in the end, either they utterly ignore the corrections or they carry them out in such a way that the Superiors have to repent for having advised them at all.

What depths of pride in such behavior! Who cannot see that? Let me tell you that whoever does like that is already well advanced on the way to laxity and to the loss of vocation. Can there be any greater misfortune for a Salesian than to force his Superiors to keep silent about averting a greater evil, as they anticipate that the religious would rather grow worse by the correction? ... And what can be said about the guesses and tormenting of one's mind seeking to find out who has carried the report to the Superior, and then the attempts to take revenge; the grumblings and complaining about the correction received? And what can be said about that little lie which is always in readiness to explain away a fault? ... Adam and Eve behaved like that with the result that, instead of obtaining pardon, they simply aggravated their sin.

Do not imitate them, my dear brother, but rather accept with humility, nay with gratitude, whatever advice your good Superiors may give you. Try your best to put their counsels into practice. Let them shape you; do not resist. Be in their hands as clay in the hands of the potter.

“Do you know what a community is?” asks St. Francis de Sales, “It is an academy of correction, where everyone must

let himself be shaped, carved and polished so that he may be fitted and attached more closely to the holy Will of God.”

To wish to be corrected is clear evidence of perfection. A community is a spiritual hospital and the patients therein are naturally supposed to wish to be cured; no wonder then they must be ready to accept injections, bleeding and cuttings and all the bitterness of medicines. Either cure or death; and in order to be cured, correction is so necessary that we should entreat the Superiors never, on any account, to spare it.

Any undue consideration on the part of the superiors could be fatal to us and deprive us of the benefit of correction. God will demand a most rigorous account from those Superiors who do not correct their subjects out of fear.

St. Alphonsus, in a circular addressed to his religious, thus expresses himself: “I solemnly declare that on the Day of Judgment I will accuse before the tribunal of Christ those Superiors who, in order not to displease some subject, put up with their defects, causing thereby harm and laxity in the congregation.”

The one who avoids correction deprives himself of many graces, offends God, scandalizes his confreres, displeases his superiors and will never make any headway either in the discharge of his duties, or in the reform of his character, or in the way of perfection.





## **HINT 21**

### **CAREFULLY PRACTISE RELIGIOUS POVERTY**

You were taught in the Novitiate to esteem holy poverty; that poverty which St. Ambrose calls the mother and nurse of all virtues. Now that you are in communities, do not be less ardent in practising it.

Let me warn you that perhaps no other virtue is so much forgotten as this by some religious who, either through malice or culpable ignorance easily trample on it. Obviously they have forgotten how far their vow reaches and what duties it entails. Lacking in serious examen, or led by selfishness under the guise of necessity, or perhaps despising small things, they easily dismiss as scruples any remorse they may experience.

Never allow yourself to give away, receive, buy, lend or dispose of anything without the permission of your superior.

Never keep money for any reason whatsoever. Whatever you receive under any head must go to the common fund of the community. You have no longer any right to it, be it a donation from your relatives or the fruit of certain ministry. A religious can possess nothing: neither more nor less; and if he does, no matter how little it is, even if it were a few coins, he breaks his vow. It will be a light matter, but he breaks his vow!

You are bound to take care of the objects you use because they belong to God.

If your clothes are torn, have them stitched at once to prevent further damage.

Look after the things of the house and try to avoid damage or loss.

If you keep superfluous things for your use, if you hoard books you do not really need, if you keep them longer than required, you go against poverty. Good religious are very observant of these points.

See what Don Rua says in his Circular No. 34: "Poverty is always the most vital and at the same time, the most delicate point of religious life. It is the touchstone whereby you distinguish a flourishing community from one which is lax ; the fervent religious from the negligent. Alas! Poverty will be the stumbling block on which so many generous resolutions and so many vocations that were admirable in their beginnings will be shattered. The one who esteems poverty as of little account is the greatest enemy of the congregation, because by going against its rules he attempts to destroy its spirit. He is a scandal as his sin cannot be hidden, but rather it is so obvious that his bad example will be fatal and might assume large proportions."

He, who does not care about poverty is always afraid that he may lack the necessities and clings to everything that he can get hold of like a drowning man. He pretends he wants nothing and at the same time longs to possess all, even that which is superfluous. They let their heart be attached to a room, to a piece of cloth, to a trifle. They put all their interests in those things like a miser with his treasures.

"A sheet of tin is as good as a sheet of gold to prevent you seeing the sun," says Fr. Rodriguez. In the same way, a religious who does not love poverty will never be able to be united with God.

How painful it is to see a religious not being able to be free from the thin thread that binds him, he who on entering religious life broke free from much more thick chains of blood relations and free will! You certainly remember the fable of the fly that, after having tried the patience of a lion, was, while

singing victory entangled in a cobweb and ended miserably. That is the image of a religious who after having abandoned the whole world succumbs to love of little things.

Never, then, give way to the temptation of keeping money, whether with you or with others, be it only a few rupees, without the legitimate permission of your superiors. Many are the pretexts that the devil and the spirit of greediness will suggest, but never listen to them. Rather adopt the safe policy of possessing nothing and disposing of nothing without permission. I can assure you that many have lost themselves for this reason, losing the Kingdom of Heaven that God has promised to those who are poor in spirit.

Let me conclude by summarizing the different degrees of perfection in the practice of holy poverty. Taken from Fr. Cotal's Catechism of Vows, they may serve as a subject of examen.

The first degree consists in really renouncing all temporal goods without disposing of anything unless with the permission of the superiors. (This is the matter of the vow)

The second consists in being content with necessities only, doing away with every inordinate liking and anything superfluous. (This is the compulsory part of the matter of the virtue)

The third consists in choosing always the worst in the community, rejoicing to get the worst in clothes, room, etc.

The fourth consists in liking to be deprived even of necessities (this of course without doing any harm to one's health); and rejoicing when Our Lord makes us partakers of his poverty.

Now, as regards the internal practice, a religious who has the spirit of poverty will be attached to nothing and will always be ready to be deprived of everything.

He will be pleased to consider himself a beggar who gets all by way of alms, being grateful for whatever is given to him, and far from believing himself wronged whenever anything is refused to him.

He will be detached from all earthly goods, from all the pleasure and comforts deriving therefrom. And this he will do on a principle of mortification and penance in atonement for his sins, to secure the happiness of heaven, and in order to be more like unto Christ and to imitate his poverty and to place all his affections in him, without exception.



## **HINT 22**

### **YOU MUST EXCEL IN THE PRACTICE OF CHASTITY**

Chastity must be the ornament and the perfume of the soul of every Salesian. We are temples of God, shrines of the Holy Spirit, the chosen portion of Christ and the most favoured children of Mary Help of Christians. We often approach the Eucharistic Table and are fed on the flesh of the Immaculate Lamb. Our duty then is to avoid even the shadow of evil. We must lead an angelic life in a mortal body. To us in a special way God can say: “Be holy as I am Holy.”

By the fact that the Salesians are children of a father who distinguished himself among the other saints in the practice of this virtue, they must be clearly a chaste generation. The Salesian must have this virtue as his distinguishing mark, and must endeavor to make it shine even in the most insignificant actions.

“You must behave in such a way,” Don Bosco used to say to his sons, “that nobody may have any ground to harbour any suspicion about you regarding the vice contrary to the angelic virtue; because such suspicion, no matter how ill grounded, would harm your holy mission than any other crime that could be imputed to you.”

Work and prayer! Behold the great motto of the Salesian under whose flag the angelic virtue is safeguarded. Experience has often shown that when neglect of our duties and prayer appear, joy and taste for the things of God disappear, and sadness and melancholy slowly eat away the soul. And the devil, on the other hand, who is always watching to cause our perdition, welcomes such a favorable chance and attacks the poor Salesian with sensual temptations.

It is a well attested fact that the religious, as every child of Adam, must have somewhere his consolation. If he does not find it in God, he will seek it among his creatures. If he does not find it in the spirit, he will look for it in the flesh.

The vice opposite to wisdom, the gift of the Holy Spirit, is precisely impurity. When this appears, the former will immediately disappear.

St. Paul expresses this truth very clearly when stating that an animal man cannot understand the things of God. King Solomon with all his wisdom felt the need to raise temples to idols when he became a slave to impurity. Similarly, a Salesian who does not give importance to his commitment to chastity will fail to value the importance of his vocation. I told you that the apples that fall from the tree before season are not the good ones, but those that are worm-eaten.

As long as a religious seeks God in the fulfillment of his duties and in piety, he will be humble and chaste; as soon as he goes astray from that path, he will become proud and

sensual, joining the number of those who, according to the prophet, become useless (Rom. 3:12).

In order, then, to prevent a drop in the thermometer of chastity, carefully keep the warmth of assiduous prayer and of that activity demanded by your duties, and flee from idleness which is the sworn enemy of this virtue.

*By work* we also mean the constant mortification of the bodily senses because they, putting us in touch with the external objects, are the means that the devil uses to introduce solicitation to sin into our soul. Hence the obligation of subduing and mortifying our senses according to that graphic expression of St. Paul: “always bearing the mortification of Jesus in our bodies.” (2 Cor. 4:10)

Moreover you have to take some precautions regarding your memory and imagination. As soon as you are aware of the presence of some bad thought or dangerous remembrance you must act as you do when feeling a spark on your hand; shake it off at once. Use a severe criterion in the choice of your readings, avoid not only the bad ones but those as well that are simply light and superficial. Our Father Don Bosco would never like his sons to waste their time in such readings. Cultivate humility because as St. Bernard says, the unclean spirit cannot stand a humble spirit.

Never have any preference for those boys whose graceful manner and natural gifts have an attraction for you. “The Salesian” Saint Joseph Cafasso used to say “is like the stick of Moses. When raised in the air it used to work miracles, when thrown to the ground it was changed into a snake.” I suppose you perfectly understand what he meant.

Try to acquire a real, solid devotion to Mary Help of Christians. Entrust her with the custody of your heart. Approach the Holy Sacraments with the best dispositions.

“The Devil,” says St. John Damascene, “cannot fight against a man whose lips are stained with the most precious blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ.” Try to keep and protect the innocence of those children entrusted to you, by means of constant and untiring assistance. If you do so, God will give you the necessary grace to keep yourself pure and immaculate.



## **HINT 23**

### **CONSTANTLY PRACTISE TRUE OBEDIENCE**

No virtue is as necessary for the religious as obedience. It is the virtue proper to his state for which the Son of God has a particular predilection. In fact He said: “I came from Heaven not to do my own will but that of my Eternal Father.” (Jn. 6:38) Without obedience all the other virtues are but mere appearances. Indeed it is only obedience that gives them their form. One would say that in the religious life we should always be speaking about obedience, praising it always and trying to make it always more prompt, more cordial, more respectful, more universal.

Oh! If it were always so! How it would lessen the troubles and how light would sufferings become! The whole life would be full of charm and peace. Obey with a spirit of faith. You have to obey the Superior with faith. You have to obey the Superior with the same faith with which you adore the Holy Sacrament of the Altar. Indeed the One who said: “This is my Body, this is my Blood,” said as well: “Whoever listens to you listens to me” (Lk. 10:16).

Every superior comes to be a kind of human sacrament whose appearances are just like those of the Eucharist, poor,

fragile, disappointing; but as in the Consecrated Bread, those humble appearances really contain God to be given to men. Therefore you have always to see God and only God in the person of your Superiors. You must submit to them not only your will but your judgment also. Never spoil your obedience by grumbling or answering back.

“To obey a superior who is hard, exacting and difficult to please,” says St. Francis de Sales, “is just like drinking the clear water that flows through the mouth of a brazen lion in a fountain.”

Do not consider whom you are obeying but for whom you are obeying. Obey punctually and exactly leaving off your work or study or rest when obedience wants you elsewhere. This is an indispensable condition in order to have the certainty that you are doing the holy Will of God in all and deserve His reward. Remember that the best way to show your generosity is by obeying faithfully pleasing Him even in the minutest circumstances of time, way and place.

Obey with a spirit of humility without wanting to know the reason why. Indeed that is not necessary nor is it your concern. Should these reasons be known to you and should you find them according to your taste, of course, your obedience would not be prompted by the pure spirit of faith and it would therefore be less meritorious.

When the holy angels are engaged in the execution of the orders of Almighty God with the zeal and promptness, do you think they are trying to scrutinize the designs of the Almighty?

The admirable secrets of His providence are often hidden and often of an order that is most simple in appearance and very easy of execution, and on which the salvation of many souls might depend.



Obey with a spirit of abandonment in God's Hands, taking no account of possible success and welcoming any place or occupation. If the work undertaken goes well, bless God for it. If it goes wrong and ends in failure, humble yourself and cheer up, because, no matter how things go, the profit will always be yours as you will always have the merit of obedience. Place yourself then in the hands of your superior as a handy tool in the hands of a workman. Never try by indirect ways to shun obedience because, as the author of *Imitation of Christ* says: "To shun obedience is to deprive yourself of grace."

