 Reading time: 4 min.

“It is not by the greatness of our deeds that we will please God, but by the love with which we do them”, St Francis de Sales.
A ten-part process in which Saint Francis de Sales could also accompany young people today who are asking questions about the meaning of their lives.

1. If we started from the ABC of the Christian life

Dear young people,
I know that I am writing to those who already carry in their hearts a small desire for good, a search for light. You have already walked in friendship with the Lord, but allow me to summarise for you here the ABC of life as a believer, that is, a rich and deep inner and spiritual life. With this foundation you will be equipped to make fruitful choices in your existence. This work is not new to me: when I was Bishop, I visited all the parishes in my diocese, and many were located in the mountains. To reach them there were no roads and I had to walk long distances, even in winter, but I was happy to meet those simple people, to encourage them to live as God likes.
To walk fruitfully, the work of the spiritual guide who notices what is going on in your heart, encourages you, follows you, offers clear, gradual and stimulating proposals is decisive. I wrote in the Philothea: “Do you want to set out on the paths of the Spirit with confidence? Find someone capable who will be your guide and accompany you; it is the recommendation of recommendations.” Four centuries ago, as today: this is the crucial, decisive point.
The goal to be reached is holiness, which consists of a conscious Christian life, that is, a deep friendship with God, a fervent spiritual life, marked by love of God and neighbour. It is a simple path, knowing that the great opportunities to serve God rarely present themselves, while the small ones always do. This encourages us to ready, active, diligent charity.
If, when thinking of such a goal, you are tempted by discouragement, I repeat what I wrote centuries ago: “We must not expect everyone to begin with perfection: it matters little how we begin. Just be determined to continue and finish well.”
To start off on the right foot, I invite you to purify your heart through confession. Sin is a lack of love, a robbery of your humanity, being in the dark and cold: in confession you hand over to Jesus everything that can weigh you down and make your journey dark. It is getting back the joy of the heart.

Going forward, the tools for walking are as old and valuable as the Church, and have sustained generations of Christians of all ages, for 20 centuries! You too have certainly experienced them.

Prayer, that is, dialogue with a Father who is in love with you and your life. Do not forget that you learn to pray by praying: so be faithful and persevering with it.

The Word of God, that is, the “letter from God” addressed precisely to you as individuals. It is like a sort of compass that guides your walking, especially when it is foggy, dark and you risk losing your bearings! Do not forget that in reading it you have the Treasure in your hands.

The sacrament of the Eucharist is the thermometer of your believing life: if your heart has not gained a lively desire to receive the Bread of Life, your encounter with Him will have modest results. I wrote to my contemporaries: “If the world asks you why you take communion so often, answer that it is to learn to love God, to purify you from your imperfections, to free you from your miseries, to find strength in your weaknesses and consolation in your afflictions. Two kinds of people must communicate with each other often: the perfect, because being well-disposed they would do wrong not to approach the fountain and source of perfection; and the imperfect in order to strive for perfection. The strong so they don’t weaken and the weak to strengthen themselves. The sick to heal and the healthy not to fall ill.”

Attend Holy Mass with great frequency: as much as possible!

I then insist on the virtues, because if the encounter with God is true and profound, it also changes relationships with people, work, things. They make it possible to have a humanly rich character, capable of true and profound friendships, to be joyfully committed to doing your duty well (work-study), being patient and warm in manner, kind.

All this does not take place in your lonely heart, to improve and please yourself. Life with others is an encouragement to journey better (how many are better than us!), to help more (how many need us!), to be helped (how much we have to learn!), to remind ourselves that we are not self-sufficient (we are not self-created and self-educated!). Without a community dimension, we soon lose ourselves.

I hope you have already tasted the fruits of stable guidance, of genuine confessions, of faithful and firm prayer, of the richness of the Word, of the Eucharist lived fruitfully, of virtues practised in the joy of daily life, of enriching friendships, of the indispensability of service. We flourish in this humus: only in this ecosystem can we perceive the true face of the Christian God, into whose hands it is wonderful and joyful to entrust ours life.

Office for Vocational Animation

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