The subject should never put any obstacle to the designs of the superior. The more spontaneous the action of the superior, the more trustfully you can expect the blessing of God, whatever the reason that prompted the superior to issue the order. God's action and even great designs of providence are often hidden in that spontaneous self-determination of the superiors towards one thing rather than towards another.

Never lose sight of that famous counsel of our dear Saint Francis de Sales: "Ask nothing, refuse nothing, but place yourself in the arms of the Divine Providence without any other desire than that of doing what God wants." "The superiors," Fr. Valuy rightly says, "possess qualities for their ruling that are wanting to you. They are concerned with the general welfare. They know their subjects and their jobs. But especially they possess the so called Grace of State that God grants to the ministers of His authority."

You will never enjoy greater consolations nor will you obtain better results than in the fulfillment of an un-sought-for occupation accepted out of obedience, and perhaps contrary to your natural inclinations.

In your difficulties always think: "If Jesus Christ during his stay in this world adopted for his motto 'to do in all the

Will of his Eternal Father' and if he was ready to lay down his life for it rather than transgress obedience, shall I, a miserable sinner, presume to reach heaven by a different way?

Reflect on the value of an act of obedience done for God and in His Holy grace. It is worth as much as though Christ Himself did it, because by the fact of our incorporation in to Him our good works are His also. This being so, what a great reward you will have in Heaven after five, ten, twenty or forty years of uninterrupted obedience. "St. Dositheus," says Fr. Rodriguez, "succeeded in five years of religious life in acquiring the merits of St. Antony and St. Paul the hermit-both saints who had spent their lives in long rigorous penance."

Lastly meditate on what the Sacred Heart of Jesus told St. Margaret Mary Alacoque:

*"Listen to these words of truth. All religious separated from their superiors should consider themselves as vessels of reprobation on which the sun of justice with its rays produces the same effect that the natural sun produces on mud. These souls are rejected by my Heart. The more they try to approach Me by means of the Sacraments, of prayers and exercises of piety, the more I go afar from them on account of the horror I feel for them. Indeed they will go from one hell to another. Such disunion has been a cause of perdition for many, and many more will be lost on account of it. In fact every superior, whether good or bad, holds my place. Therefore, whenever a subject decides to resist authority, he wounds himself fatally. In vain will he knock at the door of my mercy. He will not be heard until I hear the voice of his superior. No other defects displease Me as much as those opposed to obedience, whether to the Superiors or to the Rules. I cannot bear in a religious Soul the slightest answer back or sign of repugnance."*



## HINT 24

### PRACTISE GENEROUSLY MORTIFICATION

“Those who are Christ’s have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires,” (Gal. 5:24).

Behold, my dear brother, a fundamental virtue on which your progress and your perseverance depend. It could be considered as the A, B, C, of the spiritual life.

If you want to be strong and not to fail in the struggle, you must constantly mortify and check yourself even in the minutest things. Neglecting this principle was often the cause of the ruin and loss of many a religious.

The necessity of this virtue is often inculcated by God in the Holy Scriptures. “Through many tribulations we must enter into the Kingdom of God,” (Acts. 14:22). “Christ did not please Himself,” (Rom. 15:3). “It behoved Christ to suffer in order to enter into His Glory,” (Lk. 24:46).

Remember, brother, if it was necessary for Christ to practice mortification, will the disciple be able to do without it? No; Jesus himself answers: “Whoever wants to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me,” (Mt. 16:24) because “the disciple cannot be above his master,” (Lk. 6:40). Have you understood? You cannot follow Jesus without bearing the cross with him. You cannot embrace Jesus without embracing the cross as well, because Jesus is nailed to it. We cannot imagine a delicate member under a head crowned with thorns. The spiritual doctors say that the lower side of the cross remained empty to make room for us, his disciples. That portion has to be taken up by us, my brother, by allowing ourselves to be crucified with Jesus.

Be persuaded that without mortification you will never make one step on the way of virtue. In fact every virtue is

something hard and what is hard cannot be practised without violence. That is why our Lord said that “Heaven demands violence and only those who mortify themselves will carry away Heaven,” (Mt. 11:22).

Listen to what the Imitation of Christ says: “You will never find happiness in following your inclinations but only in fighting them.” It means that without mortification we shall never be happy; that those who flee mortification suffer more than those who welcome it. How many of those damned in Hell will have to repeat: “I have paid for this Hell a higher cost than the saints did for their Heaven.”

“Unhappy is the one,” St. Vincent de Paul says, “who shuns the cross. He will find other crosses much heavier and unbearable.”

Stick to your tasks then. Through mortification you will conquer all your enemies and you will yield abundant fruit of eternal life.

Only a mortified Salesian will bear more fruit than many others who are too self-indulgent and comfort-loving.

Through mortification you will free yourself from the torments of purgatory. Through mortification you will acquire all graces and will work out a great reward for yourself in Heaven.

But, “when and how should I mortify myself?” You will ask; and I will answer with the words of the author of The Imitation of Christ: “Always and at every moment; in the little and the great, without exception.” You have to mortify your ruling passion and fight the defects of your temperament. Never explain away your faults by saying; “I am just made like that.” You have to suppress the excesses of your bad temper, break down your laziness and eradicate whatever is a hindrance to the right fulfillment of your duties.

A mortified religious is never exacting, over-particular, dissatisfied with his food. He is always ready to perform those little sacrifices which pave the road of our daily life. He gets up at the first stroke of the bell. He bears sickness, fatigue and privations patiently. He is ingenuous in finding out a number of little privations that having the advantage of being known to God only, these do not give room to self complacency.

Occasions to practice mortifications are always there. There is nothing more efficient than mortification to master our nature and free ourselves from the slavery of sin. If mortification frightens you, think of Jesus, your Master, whose life was a constant cross and mortification, and then you, too will find it easy and pleasant.

A delicate youth was once seeking admission into a rigorous Religious Order. He was told that undoubtedly he would not bear the constant toil, fasts and vigils; but he answered. "Is there not a crucifix in the cell of every religious?"

Think of Heaven and remember how short are the sufferings of this life, while the joys of the future life are eternal. Who does not know that saint's refrain: "The good that awaits me is so great that every pain delights me." Think of this that at the point of death you will feel so happy to have suffered something for the love of Jesus. The pleasure of dying without pain is worth the pain of living without pleasure.

Don't get frightened! Trust in God. He, through his divine consolations will make your burden light. What seems difficult in the beginning, little by little, appear easy and even pleasant. Fervour will make you love what nature hates. If on the contrary, you do not want to mortify yourself, let it be known that you will die. The choice is between an eternal happiness and an eternal doom. Make your choice.



## HINT 25

### USE OF TIME, APPLICATION TO WORK, LOVE OF STUDY

A saint used to say: “For one devil that tempts a busy religious there are hundreds working for the perdition of an idle religious.” “Idleness,” says another Saint, “is the hook with which the devil fishes the incautious soul.” “Idleness has a trail of temptations and bad thoughts behind it.” You may come across a work-loving Salesian who is not a good Salesian, but you will never find a good Salesian who at the same time is not a lover of work.

Therefore, dear brother, never be idle. Remember that time is not yours any more. On the day of your profession you gave it up to the congregation, to your pupils, and to God. Therefore it is not lawful for you to waste one single moment. Remember that time is a coin whose value is only appreciated in Heaven and in Hell. Remember that time is worth the blood of Our Jesus Christ. Remember that time is one of the talents of the Gospel that we must trade with so that we may give a good account of it to our Lord. Remember that our father Don Bosco bequeathed work to us as our inheritance. He used to have a board in his room bearing this inscription: “Every moment of time is a treasure,” and he made the most of that treasure. When he was still a seminarian he took the resolution not to waste one single minute and he fulfilled it exactly during his life. That is why all good Salesians, faithful imitators of their father are good workers and treasure up time. One of them answered to somebody who was requesting him to rest: “Give me one hour in which I shall not be a Salesian and then will I rest.”

Happy the Salesian who uses his time profitably, who loves work, shuns useless talk, avoids wasting time; it will

be extremely easy for him to make giant strides in virtue and persevere in his vocation.

On the contrary, the Salesian who does not make a good use of his time is exposed to regrettable faults. How many, losing their love of work, have lost also their virtue and afterwards their souls. Listen to what the Book of Proverbs says: “I passed by the field of the slothful man, and by the vineyard of the foolish man; and behold it was all filled with nettles, and thorns had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall was broken down,”(Prov. 24:30).

Do you know those who make the Congregation weep? Usually they are the ones who waste their own time and that of others by forming unhealthy groups and gossips.

“And what shall I do,” you may ask me, “in order to make my time profitable?” Apply yourself intently to your duty along with right intention. Try to equip yourself with as much knowledge as possible. Make yourself handy and always more useful to the Congregation. Take to heart the interests of your community and do not spare yourself.

If they put you to teach, love study and carefully prepare for your classes. This is one of your most important obligations.

Study and work, not just following your natural inclinations or in order to crown yourself with laurels but work in order to give more glory to God, to become more useful to our Congregation and to your pupils. Proceed with order and method because without order you are sure to be doing only your own will. Order possesses the secret of how to multiply time.

Lastly be on your guard against curiosity, inconstancy and hastiness. If you come across great difficulties; if your efforts are seemingly useless, do not be discouraged: do

what you can and leave the rest to God. Console yourself with the thought that reward is given in Heaven not for the success of our work but for our good will and uprightness of intention.



## HINT 26

### DO EVERYTHING WITH RIGHT INTENTION

By intention I mean the motive and aim of the action. Purity of intention consists in forgetting ourselves, in detaching oneself from every motive of self-interest, and in aiming at nothing but God, his good pleasure, his love and his glory.

According to St. Augustine, every action is made up of two elements that we could call body and soul. The body is the material action itself and the soul is the intention. If there is only body, there is nothing left for God. Only the soul, that is to say the intention, can give glory to God. Without this intention your actions will only be a shell, a ghost, a lifeless and a soulless body. With uprightness of intention, every action could very well become precious in the sight of the Lord, becoming a thousand times more valuable than all the treasures of the whole world. On the contrary, the greatest, the holiest and the seemingly most meritorious actions are vile and despicable in the eyes of God, nay they could even become a cause of damnation to us, if they are not performed with right intention.

“The one who labours much, but not for God, labours in vain,” says St. Bernard. “To do so is just like throwing gold coins into a bag riddled with holes or pouring water into a pot full of holes; all is lost; nothing remains.”



“Instead when we do our actions for God,” says St. Augustine, “we are bound to see them crowned with success, as then we may count on God’s blessings. We treasure up merits and win a splendid crown for eternity. In fact, when St. Peter said, “If you say so I will lower the nets,” (Lk. 5:5), he hauled his net ashore teeming with fish; although in one whole night’s toil he had got nothing before.

Consider then, my dear brother, how blind and unfortunate you would be to forfeit such a great gain which could be possessed at such a small price.

Of course, to work with a pure and right intention is not as easy as it looks at first sight indeed. It does not even suffice to begin our work with a “Hail Mary” or with the “*Veni Sancte Spiritus*.” It does not even suffice to repeat with our lips, “My God, I study for Thee, I work for Thee.” In fact how often our Divine Master could reply, “That is not true: you are not working for me.” And the fact is undeniable, because if you really study or work in order to please God, how can you explain why you put your whims before the commands of obedience?

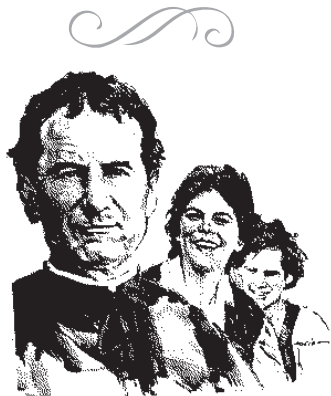
You say that in all your work you want only to please Him. How is it, then, that you are so downhearted when your work is not appreciated by men; that you are downcast when you are not thanked by the superiors? What do men matter if you displease God? Will God perhaps reward you for what men might say?

Do you want to know the best means to safeguard purity of intention? Renew your intention often and expressly with formal acts. When rising from your bed, when saying that “Hail Mary” before your occupations, in your visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and, above all, at Holy Communion promise to God, that you want nothing else in the day’s work than to please Him.

Every time you are confronted with some different job you have a splendid opportunity to offer it up to God repeating that ejaculation: "All for Thee, most Sacred Heart of Jesus." That is a good resource that will render your duty wonderfully easy. Were your intention only an empty one, it would be bound to slacken little by little and finally get the death blow from some blameworthy motive.

You should especially purify your intention at the beginning of those actions that, being pleasing to your natural inclination, are liable to offer a greater danger. And this not only in the case of recreation or meals, but also when undertaking certain studies or certain occupations that are according to your taste. It is then that we are more easily liable to forget to raise our intention except by routine and in a mechanical way. Then it is that self-love will feed upon what ought to be meritorious for you. In order that your intention may be the more perfect, train yourself to offer to God all that you do together with the infinite merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then your actions will have a strong support in your difficulties when nature grumbles and objects.

If you are faithful all your life long, to this practice of uprightness of intention, how many merits you will treasure up for Heaven!



## HINT 27

### STRIVE TO ACQUIRE FRATERNAL CHARITY

None can doubt that our only good, our only true happiness is to remain in God. To be far from Him means misfortune, calamity, death. But in order to remain in God, says the Apostle St. John, we must abide in charity, that is to say we must practise that command whose practical rule has been laid down by our Lord in these words: “Just as I have loved you, you also must love one another,” (Jn. 13:34).

This virtue must be exceedingly important indeed because our Lord declares it to be the distinguishing mark of good Christians and of all good religious. “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,” (Jn. 13:35). In fact, if charity is the characteristic virtue of Jesus, it must also be the characteristic of the religious, as he is supposed to be his perfect imitator. And in a particular way it should be the characteristic of the Salesian, gifted, as he ought to be, with the spirit of Don Bosco and of St. Francis de Sales, the two saints of charity.

As we Salesians are their sons, as we have been fed on the milk of reason and religion, as we have the same founder and the same rule, live under the same roof, work for the same ideal and enjoy the spiritual benefits, as we form one only body, so we must live intimately united and must love each other in such a singular way as to be the admiration of the world. If we don't love ourselves, who will love us? Those words of the Apostle St. Paul to the Colossians seem to have been written for us: “Clothe yourselves then, as is fitting for God's chosen people, holy and beloved to him, with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Bear with one another and forgive one another whenever there is any occasion to do so. As the Lord has forgiven you, forgive one another. And over

all these put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity,” (Col. 3:12-14).

Let me now briefly tell you what is commanded and what is forbidden by this most important virtue. Fraternal charity demands above all that our hearts should be humble and meek. From this source spring all the rest: selflessness, cordiality, esteem and mutual trust, delicate attention, willingness to render service, forbearance with one another’s defects, and readiness to forget the unavoidable clashes.

Above all what spoils charity is selfishness with its freezing distinction between “mine” and “thine.” To expose selfishness more in detail, here are the defects you should avoid: pretensions, arrogance, jealousy, impatience, rudeness, cutting remarks, want of delicacy and of attention, touchiness, ill-feelings, particular friendship, affected firmness, dislikes, taciturnity, excess in talk, suspicions, mistrusts, tale-carrying, criticism, retorts, leg-pulling and ponderous jokes.

If at the bottom of your heart you discover any ill-feeling against your brother on account of one clash or contradiction, beware! Because, this feeling is liable to take you far from him and dry up your charity. Substitute coldness and harshness with sweetness, amiability and cordiality.

As a consequence of your respect for your brother, avoid being rude, avoid breaking the rules of courtesy, try to practice Christian good manners being attentive, delicate and considerate, without falling into exaggerations, subdue your tongue and never deliberately turn it against your neighbor.

If you have offended your neighbor by treating him in a harsh or haughty way, hasten to ask his pardon. This act of humiliation will, whilst restoring charity, help you to correct yourself.

Never indulge in criticism or grumblings no matter how light they may appear. From light matter it is easy to pass to the grievous and once you have got into the habit of speaking ill about others, you will not be able to discover sin where the eye of God finds it, even though it may be very grievous.

If you have unfortunately fallen into this defect, talk about it plainly to those who guide your soul. Watch constantly over your behaviour. Demand of yourself an account in your daily particular examen and flee the company of gossipers.

Do not forget what faith teaches us viz, that whatever we do for our brother we do for Jesus himself who will reward us for it in heaven with an exceedingly great reward. This he has promised us in the Gospel and has assured us that whoever practises mercy will find mercy, and whoever gives will receive, and whoever treats his brothers well, will also be well treated. Consequently our own self interest advises us to be charitable! Charity will help you to do a great good to souls. It will make your prayers heard. It will make you enjoy much peace and joy. It will enrich you with merits which correspond to an immense weight of glory in Heaven.



## **HINT 28**

### **PERSISTENT FIGHT AGAINST DEFECTS ESPECIALLY THE PREDOMINANT ONE**

Once you are in the houses, rather than reducing your vigilance and your struggle, you must intensify your efforts and overcome yourself, because now your defects will have more occasions to develop while you have fewer weapons to combat them.

Only one defect, as trivial as you like but against which you do not put up a hard struggle, will be sufficient to compromise your future and endanger your perseverance and your salvation. Do you want to know the reason?

“After original sin,” an illustrious writer says, “there is no defect or germ within us, however small it may be, that could not grow and develop so as to hinder and corrupt all, unless it is fought against. On the contrary, there is no good quality or holy inspiration within us that would not tend to fade away and vanish unless it is kept up and cultivated.”

All this has already been expressed by the Eternal Truth in the following words: “He who despises small things will fail little by little.” (Sir. 19:1). He who is faithful in little things will be faithful in great things as well.

How is that so many vocations are lost and so many beautiful hopes are frustrated? Because there is not that regularity and “lawful striving” to which the Apostle refers: “no athlete is crowned unless he competes according to the rules” (2Tim. 2:5); because we forget that “disciple of Christ” and self-denial and carrying our daily cross are equivalent. Are you shunning sacrifices and avoiding the cross? You have by this very fact ceased to be Christ’s disciple!

Learn at the expense of others, my dear brother, and prevent, these misfortunes by an assiduous and constant fight against self. To think that constant holy war started in your novitiate should last only for that brief period would be a regrettable error.

It is very far from being so. After your profession this war must be more relentlessly fought, without stopping until death. Otherwise, as soon as you say “enough,” you are done for. “Not to go forward in the way of the Lord is to go backward,” these are the words of St. Augustine. Remember

that at your profession you have taken upon yourself the duty of forming within you the new man according to Jesus Christ; and this is done by daily progressing in virtue and rooting out defects.

Our good Lord on His side will lavish his graces on you; but unless you trade with them and make them bear fruit, God will withdraw them from you and will give them to those who will bear fruits. If that happens, anyone would notice in you a swift fall and you will not be able to live up to the standard of a good Salesian, nay not even to that of a good Christian. “Believe me” St. Bernard says, “Our vices, when pruned, shoot again; when extinguished, flare up again; when made to sleep, wake up all on a sudden. You cannot cut them out once for all. You must cut them often and always. Indeed if you are sincere with yourself, you will avow that you always find something to cut.”

Apply yourself then to detect your defects and combat them energetically.

But there is one amongst them, usually called the dominant passion which, so to say, looms large above all others. It is like the propeller the chief cause of all our faults. For this reason we must look upon this passion as being our mortal enemy. The signs whereby you can detect it are the following:

1. It is the chief cause of our faults, of our sins and the constant matter of our confessions;
2. It is the one that troubles the peace of our soul and very easily awakens our sensitivity;
3. It is the one that most often leads us to evil and seems to us the most difficult to correct, and we do not feel like tackling it.

Some will have a nature more prone to laziness, others to impatience, others to pride, others to sensuality, others to the love of their own comfort. In front of this mortal enemy, you are not going to fold your arms. Woe to you if you do not engage it persistently and every day!

Above all it is when passing from the Novitiate to another community that you should not lose sight of it, but rather make it the special subject of your examens.

Once you know your predominant passion, put yourself to acquire the opposite virtue. Its practice should be the target of your constant efforts, the usual object of your desires, the ordinary fruit which you derive from your meditations and the grace for which you unceasingly plead before our Lord at Holy Communion.

Fight, then, as a good soldier of Christ, against that enemy within, your predominant passion.

Do not let yourself be scared by difficulties at the beginning. Once the first are overcome, getting rid of the others will be an easier job. When we often make acts of a certain virtue, soon do we acquire the habit; and habit makes the practice of a virtue that once seemed impossible, very easy.





## HINT 29

### **DO THE DAILY EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE, ESPECIALLY THE PARTICULAR EXAMEN**

Do not neglect the general examination of conscience every night, at the night prayers. Do it with exactitude and severity. In it you should review all the actions of your day as not possibly to over-rate the importance of this examination in our efforts to avoid tepidity and relapse, or in order to rise after our faults. Hear what St. Gregory says: “To make our daily examination of conscience is a sign of predilection; to neglect it is, on the contrary, a sign of disapproval.”

But I want to draw your attention to the particular examen. This is not intended to consider the general state of your conscience, but to ask of you an account of your predominant passion or of that virtue you have proposed to yourself. It must lead you to practical goals, to be achieved next day.

Its direct and essential purpose then is the destruction of one defect or the acquisition of one particular virtue. The Spiritual Doctors highly recommended this as one of the most powerful means of sanctification. Resolve then to perform this exercise well, and be assured you will derive immense advantages from it.

But I warn you that the temptation to abandon your examen or to make it through routine or negligently will be a persistent one. For one thing, the particular examen demands so much attention. Therefore few are those who practice it in an effective way. No wonder then that those who advance in perfection as they ought to are few also.

Experience proves that those who neglect the particular examen, far from advancing in virtue, easily go backwards. On the contrary, those who persist in it with tenacity of

purpose and perseverance make giant strides along the way of perfection. If you want to belong to the number of the latter, practise faithfully the following advice:

- a. On the day of the Exercise for a happy death, when making your general examination of conscience, resolve to combat during the month that defect which dominates you, or resolve to acquire that virtue that is most necessary for you. Let this resolution be the subject of your daily particular examination. It would be wise to make this choice in accord with your Spiritual Director or your Confessor.
- b. Do not change the matter of your examen until that vice has been destroyed or there has been a positive improvement in the virtue proposed. On this you must be constant and inflexible.
- c. I advise you to note down the results of this examen every day. In order to safeguard yourself against your natural inconstancy, make it a duty to submit to your Spiritual Director every month the little notebook in which you have entered your jottings.
- d. Do not be elated on the success of your efforts nor be discouraged at the apparent uselessness of your struggle.
- e. Impose some little penance on yourself everyday on behalf of that virtue you want to acquire. Make known to the spiritual Director with simplicity your faults in this regard. It is understood that you are not bound to declare what is matter for confession, although to declare it will redound to your spiritual profit.
- f. In your morning meditation, make a foresight examination, reminding yourself of the resolution of the preceding day and studying in what manner you can

practice it during the day. Foresee the cases that might happen to you, and afterwards in Holy Communion ask from God the graces to fulfill your resolution. Do not forget that “the Kingdom of Heaven suffered violence and the violent bear it away,” (Mt. 11:12).

- g. Once you have found out your failings, do not neglect to foster a deep contrition and take a firm resolution so that you may avoid the pitfall that is very common with pious persons, that is, they are only concerned with finding out their sins without thinking of detesting them. If you have been distracted during the examination at night prayers or if you have been unable to complete it to your satisfaction for want of time (and this is a common occurrence) it will be necessary to make up for it at the foot of your bed before going to sleep.
- h. If unfortunately (indeed the very thought makes you desperate) you become aware of having committed some grievous sin, resolve to go to confession as soon as possible and make an act of contrition till you can feel the sweet persuasion that God has already pardoned you. What an excess of blindness and hardness it would be to go to rest having a mortal sin in one's heart; to go to sleep in the enmity of God. It would be a thousand times worse than going to sleep with a cobra in your bosom or lie down at the brink of a frightful abyss. To go to sleep in enmity with God would be to risk awakening in the abyss of hell. What a frightful misfortune! Who could cold bloodedly think of it?



## HINT 30

### DO NOT DREAD TEMPTATIONS TOO MUCH

Holy Scripture assures us that to be tempted is a sign that God loves us. Those whom God loved most have been exposed to the greatest temptations. “Because thou wast acceptable to God,” the Angel told Tobias, “it was necessary that temptation should prove thee,” (Tob. 12:13, RHE version) Consoling words indeed not to be forgotten. Do not then ask from God to be freed from every temptation. Ask rather for the grace of not giving in and of making a holy use of temptation.

There is no trick that the devil would not try to prevent our drawing profit from these trials of temptation. He would rather have them as instruments of perdition, whereas in the plan of Divine Providence they are allowed for our justification and salvation.

One of the principal tricks the devil tries on us is that of frightening and troubling us. The evil spirit fishes best in troubled waters. To remain, then, calm and on your guard without fear in the midst of the most violent temptation is a powerful means with which you will avoid painful surprises and withstand the onslaughts of your enemy.

Nothing puts him out as much as to see you firm and confident, daily more humble on account of the sense of your own weakness, ever more eager to avoid occasions of falls, always more diligent in having recourse to God by prayer, always strengthened in your weakness through the same means that he would use to pull you down, in the same way as the reed is fed by the brook that shakes it.

“Temptations perturb you,” St. Francis de Sales says, “because you make too much of them and you dread them too much.” As soon as a thought contrary to your good resolution assails you, do not consider that all is lost. Let the wind blow.

All the temptations of this world cannot soil a soul that is fearless.

At that moment you should consider God as a good and tender Father who only allows the devil to tempt men, just to increase their merits and their glory. “One day,” St. Francis de Sales says: “I happened to pass by some bee-hives and some of the bees alighted on my face. I was about to drive them off with my hand when a peasant told me: ‘Don’t do that, don’t be afraid and don’t touch them. They will not sting you.’ I followed his advice and not one stung me.” You should do the same regarding your temptations. Do not dread them too much. Do not stop at them. Bypass them. Despise them, and they will not harm you.

The longer a temptation persists in spite of your reluctance, the more it is shown that you have not consented. When the enemy makes so much fuss and raises such storms around your will it is a clear sign that he is not inside. No one keeps attacking a fortress that he has already in his power! As long as you withstand the onslaught, you may rest assured that you have not given your consent. So, even if the most violent temptations assail you, even if they last the whole of your life, do not worry, because your merits will grow in proportion to your struggle and your crown will be in proportion to your merits. Fight, then, constantly as a good soldier of Christ, always fully resigned to God’s will and humbly hoping for his help. He will never fail you.



## HINT 31

### **AVOID SCRUPLES, AND KNOW HOW TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF MISTAKES COMMITTED**

You have got to form within yourself an upright and delicate conscience that should warn you of the dangers of offending God: it should reproach you if by misfortune you have offended him; and it should urge you to true repentance.

There is nothing as dangerous as a lax conscience that takes no account of the little virtues and minimizes the seriousness of little faults.

But you have got to avoid the extreme of stopping too long to examine minutely and persistently all the circumstances of your faults, or bad thoughts; whether, for instance, you have given full consent or not, whether it was grievous matter or not, thus inviting the self same temptations, muddling matters in a hopeless way, and increasing your doubts. All this only serves the purpose of making you waste precious time, weakening your brains and filling your soul with anxiety, troubling your spirit and discouraging your heart.

This wrong policy is the cause of many people having their head always full of bad thoughts and their hearts continually in trouble. They always believe themselves to be in the disgrace of God; they drag a miserable and languid life and are obstinate in following their own ideas rather than the salutary advice of their confessor.

If by misfortune you have committed a mortal sin (and for this grievous matter, full knowledge and deliberate consent are required) you would not need many tests to know it. In fact a soul that fears God cannot commit a mortal sin without being in constant and absolute certainty of having committed it. For this reason, if you do not see quite clearly, if you are not perfectly sure of the gravity of your action, it means that

at least no mortal sin has been committed and you are not bound to go to confession before Communion. For safety's sake, it would be enough for you to make an act of contrition. (Of course if you have a lax conscience, I would resolve your doubts in quite a different way).

Should you have the certainty of having committed a grievous fault, weep over it immediately, repent, and humble yourself. That is the secret to draw profit from your fault. Acknowledge your great weakness, but immediately place a sweet and loving confidence in God and in your spiritual Father. Go to confession at once and learn caution for the future and then afterwards remain in absolute peace. I recommend you always to be cheerful and never to be sad because sadness has killed many and no good can be expected from it. Our Father Don Bosco always recommended cheerfulness and used to repeat those words of St. Philip Neri:

“ Sadness and melancholy – out of my house! ”.

Sadness ordinarily springs from wounded self-love. From it nothing but discouragement and often despair can come.

Even if you commit one hundred faults a day, do not give room for discouragement. This would be more fatal to you than all the other faults. On the contrary, if you see your faults as a means of humiliation, you gain immensely; and the profit you derive from it, advancing in self-contempt makes up for the harm that your faults may have caused you.

The faults that humiliate are more useful than the good works that fan your vanity. You should undoubtedly exercise intense vigilance in order to prevent any fault; but after a fault, humility, repentance, prompt and generous atonement are expected from you. In this way your very faults will be like steps to climb up to heaven and to ensure your perseverance rather than endanger it.

That you should be convinced of it, here are some sayings gleaned from the writings of the Saints to corroborate what I have told you:

“If you feel miserable after your faults, the humiliation you derive from it is a treasure that enriches the soul. This is not known to many. They do not know this happiness: they are poor and yet they possess a treasure in their own poverty. But alas! they do not possess this treasure because they do not know how to look for it.” (St. Francis de Sales)

“I have had the habit of saying that the throne of God’s mercy is our misery. It is necessary then that the greater our misery the more intense our confidence should be.” (St. Francis de Sales)

“God is more pleased with bad actions accompanied by humility than by good actions infected by the poison of pride.” (St. Augustine)

“A cart-load of good works driven by pride goes straight to hell. A cart-load of sins driven by humility certainly reaches heaven.” (St. Gregory of Nicea)

“It often happens that the one who sees himself covered with many stains is before God most richly adorned with the garment of profound humility.” (St. Gregory the Great)

“If we cannot acquire many virtues, let us at least acquire humility.”

“Blessed be our imperfections because they make us acknowledge our misery and practise humility.” (St. Jean Francis de Chantal)

“As manure renders the soil fertile, so the feeling of one’s own weaknesses makes gratitude grow in the soul. Every



time one humbles oneself for one's faults, I give him the grace to destroy them little by little. I transform imperfections into virtues; and a day will come when the soul will be surprised to find itself wrapped in a light without shadows." (Our Lord to St. Gertrude)



## HINT 32

### **CONFESS EVERY EIGHT DAYS WITH HOLY DISPOSITIONS**

Without the express order of your confessor, or without most legitimate reasons, do not ever dispense yourself from your weekly confession imposed by our holy rule. To do otherwise would be to deprive yourself of many graces and of not deriving from the Sacrament any significant help.

In fact, in confession, you not only receive absolution from your sins but in addition, great grace to avoid them in future, an intense light to detect them, an abundant help to make up for the loss incurred. You practice in this one action more virtue than in all the works of the day. You practise especially the virtue of humility.

Moreover experience teaches us that the practical effects of a good confession seldom last longer than eight days. Once this time is over, you will not necessarily commit grievous faults, it is true. But you will surely feel a decrease of fervor in your prayers, a diminution of control in your words, a slackening in the mortification of your senses. You will fall into a number of imperfections that you would certainly not have permitted yourself on the day of your confession; and this little laxity will go on growing until a fresh confession will return to your soul the lost energy.

To delay, then, your confession is a real evil. The more you wait, the more difficult you will find it.

Avoid the harmful and generally camouflaged defect, namely that of laying much stress on the examination proper, accusing yourself of little things that perhaps do not constitute a venial sin and skipping over more important faults. It happens, for instance, that one may accuse oneself of having neglected some novena prayers, of having omitted some “Our Fathers” for the Scapular Indulgence, and failing to accuse oneself of certain serious faults against charity, submission, obedience, of pride or of certain attachments and dangerous friendships.

Avoid, also, the defect of those who do not explain matters in their confession as they ought. They say for instance that they have gone against modesty when in reality it might be serious looks, curious desires, sexual scandals, etc., and thus serious matter. You cannot simply say that you have given consent to bad thoughts when they have been put into action; that you have failed a little in charity towards a confrere when you treated him very harshly calling him a hypocrite or something of the sort; that you have failed a little in poverty, whereas you have allowed yourself to make a considerable present by giving away a library book to a pet of yours.

Avoid another defect as well, which could make the Sacrament null and void, namely, that of not repenting as one should, that of not making firm and efficacious resolution.

If you forget a sin, your confession is valid all the same; but if you forget your sorrow, your confession is not valid. Therefore give sorrow its place and see that it is always accompanied by a firm and efficacious resolution, because sorrow without resolution is not sorrow at all.

“It seemed to me,” Don Bosco said once referring to one of his dreams, “that I saw the boys of our Oratory coming

out from the Church after confession bearing horns on their foreheads.” ‘Whatever could that mean!’ I was asking myself; and I was told: ‘that means the inefficacy of the resolutions taken at holy Confession’.”

On several occasions Don Bosco told his boys: “Do you know what has cast most souls into hell? Failing to make or failing to keep the resolutions at holy Confession.”

Away then, with stereotyped confessions! Away with mere formalities that cause more loss than gain to be derived from that Sacrament.

God forbid that instead of deserving his mercy, you should provoke his wrath and anger according to those words of the Prophet: “Cursed be he that does the work of the Lord deceitfully.” (Jer. 48:10).

How great are the efforts that the devil makes in order to deceive and destroy a Salesian! But through your weekly, fervent, sincere and humble confession, you will surely smash his snares and join the number of those who persevere till the end.

Imitate that holy religious about whom Rodriguez speaks, “he always used to make his confessions as if they were the last, so that on the day of his death he made his confession just to console himself.”

The Salesian must view his confessor from two points of view: as God’s minister, who will absolve him, and as the counselor and guide of his spirit, who will help him in the great business of his sanctification. Therefore you must always go faithfully to your ordinary confessor, the one appointed for your community by your Superiors; and only in extraordinary cases should there be exceptions to this rule. You must make yourself well known to that confessor and entreat him to guide your soul in the way of virtue, assuring

him that you will always docilely fulfill his commands and follow his exhortations. What a great advantage it is when the Confessor knows you well. In the first place it acts as a kind of brake that makes you proceed cautiously; and secondly, you will enjoy a great tranquility of conscience, as you are indeed obeying God whom the Confessor represents.

Sometimes this confessor may ask clarifying questions to help you to avoid disastrous consequences. In these cases the Confessor is only fulfilling the responsibility incumbent on him. He cannot in conscience, under pain of betraying his holy ministry, be reticent and spare you certain admonitions. Your humility would be very little, if for this motive only you were light headedly to change him. Great harm for your soul would certainly follow.

What would happen if there is another Confessor who does not know you, who keeps silent over certain things, who does not give you certain admonitions, if it is to your disadvantage?

Do not imitate those who keep their venial sins for one confessor and their serious faults for another. I can assure you that all those who caused grave displeasure to their superiors and lost their vocation, ignored these warnings.

Be open and transparent with your ordinary Confessor. Be humble and obedient by faithfully executing his directions.

Lastly, let me add that, just as we are supposed to choose the lesser of two unavoidable evils, so also go to confession to whomsoever you like, rather than make a bad confession and live for many days in the disgrace of God (I tremble even at the thought it).



## HINT 33

### APPROACH HOLY COMMUNION DEVOUTLY AND FREQUENTLY

Holy Communion is the daily food of the religious. The religious who does not love frequent Holy Communion and neglects it, crawls under the weight of his vows like a prisoner under the weight of his chains.

In the life he has embraced everything becomes heavy and annoying. He does not know how to love, fight, suffer, obey, or pray.

But the one who loves Holy Communion and goes to receive it with the proper dispositions, derives grace from it that purifies him, subdues his nature to his spirit, curbs the natural inclination to sensual pleasures, overcomes the repugnance to penance and mortification, and finally Communion preserves and sustains him.

In receiving this Sacrament, do not stop fighting routine, lightheadedness and lukewarmness.

“The life of a religious,” says an illustrious author, “ought to be nothing else but a preparation and a thanksgiving for Holy Communion.” Who could express what Our Lord would work in our souls, if we did not put obstacles to Him?

A well-disposed soul receives in one fervent Communion a favour that is incomparably greater than the visions and revelations that all the saints together have had. But when there is lack of devotion, faith, and love, when there is excess of lukewarmness, this Sacrament produces no other effect on a soul than it does on the walls of the chapel where it is kept. And this for the simple reason that the dispositions required for the effects of grace are lacking.

Our ignorance in this matter is highly deplorable.

Something that will help you much to Communicate well is the habit of always working with the right intention of pleasing only God, the frequent use of ejaculatory prayers, doing your meditation well, and frequent but fervent visits to the Blessed Sacrament, a custom so highly recommended by our Father, St. John Bosco. When you are about to receive Our Lord, awaken your faith and ask of yourself: "What is that I am going to receive and who am I?" Humble yourself as much as you can, repent for your past infidelities and abandon yourself into the hands of the God Whom you are going to receive. Renew the resolution of loving and serving him all the days of your life as a perfect religious and of being always united to him, your only good. Once you have Jesus within your heart make acts of love and give yourself entirely to him. Renew your vows. Offer him as a perennial holocaust your life and your death, just as they will be, as it pleases him that it should be, with all its pains and accompanying sorrows, according to His good pleasure, and wishing that his Holy Will should be totally fulfilled in you.

Then pray for yourself and your dear ones with the greatest confidence, do not be afraid to ask for the grace of dying rather than stop loving him and be unfaithful to your vocation. Pray for the boys entrusted to your care, for your Superiors and Missionaries, for sinners and the dying, for the Congregation, etc.

Do not be shy in asking, because the one who asks for much with faith will certainly receive much. Jesus has assured us that whatever we demand from his Father in his name will be granted to us. Let the Communion time be for you the most solemn, the most consoling and most profitable of the whole day. Only God can measure the good that will be bestowed on you at that moment; only in Heaven will you be able to see the glory that your fervent Communions will have brought you.

As a dutiful son of St. John Bosco, do not be content with yourself being devoted to the Blessed Sacrament, try your best to propagate this devotion and become an apostle of frequent Communion.

If our Father Don Bosco succeeded in filling the earth with the lilies and with ecclesiastical and religious vocations, it was all due to the love of the Holy Eucharist which he infused into his boys.

Msgr. Costamagna used to say: “I do not believe in any other devotion when I do not see the devotion to the Blessed Sacrament as the dominant.”

It was Don Bosco’s desire that no Salesian should forget his daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament, and he expected everybody to inculcate this practice amongst boys. “The time we spend before the Blessed Sacrament,” St. Alphonsus says, “is the most profitable in this life; is the one that will console us most at the moment of our death; is the one that will gain the greatest glory in heaven.” You will tell me that you cannot find time for it and I will reply that you nevertheless find time to chat with your friends.

Besides, my dear brother, you should try to hear as many Masses as you can. This will certainly help you to sanctify yourself easily and promptly. By this means you can convert a number of sinners.

Every Mass is a treasure. Greater treasure you will find neither on earth nor in Heaven. In some of our Houses where there are several priests, it will be very easy for you, if your time permits, to acquire not one but many of these treasures daily.

Therefore have a great devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. Practice it and propagate it. Thus you will do one

of the most pleasing things to the Sacred Heart of Jesus which will abundantly reward you in Heaven.



### HINT 34

#### **PRACTISE MODESTY, RECOLLECTION AND SILENCE**

“Where Christ is, there is also modesty,” St. Gregory says. A religious, for whom to live is Christ, cannot but love and possess the virtues of modesty and silence.

To be a good religious and not to possess modesty is impossible. Modesty is the clear and unmistakable sign of the Salesian. The tree naturally produces the bark and for its part, the bark preserves and protects the tree. In the same way a religious will necessarily produce that religious modesty that will in its turn keep him in his fervor and protect him against bad outside influences.

This virtue, the armour of a religious, should be the distinguishing mark of a Salesian, who, on account of his mission, must constantly deal with his neighbor and especially with his boys, being thereby often exposed to every kind of danger.

That Salesian is certainly doomed who happens not to possess or, at any rate, does not earnestly try to acquire this virtue. He is just like a tree without its bark, a monster of nature: no fruit can be expected except the sour and bitter.

The observance of *silence* is equally important. Silence time is God’s time. Silence is the ornament of the religious house, the mother of prayers, the door and key that guard our heart. St. Ignatius used to say that in a religious house well-



observed silence makes all virtues flourish. And St. J. Francis de Chantal, used to repeat that in order to reform a monastery spoiled by laxity, the establishment of the observance of silence would suffice; while, on the contrary, to make it lax it would suffice to abolish silence.

Here you have, my dear brother, another means of perseverance; practice well the silence prescribed by our Rules. Avoid excessive talk and you will avoid a number of evils. If silence time is God's time, its contrary is the devil's time. Our enemy uses it to cause the greatest havoc. It is then that unholy groups, talks and backbiting take place, often with disastrous consequences.

This truth is borne out by the Holy Spirit in the book of proverbs: "In the multitude of words there shall not want sin," (Prov. 10:19). Avoid, my dear brother, any breach of silence; get rid of that itch for speaking too much and so you will avoid many defects and faults that would shipwreck your vocation.

I suppose you will not join those who think that these virtues are good only for novices! The devil must make you believe so, when you see certain professed members who even pride themselves on always being dissipated: who seem to think it to be demeaning to be well composed in the chapel, to lower their eyes, to have their hands joined, to keep the holy silence after night prayers.

God keep you from such a blunder and from breaking in the least this holy silence commanded by our Rules, with the pretension of appearing funny or joyful.

Similar to the practice of silence is that of *recollection*. Without a constant and rigorous vigilance over your senses you will in your first years of religious life be inexorably exposed to the danger of losing in no time what you have learned in your early years.

Keep in mind that if recollection and silence are necessary for keeping your virtue, they are not the less indispensable for edifying your boys and your confreres. Nothing contributes so much to create a bad impression about a Salesian, nothing so exposes him to lose the prestige and confidence needed for his mission as dissipation and immodesty of his senses.

Don Rua used to say: “Modesty, silence and recollection in a Salesian serve wonderfully the purpose of awakening vocations, because, the fragrance of good example is a constant sermon and the best way to engender love for virtue amongst souls.”



### **HINT 35**

#### **LOVE THE CONGREGATION VERY MUCH**

A child who does not love its mother is called an unnatural child. What should we call the Salesian who fosters no love for his mother, the Congregation, who has undergone so many sacrifices for his spiritual, scientific and material welfare? We should call him a heartless son, unworthy of enjoying her benefits!

When you pronounced your Holy Vows, you entered into an agreement with the Congregation; she took on herself to cater for all your needs and to help you in all, whereas you, on your side, gave yourself completely to her with all your abilities. You, then, belong entirely to the Congregation and have the duty of loving her with all your heart, of striving until your last breath after her glory and advancement, of rejoicing with her and of weeping with her, of being ready to make any sacrifices for her, even if that entailed laying down your life.

When God in his eternal decrees enriched you with His vocation, He destined you to be saved as a saint and a cooperator in his work of redemption. Then His Mother, our Lady, taking on herself this serious concern, led you to her house, the Congregation, her own work; and now you are under her special protection having at your disposal all the means for the achievement of your aim.

How will you duly thank her for so great a favour? How will you fulfil such a holy duty of justice? With love and sacrifices. If you love the Congregation, then try to maintain the regular observance with your example and words because on this depends her welfare. And fight within yourself and others even the slightest fault.

If you love the Congregation, try to acquire the true spirit of Don Bosco and a lot of love and zeal.

If you love the Congregation, you will be humble and obedient, you will achieve great works because the Salesian is useful in as much as he possesses these two virtues. If you love the Congregation do your job well, profit by your time, make yourself as useful as possible.

You can say you love the Congregation if you really love St. John Bosco, if you love your superiors, if you place all your confidence in them and if you never open your mouth to grumble against them. Who can calculate the harm that a gossip does to the Congregation?

If you love the Congregation you will cultivate vocations, making use of every means in your power and never sparing any sacrifice. The one who fosters vocations is entitled to all the good deriving from them.

If you love the Congregation, you will speak with enthusiasm about her and her works. Don Bosco used to say that we must praise the good we do; and he used to do so.

The one who broadcasts the faults and defects that might discredit her certainly does not love the Congregation. When you know of the defects that are harmful to the spiritual progress and to the perseverance of your brothers or to the good name of the Congregation, inform your superiors about them so as to prevent harm. You are bound in conscience to do it. But, once done, forget about it. If our Congregation has defects, She does not cease to be our mother, and, like our natural mother, will, regardless of her beauty, always be loved by us more than a queen.

The brother who tries to satisfy his comforts and whims at her expense, forgetting that he has come to serve and not to be served, and that the resources at his disposal must only be used for the welfare and salvation of souls, does not love the Congregation.

The brother who fosters particular friendships, who ill-treats his boys with insulting words or with blows, ignoring the Preventive System, and following one of his own and who as a result instead of cultivating love awakens hatred for Holy religion and her priests does not love the Congregation. He is a real Judas.

The brother who does not care for her material well-being, for her conservation and property, who would rather favour his relatives, who causes unnecessary expenditure by not caring for things or administering them with neglect does not love the Congregation.

I hope you will not forget these hints and you will rather behave so as never to make that good mother repent for having admitted you into her bosom. Ask God that the Congregation be free of unnatural children; and that this masterpiece of Mary Help of Christians will give more glory to God with few but good than with many and bad.



## HINT 36

### HAVE GREAT ZEAL FOR SALVATION OF SOULS

The good Salesian who loves God with all his heart and who through the eyes of faith sees Jesus himself in the person of his neighbor, ardently desires the good and the salvation of souls.

How can we serve God and practically manifest our love to Him, when we cannot see or touch Him and when He is not in need of our services? Well, he wants us to serve Him in our neighbour. In this way He wants us to pay the countless debts for our sins. Therefore you should direct your works and efforts to this aim, to destroy the kingdom of sin and to make God known, loved, served and glorified by men.

“Truly we cannot give God greater pleasure nor can we offer Him a more acceptable sacrifice than our labour for the salvation of souls,” St. Gregory used to say.

Doesn't it hurt you to see how many souls are blindly going down the wide path of perdition despite what our Lord did to save them? Don't you feel, like St. Paul, that your heart is torn apart? Are you not pained?

“To save souls,” Don Bosco used to say, “is exceedingly greater than to suffer martyrdom. One soul is worth more than the whole universe. To guide a soul is more than to govern the world in all temporal things. To clothe one soul with the grace of God is more than serving and feeding all the hungry. To free one soul from the slavery of sin is more than rescuing all the slaves and prisoners of the whole world. To prevent sin in a soul is more than preventing a dreadful plague. To convert one soul is more than raising all the dead.”

How can one who is convinced that a soul is the most precious masterpiece that has ever come from the hands of God; that a soul is worth what the blood of God is worth; that a drop of this Blood is worth more than all the existing worlds, put a limit to his zeal?

The life of Don Bosco was but a chain of sacrifices for the salvation of souls, and countless Salesians have laid down their lives in a premature death toiling for the salvation of souls. St. Theresa would have given her life a thousand times over for the salvation of one soul.

In the space of thirty years after the death of St. Francis Xavier well over four hundred Jesuits in Japan died as martyrs in their efforts to save souls.

And we Salesians, why do we have as a programme of action the motto *Da Mihi Animas; Caetera Tolle*? So that we may think of nothing else than to save as many souls as we can; so that we direct all our labors and efforts to that end!

Work generously, then, for the salvation of your pupils:

1. In the apostolate of teaching, giving them a solid instruction.
2. In the apostolate of sacrifice, assisting them and giving them generous good example. St. Charles used to say, "Children learn from their masters not only doctrine, but the way as well."
3. In the apostolate of charity, treating them with kindness and respect. "The shortest way to the heart," Don Bosco used to say, "is not the straight line of rigor, but the curve of holy charity." And he used to remember the words of Quintillian: "Greatest reverence is due to a child."
4. In the apostolate of prayer, praying daily and much for your pupils, for the conversion of poor sinners, for missionaries,

etc., reserving for this purpose the appeal value of your daily actions. But in order that it may be abundant, see that you are never lacking the right intention. Say often with St. Peter, “In your name, I will cast the net,” (Lk. 5:5).

Never be discouraged if the success is not up to your expectations. As I told you elsewhere, you will be rewarded according to your intention, not according to the result you obtained. Do not fall into the mistake of doing nothing on realizing that you cannot do much. The best is the enemy of the good. Even if you have prevented a single sin, all your efforts would have been very well spent. St. Leonard, in his long and fatiguing missions, was satisfied if he could prevent just a single venial sin.

Let the words of the Scripture comfort you: “They that instruct many to justice, shall shine as stars for all eternity,” (Dan. 12: 3).

Even if you did great penances, fasted all your life long, slept always on the ground, and gave all your wealth to the poor, all these would be very little in comparison with the value of working for the salvation of souls.

If you succeed in saving one soul you have thereby predestined your own salvation.

Whoever leads a sinner to the path of salvation and converts him, saves his own soul from death and his sins are forgiven.

So keep the fire of your zeal for the salvation of souls burning always in your heart. Work with great faith and confidence. God will work with you and one fine day you will see with astonishment the amount of good achieved and the numberless souls saved by you. They will be your joy and crown in Heaven.



## HINT 37

### FOCUS ON ASSISTANCE

After a hint on zeal for the salvation of souls it is expedient to deal now with our sacred duty of assistance. The exceptional importance that the subject assumes for us Salesians imposes it as a necessary item, brief though it be.

Our Father St. John Bosco used to say that assistance is one of the chief duties for a Salesian. It is indispensable for the practice of the Preventive System. In fact, if we assist well, our boys behave well; but if assistance is neglected the boys behave improperly and are lost even though sheltered in our houses.

Make no mistake about it: the devil never sleeps. “He prowls like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour,” (1Pt. 5:8). He is just waiting for the assistant to rest a little in order to dart a poisonous arrow at the boy and cause havoc in his soul changing it into black coal what was up to then the white snow of innocence.

This arrow will be something printed, a writing, a picture, a little gift, or a scandal. One word of double meaning might suffice. A wink would be enough; a boy’s going out of the church, dormitory, or classroom when a ravaging wolf is waiting for a victim or an accomplice. Ah! Few minutes are enough to ruin a soul! Woe to the shepherd who watches for twelve years and falls asleep for one hour! A boy, when leaving school, told his Rector: “I entered this school an innocent boy and I go away initiated into every kind of malice.”

For this reason the assistant is called the visible guardian angel of his boys. He bears the parental responsibility over all his boys. A mother once said to a Salesian: “When my son is at your school I am at peace.” How much meaning there is in these words!



Lacordaire shuddered when pondering over his responsibility because he knew that when they are not duly assisted, the superior has to bear the sins of his pupils, and that he owes a rigorous account to God as do the parents who neglect their children.

Thomas says, “when we think what parents expect for their children, what they fear and what they suffer, we feel how difficult it is to meet such expectation and such love.”

Who can declare the value of a soul redeemed by our Lord? It is worth the Blood of our Lord Himself. A negligent assistant exposes it to being lost. Our Lord could then rightly be angry with such an assistant, and could withdraw his graces from him. It is a well established fact that the neglect of assistance always brings harmful effects on the Salesian. At first he feels some remorse, afterwards not so much, and, in the end, this salutary remorse vanishes altogether, and the unfortunate assistant finds himself on the slope of laxity and on the way to the loss of his vocation. I dare say without fear of being mistaken that if we abandon assistance we shall, in proportion, be abandoned by God.

I do not deny that assistance implies sacrifice. It is a cross, but it is the cross that we have spontaneously accepted when we decided on following Christ; it is a sacrifice that God will amply reward. Do not, then, my dear brother, neglect the assistance which your superior entrusts you with. Never lose sight of your boys, watch over them - though it is understood! - with prudence and not as a policeman. Do not show that you mistrust them. At recreation keep them playing, or rather play with them. This is a great means to crowd out the devil from your boys.

The boy who plays is pretty safe. With your looks, either kind or serious, with a “word-in-the-ear” encourage the downhearted, contain the vengeful, restrain biting tongues

and break up certain cliques throwing yourself into their midst without any fear. A few minutes are enough for the frost or hail to destroy all the flowers and the coveted fruits of a luxuriant garden.

During recreation avoid walking up and down with the other brothers, as this is a serious obstacle to assistance. Be with your boys always.

Watch over them during the walks; remain behind them. Watch over them in the study, in class, in the Church, exacting that they always should have their hands on the desk. A little suspicion should always be kept alive; do not be so simple as to believe that your boys are little saints. They can always cheat you.

Study their temperaments; advise them once, twice, thrice or even twenty times. If they correct themselves, cheer them up with a hearty “all right” or “well done”; if not, report it to the superiors.

Believe me, my dear brother, a good assistant does more good than a good preacher, and earns more merit than the greatest penitent. Only God knows how many sins are prevented. A saint used to say that in order to prevent one sin, he would roam barefooted to the end of the earth! And he was right because to prevent only one mortal sin is like freeing the Son of God from death.

A school where the duty of assistance is well done will give much glory to God, much joy to our Blessed Lady and to the Holy Guardian Angels. It is bound to be blessed by God and will always overflow with pupils. Instead a school that is lacking in assistance will be a home of corruption rather than being an educational institution.

Always assist with a true spirit of sacrifice. Remember that one day Our Lord will reward you for it as for a charity

done to himself. If you fulfill this duty well you will live happy and contented in your vocation; you will be the consolation of your superiors and the right hand of your Rector, and God's blessings will accompany you everywhere.



### **HINT 38**

#### **GUARD AGAINST BAD EXAMPLES!**

There have been bad examples in Heaven, in the Garden of Eden, in the apostolic college. No wonder then if they can be found also in the holiest communities. Therefore it is essential that you should take the necessary precautions, lest those bad examples might become for you an occasion of falling. "Take unto you the armor of God that you might be able to resist in the evil day and to stand in all things perfect," (Eph. 6:13).

Act in such a way that everything may help you to advance in virtue. "All things work together for good," (Rom. 8:28). If you are moved by good examples try to follow them; but if, on the contrary, you feel affected by reprehensible examples look upon them as disgrace, and do not imitate them. God makes use even of bad example in order to try the just. On account of them some people are lost whereas others are sanctified. To which number will you belong?

Due to our nature, so prone to evil, it is easier to follow evil than good. However steady your will may seem, you will not, unless you take special precautions, escape the evil influence of the defects of those with whom you live. You will not fail to come across one who openly or in a veiled manner will make fun of your zeal, of your interest for the house, of your punctuality, and even of your piety, because good example is always a silent unpleasant reproach to those

who do not behave well. Simply ignore him as you would a dog barking behind you.

Allowing yourself to be overcome by human respect, and slackening in your fervour, would be an act of shameful cowardice, a sign of very shaky virtue, and a remarkable harm to your soul. Bad example is like a hurricane that roots out only tender trees, whereas it strengthens those that are well rooted.

If one smears his face with mud, would you follow suit? If he throws himself off a cliff, would you imitate him? Never commit the nonsense of displeasing God by pleasing a fool.

If you come across somebody whose example, words or counsels are a motive of danger to you just move away, and far from seeking his company do not have anything to do with him, confining yourself to what is strictly necessary. Do not join those who murmur and start cliques and factions even if they seem good. Always be with your Rector, and you will never be mistaken.

If you come to know that something wrong is going on, whose consequences might be serious, inform the Rector about it, not caring in the least what they are going to think about you, or what is going to happen to you. The prudence of your superiors will settle all matters. When a Salesian is intent only on doing his job, and he simply ignores any outside influence, normally those who are looking for trouble, leave him in peace or rather avoid him. So much the better! There's less trouble and no loss in that.

Be careful! Don't be a weathercock or a hollow reed that is easily shaken by any gust of wind. Rather be a steady pillar by practicing what you have learnt in your novitiate, where whatever is taught is intended to be put into practice all your life long. Fr. La Colombiere once exclaimed: "It seems that the whole world is up against me, mocking at me,

complaining of and scolding me; in spite of all that, I want to put into practice what God commands and inspires me for his greater glory. I have vowed it and I hope to maintain it by the help of His grace.”

These should be your feelings.



### **HINT 39**

#### **DON'T BECOME TRASH**

When a tool or any object becomes useless it is thrown away as if it were garbage.

The same may happen to a religious who ought to be an instrument in the hands of God and of his superiors. He becomes useless when he allows himself to be dominated by dissipation, by pride, when he loses his fervor, when he forgets the sacred commitments he signed at the foot of the altar, when he scandalizes his confreres with his bad behavior, though, on the other hand, he may be gifted with assets and skills.

Allow me this comparison: Of what good is a beautiful horse if he does not obey, if it bites the bit, and if it rears up?

On the contrary, how much more useful is a little donkey that is patient and docile? You will understand that its usefulness depends on its humility and docility. This is clearly expressed by the Royal Prophet: “All declined and at the same time became useless,” (Ps. 14:3). They became useless because they deviated from the path of virtue.

The religious who, led by pride, complain of everything and criticize everything and everyone without restriction, who neglect their most sacred duties, who do not love work, who

resist obedience, who ignore their rules and are ashamed of piety, let them ponder these words:

They are indeed those who “labour in vain,” who become useless, rubbish. They are clouds without water carried away by wind, they are fruitless trees about to be uprooted. What a sorry role those unfortunate people are playing! Soon the fame of their unholy deeds spreads around! The superiors do not know what to do with them; they do not know where to place them because in addition to being useless, they are scandalous and destroyers of the good that others do. Anything can be feared from such people who trusting in themselves seek only their own glory.

But Our Lady who is an excellent doorkeeper in our Congregation, will certainly make a good cleansing and will sweep that rubbish from her house. The day will come when those poor blind people will be cast away from the Congregation and thrown into the garbage heap of the world to be excluded perhaps for ever from the eternal tabernacles of heaven.



## **HINT 40**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

Let me put in a nut-shell all that I have told you. Out of the novitiate you will breathe an atmosphere of greater freedom. You are not watched over as before. No one gives you those frequent remarks and encouragements with which you were once so familiar. And the other thousand and one resources to keep your fervor alive are gone with your novitiate and studentate.

You have, in a way, come of age. So now you must not be led by the blowing wind, or by your natural inclinations, but only by your duty, by those deep convictions that are the fruit of the spirit of faith and by a firm determination to please God alone in all things. You must appropriate those words that the Lord addressed to Abraham: "Walk before me and be perfect," (Gen. 17:1).

Remember the presence of that God who will one day demand of you a strict account and you will become perfect. In the novitiate you behaved yourself well, in spite of not being bound by the vows. Now that you are bound, you are supposed to behave much better because of the strict obligations you have now contracted to constantly strive after perfection.

For God's sake do not neglect it by abandoning the means that will help you to fulfill it. Keep your Holy Rule scrupulously. Have the greatest care for the queen of virtues; be most delicate in its practice. Observe the virtue of poverty, not attaching your heart to anything in this world, never keeping money without the permission of your superiors. And keep obedience in the smallest things as did the servant of God Fr. Andrew Beltrami.

I assure you that it is almost always the neglect of these great means that brings about that laxity which we have been fighting in these pages. It is here that we find the root of that looking behind which is so fatal for the religious. Do not be carried away by the example of certain confreres who, unfortunately, are of a blameworthy conduct; who give themselves to dissipation and go far from their goal. Never be a cowardly slave of human respect; always do well openly and boldly. Do not be carried away by any wind of opinion just like a weathercock. Stick to your Rector like a shell to the rock; follow his directions; place all your confidence in him; keep nothing hidden from him.

Be on your guard lest the devil or your self-love should blind you with the desire of becoming prominent, inducing you to believe yourself to be something.

Do not lose sight of your nothingness; do not consider yourself superior to the others; but rather deem yourself the last and least of all, and then you will enjoy constant peace of mind. Combat self-love and abject selfishness because they are the opposite and exclusion of charity, so that the words of St. Paul “They seek the things that are their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ’s,” (Phil. 2:21), may not be applied to you.

Remember the motto: “*Da mihi animas caetera tolle.*” Subordinate your comfort to the interests of the Congregation.

Flee grumbling which Don Bosco called the plague and scourge of a congregation; and whom the Scripture characterizes, “their tongue is an asp,” (Rom. 3:13). According to the book Proverbs, it is the object of the abomination of God and peculiar only to abject and despicable beings. Do not complain about clothes, food, or superiors’ orders; but if difficulty arise, clear your doubts by speaking openly to them.

Suffer in silence those little crosses that the Lord sends you. Even if the spirit of mortification typical of a religious does not encourage you to suffer small inconveniences, at least give up the bad reputation that you would earn by your criticism and grumbling. It is a fact that God sends severe punishments to such wayward religious.

Flee from particular friendships and sensual attachments which blind your mind, harden your heart, produce God’s disgust, and cause desolation and ruin in souls.

If you practise these simple hints, without doubt, you will persevere, you will be useful, you will be the consolation



of your superiors, you will be happy in your vocation, you will advance in virtue, you will save many souls and you will hear with joy on the last day the consoling words of our Saviour: "Well done, good and faithful servant; because thou hast been faithful over few things; I will place thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of the Lord." Amen.



## APPENDIX 1

### SOMETHING ABOUT INTERIOR LIFE

Do you really want to achieve the perfection of your religious life, to imitate Our Lord Jesus Christ, to save many souls and to achieve final perseverance? Try to practice interior life.

The Saints and Masters of spiritual life agree in saying that the stillness of the soul and true and habitual joy are found only in the inner world, in the kingdom of God, which we have within ourselves. In fact, what is the cause of the disturbance and discontentment that gives rise to such complaints and murmurings among religious people? What is the reason for their not taking a step in the life of virtue, for drawing so little fruit from the sacraments and prayer, and sometimes feeling so much distaste for the vocation? It is the lack of that spirit of faith that must dominate all the feelings, words and works, and all the affections of the heart of the religious, which is nothing other than the practice of the interior life.

If in your occupations you pay attention only to the external, you are guided only by human motives: without paying attention to the above, you will be unfortunate, exposed to committing a thousand nonsense; Because you will carry the entire weight of the exterior work, without tasting the anointing and interior sweetness, that is, that consolation that comes from knowing that God is well served and pleased with you, and the hope of eternal reward.

Due to the exceptional importance of this matter, I have thought of presenting you with a short practical summary, which can serve as a guide to know where you are in something which is so necessary for a religious.

What is interior life? It is the kingdom of God in souls; it is to belong totally to Jesus Christ; It is to put Him on,

and imitate Him, according to what Saint Paul says: "Those whom God has foreseen from all eternity that they should be among the number of the elect, He has predestined so that they become conformed to his Son by imitating his virtues."

It is having God as the goal of all our works, sorrows and labours; It is to live habitually connected in Him; It is the entrance of the soul into its intimate or center, where the Kingdom of God is properly located. "My Kingdom is within you" said the Lord.

To live an interior life, Jesus Christ must be the soul of our soul, the owner of our entire being, our Teacher, Counselor, Director; our life must be so much in accordance with His that we can say with Saint Paul: "I live, it is no longer I but Christ lives in me."

The interior life is also called the life of faith, because the interior man is so intimately convinced, penetrated and in love with the truths of the Gospel, that they move him to act in all his judgments and appraisals, in all his acts and circumstances of the life; For this reason, the good Salesian, of interior life:

1. He always sees God present in his heart, and seeks only Him and His glory in all his works.

2. He sees God in the person of his neighbor, especially youngsters, and he treats them as he would treat Jesus Christ himself, remembering that he has been called to the Congregation to cooperate with Him in the salvation of souls with the motto: *Da mihi animas, caetera tolle*.

3. He sees in the things commanded by the Superiors, by the Rules or required by duty, the will of God manifested; He knows how much obedience is worth, even the smallest ones, he is encouraged by the hope of the great reward that awaits him, and he always repeats with pleasure that the words of

Our Lord Jesus Christ: "I did not come to do my will": in short, he knows that God wants to be:

worshiped under the species of Bread  
served under the rags of the poor,  
obeyed in the person of a Superior (not necessarily kind)  
loved in the person of our enemy.

4. He is not discouraged by not succeeding in his works, because he knows that God does not reward success, but rather good will.

The interior life is also a life of abandonment to God. For this:

1. The Salesian of the interior life is convinced that God does not need him, but that he is the one who needs to fulfill the Will of God and abandon himself completely to Him.

2. He is convinced that nothing happens that God does not want or allow for our good, in terms of misfortunes, persecutions, illnesses, orders from Superiors, etc. and it does not stop at the secondary or immediate causes. Sees the Providence of God not only in the whole of our lives or in great events, but also in the most insignificant details and circumstances. For this reason:

3. On every occasion, he lovingly submits himself to the good pleasure of God, and says with all his heart: 'My God, thank you.' In relation to this, Saint Teresa used to say: "Let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you." And Saint John Berkman: "I will never worry about what will become of me."

4. He rests in God as the child rests in its mother's lap.

5. He rises above all the sorrows and miseries of this life. He will cry, but in the meantime prays "You are with us, Lord, this is enough for me."

6. He is not disturbed or discouraged by the experience of his miseries and frailties, and tries to consume them all in a blind hope in Divine Mercy. He will say like Saint Paul: "The more I recognize myself, the stronger I find myself."

The interior life is also a spirit of humility. Therefore:

1. The Salesian of the interior life is convinced that he is nothing but nothingness and sin, and that, without the help of God, he can do nothing, just as the eye can see nothing without the help of light.

With this low feeling of self, he seeks self-denial and contempt in everything, and renounces all self-love and attachment to the things of the earth.

With this step he creates such a complete void in his soul that God is forced to fill it with the treasures of his grace. These treasures, in turn, lead him to such a state of holiness that honor becomes torment, and confusion becomes consolation, facilitating the possession of all the virtues, and that peace and joy that are the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

From what has been said above, it follows that:

2. He rejoices in his humiliations and persecutions, remembering that Jesus, his Master, licked the dust and was reproached.

3. He never aspires for a preferential place, but is always content with the last and with being the servant of everyone. For this reason, he never offends his Brothers or takes offense, and treats everyone with the most exquisite charity.

The interior life is also a spirit of sacrifice and mortification because:

1. The Salesian with an interior life loves work and takes advantage of his time, like a good son of Don Bosco,

convinced that this is one of the treasures of the Gospel that must be traded with.

2. Mortify your will, fulfilling all duty, all obedience, and remaining indifferent to any position or to go from one place to another. In short, practice well the "denial of oneself" which the Lord instills in us.

3. Mortify all your senses, particularly restrain your imagination, your sight, and your tongue, which you should try to keep away from idle and useless talk, which is of no use either to God or to your neighbour, but rather is the material for the day of judgment. The apostle Saint Paul asks us of this when he tells us: "we always carry the mortifications of Jesus in our body."

4. Mortify your heart so that it does not become passionate about any creature and loves only God. The death of sensuality in man is necessary, so that all men be saved. "The wisdom of God – says Job – is not found among those who live sensually; nor are divine consolations given to those of the flesh."

The interior life is also the spirit of prayer. For this reason, the Salesian of the interior life:

1. Habitually trusts in God, goes to Him in all the difficulties of life; He frequently elevates the heart, and is very familiar with the use of ejaculations; He is habitually faithful to all the private practices of piety, especially in doing well the Meditation, and the daily examen, that of the holy Mass, in confessing every eight days, as the Holy Rule commands, and fervently receiving the Holy Communion

2. Professes solid devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary Help of Christians, and seeks to propagate these two devotions with true enthusiasm.

3. He has and often renews the right intention in all his works, to make them supernatural; he cultivates the presence of God and is guided in everything by faith, without which it is impossible to please God.

If you seek to acquire and preserve this inner spirit, you can be sure that you will possess the spirit of Christ.

Saint Paul, by telling us that "the one who does not have the spirit of Christ is not His" fills us with a healthy fear and encourages us to acquire this spirit, without which we cannot belong to Christ, who is the only source of life. If we add to this that, as religious, we have a true obligation to acquire it, we find ourselves in this alternative: either we belong to Christ through the practice of the interior life, and achieve eternal life, or we lose everything.



## **APPENDIX 2**

### **EXPLANATION OF THE TRUE DEVOTION TO MARY MOST HOLY OR MARIAN SLAVERY**

All Salesians should profess a great, extraordinary devotion to Mary Help of Christians because you cannot conceive of a son of Don Bosco who does not love Her to the point of madness and does not work tirelessly to make Her known. I have thought of exposing you in a brief and clear way what true devotion to the Mary Most Holy consists of, according to the teachings of St. Grignon de Montfort, approved and recommended by the Church and the Supreme Pontiff Pius X. Look closely and you will understand.

#### **1. To Jesus through Mary**

Jesus Christ must be the ultimate goal of all devotions, as he is the alpha and omega; the beginning and end of all things; otherwise, they would be false and misleading.

But just as Jesus Christ is our mediator with his eternal Father, Mary is our mediator with Jesus Christ. 'to the flower through the stalk'; like someone who picks up a flower with its stem, he who takes hold of Jesus through Mary, finds him more easily and preserves him more safely.

Mary is the tree of life: Jesus Christ is the fruit; just as through the door one goes to the temple, through the staircase to the summit, through the canal to the fountain, through the stem to the flower: through Mary and in Mary we find Jesus.

God came into the world through Mary, and man must go to God through Mary. Through Mary God becomes man, and through Mary man becomes God, to be able to ascend to heaven.



Mary was called by St. Grignon de Montfort the mould of God in which the God-man has been formed by an hypostatic union and where man was transformed into God, by grace.

As the Holy Spirit produced in Mary and through Mary the adorable Head, he will produce in Mary and through Mary by the end of the world the predestined members of the body of this Head: since a mother does not give birth to the head without the members. In such a way, Mary, who has been the Mother of the firstborn of God, must be the Mother of the adopted children until the end of the world. This is what the Royal Prophet refers to when he says: "Man and man was born in Her."

According to the explanation of some Fathers, the first man born of Mary is the Man God, Jesus Christ, and the second is a pure man, son of God and son of Mary by adoption.

Just as in the corporeal generation there is a father and a mother, so also in the supernatural generation there is a Father, who is God, and a Mother, who is Mary.

Thus, all the predestined have God as Father, and Mary as Mother; and whoever does not have Mary as a Mother, cannot have God as a Father.

We will have Mary as our Mother, if we truly love Her and if we give ourselves to Her in an absolute way, as slaves of Her love. In this way, being in Her hands like a canvas before the painter, She will be able to form in us the image of the Son of God, that is, help us to achieve holiness, being able, as She can, to dispose of all the abilities in our favour, graces and gifts from God, of which She is the absolute owner and treasurer, in charge of distributing to whom She wants, as much as She wants and how She wants, to the greater glory of God.

It is the doctrine of Saint Bernard and Saint Bonaventure that Mary is the mysterious channel through which God makes His graces and mercies pass gently and abundantly: because it is the will of God that we have everything in Mary, and that She who was the humblest of creatures, be in-charge of filling with Saints the thrones left empty by pride.

On the other hand, the Holy Spirit, who wants to form His chosen ones through Her, as he finds his indissoluble spouse in us, that is, true devotion to Mary, through which we become Her property, produces Jesus in our soul, putting it as if into a sea of graces. For this reason, it has been noted that those who formally cultivate this devotion make rapid progress in the life of faith, in union with God and in all other virtues, until they reach the true imitation of Christ. You must walk this path, dear Brother, if you want to be among the predestined, and thus ensure your perseverance and salvation.

## **2. Marian Slavery or spiritual childhood**

Slavery by force is degrading and pitiful; but voluntary slavery, for the sake of the great ideals and noblest loves, is great and sublime. Mary was called a slave of the Lord, and Jesus Christ "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant".

The infant is his mother's slave by nature: he is so placed in Her hands that, without continuous subjection to Her, he can barely live.

We, in the spiritual order, are like children: we cannot take even one step on the path to heaven without God preceding us, accompanying us and following us, with the help of his grace (according to the Council of Trent); nor can we say 'Lord' without His help; So is our incapacity for supernatural things; our ignorance and weakness, our hesitations and falls reduce us to the condition of slaves, that is, incapable children. Now, to this forced slavery and childhood of the spirit we must

add another, immensely meritorious: to become children and abandon ourselves in the arms of our heavenly Mother, Mary Most Holy, so that She may prepare us to achieve eternal bliss.

We must become children, I have said, and the more children we become, the more we will grow in the spiritual life. This is what our Lord already instilled in us when he said: "you will not enter the kingdom of God if you do not become like little children".

It is, therefore, a necessity for us; and just as the child needs the mother, we, I repeat, will abandon ourselves to the arms of Mary so that She may nourish and educate our spirit until She leads it to the highest holiness. Let us not fear being rejected: She herself invites us and desires it: "if anyone one is little, let him come to me."

### **3. Surrender of our being to Mary**

We owe our love to Mary; The first is called diffusive, and it manifests itself by uniting one's own will to Her will and pleasure. Now, given that on earth we are distracted and forgetful of God, we make an agreement with Her, formally declaring to Her that our desire is to be loving, adoring and praising our Lord as She Herself loves Him, adores Him and praises Him in heaven, and we want to give Him the same glory that She gives Him.

To this end we will absolutely surrender all our being, will, works, gains and prayers, so that everything is directed to produce greater good and give God the greatest possible glory.

#### **We will surrender:**

1.Our body, with all its members and senses. With this dedication we consecrate to Her the chastity and purity of our flesh and body, wishing to spiritualize it and elevate

it to that life that is all pure, all chaste, all virginal that She herself taught us. It is characteristic of the chaste to dedicate his senses and consecrate his heart to this most pure Virgin, as it is characteristic of the true devotees of Mary to be chaste.

2. The soul is consecrated with all its powers.

3. Our external goods, that is, materials.

4. Our internal, or spiritual, goods; that is, our past, present and future good works, with their meritorious, impetratory and satisfactory value; and this without any reservation, and, furthermore, for all eternity and without seeking any other reward for our offering and our services, than the honour of belonging to Jesus Christ through Mary and in Mary, even if this kind Lady was not, as She is, always the most liberal of all creatures.

We, as religious, should not find difficulty in making these dedications, since, with the taking of the holy vows, we have already renounced the goods of soul and body in the hands of God, and we have detached ourselves from all material goods of the earth.

This devotion makes the faithful slave offer without reserve to Jesus and Mary all his thoughts, words, actions and sufferings of his entire life; so that, whether he wakes or sleeps, whether he drinks or eats, or whether he does the greatest or the smallest actions, he will always truly say that he does it, even without thinking about it, to Jesus and for Mary, by virtue of their absolute offering, unless expressly revoked.

What a comfort! If God gives a hundredfold in this world to those who, out of love, leave behind external, temporal and perishable goods, what hundredfold will He not give to those who also sacrifice their interior and spiritual goods? For a clearer understanding of this act, it is convenient to know

that every good work done in a state of grace produces three effects or fruits for us:

1. The meritorious fruit, which is an increase of grace in our soul, to which corresponds an increase of glory in heaven.

2. The impetratory (imploring), which is that power the good works have, to obtain some benefits from God.

3. The satisfactory; it is so-called because the Lord deigns to accept the work or merit of the good works, as satisfaction or payment of the temporary penalty deserved by our sins. Now, the dedication we are dealing with is similar to the "Heroic Act of Charity towards the Souls in Purgatory", which consists of voluntarily and generously giving away the fruit of our good works, as well as the merits that we receive for ourselves after our death, in favour of souls, depositing the said satisfactions and suffrages in the hands of the Mary Most Holy so that She may distribute them among those souls whom She wants to free from those sufferings, with the difference that in this consecration is given to Mary much more.

We give him not only the satisfying fruits of our good works, but also the meritorious and impetratory.

We give him the meritorious fruits, that is, our merits, not to communicate them to others (because our merits are, properly speaking, incommunicable, and only Jesus Christ, becoming our guarantor with his Eternal Father, has been able to communicate his merits to us), but so that he preserves them for us, increases, purifies, beautifies them, adorning them with his own merits and virtues, and makes them pleasing to his Divine Majesty.

St. Montfort demonstrates these offices of Mary with the beautiful example of the apples that a vassal offered to his king at the hands of the queen, who would clean the said fruit and put it on a golden platter, surrounded by beautiful

flowers so that the king would receive the offering with more pleasure.

Regarding what has been said, Saint Bernard expresses himself this way: "When you want to offer something to God, be careful to offer it through the most gracious and worthy hands of Mary as long as you do not want to be rejected."

We give Her the impetratory fruits of our good works and our prayers so that She, who knows perfectly where the greatest glory of God is and has all the holiness necessary to be attended to, to pray for us according to our intentions, which are great and unbeatable; and great goods will be achieved, such as the conversion of sinners and the reign of Jesus Christ, leaving the benefit of all this good for us, as if it came from us. For this reason the Saint calls Mary our supplement, because She makes up for our ignorance and poverty.

What an amazing advantage! We give Her satisfactory fruits, which do not lead to an increase in glory (since they are only ordered to the remission of temporal punishment), so that She may distribute them at Her pleasure and in our name, especially to the souls in Purgatory, if we have done the Heroic Act. And since this distribution made in our name is a set of acts of exquisite charity, we provide ourselves with so many other merits of infinite value. We give up our own satisfactions, which are worthless (because they are temporary), to acquire the essential reward of acts of charity that are worth an eternity. It is, as if we said, exchanging blackened copper with the purest and most brilliant gold. It's like giving an egg to receive an ox. The heroism, then, of our total dedication to the Mary Most Holy, consists essentially in not reserving anything for ourselves, not even the satisfaction of our good works.

As you can understand, we do not lose anything; On the other hand, we earn the unspeakable: it is as if one could

withdraw from the National Bank 100 times what one deposits in it. On the other hand, we can be assured that the value of our good actions, desires, and prayers is always used for the greater glory of God. Is it possible to find anything more consoling for a soul that loves the Lord, and that seeks in this life only the glory, the interests of God?

#### **4. Response to two objections**

Would anyone say that this devotion makes us incapable of helping the souls of our relatives, friends and benefactors because it makes us give our Lord the value of all our good works, mortifications and alms? This is answered this way.

1. Our relatives, friends and benefactors are not hurt because we have consecrated ourselves and sacrificed ourselves without interest to the service of our Lord and his Most Holy Mother. To assume this would be to do an injustice and insult to the goodness and power of Jesus and the Most Holy Mary, who want to grant to our relatives, friends and benefactors what we, out of justice and recognition, must provide for them with our prayers. There is no room for ingratitude in heaven. Consequently, this practice does not prevent us from praying (and we should pray) for them, and other living and deceased faithful, even though the application of our good works depends on the will of the Blessed Virgin. On the contrary, this will lead us to pray with more confidence. In the same way that a rich person who had given all his wealth to a great prince in order to honor him more, would more confidently beg this prince to give alms to one of his friends who asked for it. And it would even please the Prince to provide him with the opportunity to witness his recognition of a person who has stripped himself of everything, in greater appreciation of his sovereign and who has become poorer to honor him. The same must be said of our Lord and the Blessed Virgin. They will never allow themselves to be defeated by anyone in acknowledgement or generosity.

It will also be objected that if I give to the Blessed Virgin all the satisfactory value of my prayers to apply it to whomever She wants, perhaps it may be necessary for me to suffer for a long time in Purgatory?

This objection, which comes from self-love and ignorance of the liberality of God and His Most Holy Mother, falls: a generous soul, which takes God's interests more seriously than its own, who gives to God everything he has without reserve, to the best of his ability, who aspires only to the Kingdom of Jesus Christ through his Most Holy Mother, and who, to obtain it, sacrifices himself always and in everything, this soul, so heroic, I repeat, will it be punished in the other world for having been more liberal and disinterested than the others? On the contrary: Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin will be very liberal with this soul in this world and in the next, in the order of nature, grace and glory!

And in truth, the Holy Virgin, who is the Mother of sweetness and mercy, and who in love and liberality never allows herself to be defeated by anyone, seeing that one gives oneself entirely to Her, to honor and serve Her, stripping himself of everything that is dearest on earth, will entirely and in an ineffable way, obtain for him from the one who gives everything: He makes the soul drown in the abyss of his graces, adorns it with his merits, supports it with his power, illuminates it with his light, surrounds it with his love; communicates his virtues, his humility, his faith, his purity, etc.; She becomes his guarantor, his intercessor, and his everything to Jesus. In short, as such a person is consecrated to Mary, Mary also consecrates herself entirely to him, so that one can say of such a perfect servant and son of Mary what Saint John the Evangelist says of himself: that he had taken to the Blessed Virgin in place of all goods: the disciple took Her into his home.



## **5. Interior practice of this devotion, or Life of union with Mary**

The life of union with Mary is summed up in the meaning of the four prepositions: in, with, through, for.

1. 'In' indicates abode, rest. It is necessary to live and do all things in Mary, that is to say: Mary must be the place of our living. This is why She is called the 'city of God' in the Holy Scriptures: Mary must be the oratory, where we can direct our prayers and sacrifices to God, without fear of seeing ourselves neglected; Mary must be our atmosphere, our element, without which we cannot live true interior life; She must be our ark of salvation, to be defended from the flood of passions and temptations that threaten to drown us; She must be our mould, where we must conform to Jesus: Mary must be our universal resource, our everything with God.

2. When we receive Jesus in Holy Communion, we will also place him in Mary, so that he may have his pleasures in Her. Mary will receive him lovingly, She will adore him preferentially, She will love him perfectly, She will embrace him closely, and She will give him in spirit and in truth many unknown gifts to our thick darkness. Thus, although our heart is a stable, Jesus will gladly come to it, because he will find Mary.

Remember the vulgar phrase that describes the character of some children: "who do not know how to get out of their Mother's skirts." Let us do the same: let us abandon ourselves to Mary like a child in the arms of its Mother, like a lute in the hands of a good musician. Oh! What harmonies will Mary Most Holy be able to bring out so pleasing to the ears of God! Then we will see how the passions will be dampened, and we will begin to forget about ourselves to think only of Mary and Jesus.

3. 'Through' indicates mediation. We must do all our works through Mary: She will be our surest means of going to God, to whom we must never go alone. She will be our mediator; She, universal supplement, because we need Her for everything, making up for our insufficiency and the deficiency of our intentions. If we do our works in Mary, it is precisely so that they go to God through Her. Our offerings, works and prayers made in Her will pass through Her hands, and She will offer them to God, who will receive them with great pleasure and will not reject them because Mary is the object of his greatest pleasure.

It is advisable that in each work these words be frequently repeated: "I renounce myself, and I surrender to You, my Mother."

St. Grignon de Montfort assures us that the more times we repeat it, the sooner we will reach union with Jesus Christ.

4. 'With' indicates company, imitation. It is necessary to carry out the actions with Mary, that is to say: take the Blessed Virgin as a complete model, in everything that must be done. Therefore, before starting anything, a man must renounce himself and his way of seeing; He must annihilate himself before God, recognizing himself as incapable of all supernatural action and of all actions leading to salvation; He must turn to the Blessed Virgin and join Her intentions, although unknown; he must be united through Mary to the intentions of Jesus Christ, that is to say: put himself as an instrument in the hands of Mary, so that She may take charge in us, and do for us and with us what She sees fit for the greatest glory of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ, so that no interior path or spiritual operation is undertaken without his assistance.

If you had to go to the King to ask for an important favor, and you did not dare because of your meanness, nor

did you know the royal etiquette, you would look for a person who was a friend of the King to act as an interpreter and intercessor to get you out of trouble: this is the conduct we follow, executing our actions with Mary.

She will be our intercessor and interpreter with God, and we, like a child holding Mary's hand, walking with Her and having his eyes fixed on Her to imitate Her. In this way, we will not do our will, but that of Our Lady, looking to Her pleasure in everything we have to do, and we will set our eyes on this as the slave places them in Her Mistress to do Her will in everything.

We will call ourselves and consider ourselves servants of the servants of Mary; and with this spirit of humility, we will always choose for ourselves the lowest place in the house of God. And we will be glad that the worst and most discarded are given to us, considering everyone more worthy of the best. Firmly resolve not to do anything without permission from the Virgin, and you will achieve this by fulfilling, for Her love, your duties as best you can, and scrupulously following obedience in small things, and offering to do some works of supererogation that serve as a tribute, whether daily, weekly or monthly.

5. 'For' indicates purpose, end. We must, finally, do all actions for Mary, that is to say: being slaves of this august Princess, it is right that we do everything for Her; that we work only for Her, for Her benefit and for Her glory, and not because we consider Her as the ultimate end of all our services, who is Jesus Christ, but as a proximate end, and as a good means to go to Jesus. The soul that proceeds in this way in everything it does must renounce its self-love, which is often taken finally, in an almost imperceptible way, and must repeat many times from the depths of his heart: "Oh my dear Lady, for you I go here or there; For You I do this or that; For You I suffer this penalty, this injustice."

This encourages and sweetens our work. Beware of believing that it is more perfect to go straight to God in your actions and intentions: if you want to go without Mary, your actions will be of little value; but going through Mary, it is Mary who works in you, and consequently, your actions will be very excellent and very worthy of God. In summary, our rule of conduct must have:

1. By motto, these words: "Everything to Jesus through Mary."

2. As an object, to do all things with Mary, in Mary, through Mary and for Mary, in order to do them more perfectly with Jesus, in Jesus, through Jesus and for Jesus, our ultimate goal.

3. By special prayer, this pious invocation, must be repeated every day, striving to understand, feel and accentuate each of its words:

"Oh my Lady, Mary, and my Mother: I surrender myself entirely to You, and in proof of my devotion, I consecrate to You from now on forever my eyes, my ears, my mouth, my heart and everything that I know and I have; since I am Yours! Oh my good Mother, keep me and defend me as something that belongs to You!"

Finally, I recommend that you be consistent in cultivating the spirit of this devotion, if you want to experience its considerable effects and advance rapidly in perfection. I assure you that no religious person truly devoted to Mary has distanced himself from his goal; none has been lost: all have become saints, they have been saved.

## **6. Some external practices**

1. In addition to loving the Blessed Virgin, pleasing Her, invoking Her, try, as a good Salesian, to spread this devotion with words and deeds.

2. Always carry with you the Holy Rosary, the scapular or medal; and If you want, also a chain, as a sign of slavery.

3. Pray the Holy Rosary with attention, devotion and modesty every day.

4. If your occupations allow it, also pray the crown of the twelve stars, composed of three Our Fathers and twelve Hail Marys in honor of the twelve prerogatives of the Blessed Virgin.

5. Try to have devotion to the great mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, whose feast is celebrated on March 25: it is the mystery of this devotion.

6. Always pray the Hail Mary with devotion.

7. To thank God for the graces he has granted to the Blessed Virgin, pray the Magnificat often.

*Note.* Regarding the way to prepare yourself to do the solemn act of total surrender of yourself to Jesus Christ through Mary, and for the formula of said act, I refer you to what is called "The Secret of Mary", by Blessed Grignon of Monfort. It is a beautiful little book, which you should read often to preserve the true spirit of Marian slavery.

### **DAILY PRAYER**

I greet you, white lily of the glorious and ever peaceful Trinity: I greet You, oh bright rose of Paradise! Oh, You, from whom the King of Heaven wanted to be born and with whose milk the King of Heaven wanted to be fed, quench the thirst of our souls with the outpouring of divine grace!

I offer you the Heart of Jesus with all its love and affections, to make up for my negligence in Your holy service, and I ask You through Your Immaculate Conception, through the Incarnation of the Word and through Your blessed

Assumption, that You achieve for me the most perfect holiness, a most blessed death, and at that hour You come out to receive me, welcome me with the kindness of a Mother and do not allow me to go to Purgatory.

Oh glorious Virgin Mary, Mother of God and my dearest Mother, I renew the firm resolution of being Your perpetual slave, giving You my soul, my body and all my goods, with the full right to dispose of them to Your liking and greater glory of God! I am all Yours and all that is mine is Yours.

I renounce my own will, my sins, my dispositions and intentions. I want only what You want: I throw myself into Your Heart, burning with love. In it I hide to pray, work and suffer always with You, for You, in You and by You, to the greatest glory of the Holy Trinity. Amen.



## APPENDIX 3

### CULTIVATE DEVOTION TO THE SOULS IN PURGATORY

As I have encouraged you to be devoted to Mary Most Holy, I encourage you to be also devoted to the Souls in Purgatory, who can help us so much in our needs, and, above all, to persevere in our vocation.

They cannot help themselves or one another; But they can help their benefactors and they want it with all their might, because neither in heaven nor in Purgatory is there ingratitude.

Saint Catherine of Bologna said: "If I need a grace, I ask for it from the souls and I get it later. Certain favours that I cannot achieve by invoking the Saints, I have easily achieved by resorting to the blessed souls of Purgatory." The experience that many have had fully confirms this assertion. You can also exercise all the works of Mercy: Jesus Christ has said that whatever we did to any of our brothers, we would do to Himself, and He would repay us a hundredfold. If he promises to reward us for a glass of water given for his love, what reward will he not give if for his love we take our brother's soul out of that tremendous fire of Purgatory, it being a common voice of the Saints that a single soul suffers more than what all the martyrs suffered since the beginning of the world to the end of the world?

If Jesus promises mercy for mercy, how can we not take advantage of such a great benefit, of which we have such great need? Furthermore, freeing a soul from Purgatory or shortening the time of its stay in it is an act of exquisite



charity, to which corresponds a merit of infinite value and an increase in glory lasting for all eternity.

Now, if we want, we can do many of these acts of charity every day, offering to the souls in Purgatory the innumerable indulgences that we can achieve as Christians or as Salesians.

