The following excerpt is from an autobiographical piece by Father Harvey that appeared as a chapter in the book Called by Name: The Inspiring Stories of 12 Men Who Became Catholic Priests *(Ascension Press 2008). It is reprinted with permission from the publisher.*

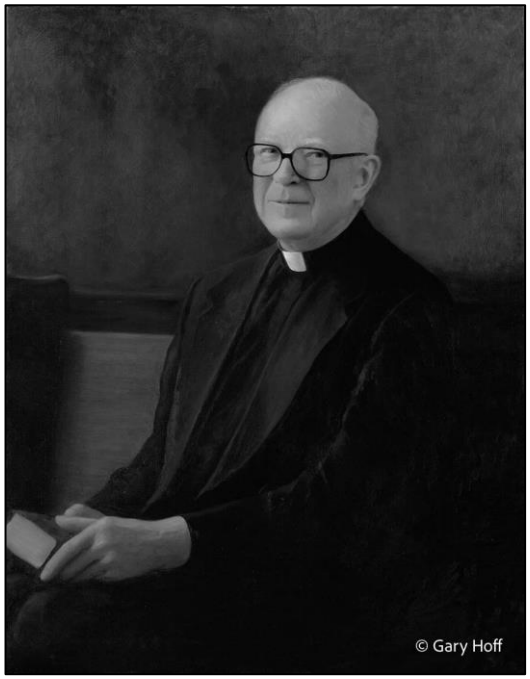
Humility and the Salesian Spirit



As St. Francis de Sales lay on his deathbed, speechless from a stroke, the Visitation nuns asked him to write down the three most important virtues in their way of life. He wrote: "humility, humility, humility." Humility, the loving acceptance of one's limitations, joined to a trust that God gives us strength to carry out his will, is central to the Salesian way of life.

In the Salesian view, what you do is not as important as how you do it—the spirit with which you act. That is why St. Francis de Sales gave the Visitation Order and the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales a Spiritual Directory to guide one's prayer through the hours of the day and night, from morning prayer to night prayer. In part three of his Directory, St. Francis de Sales recommends that one direct the principal actions of the day to God, while accepting all the difficulties which one may encounter. Truly living the Spiritual Directory is more difficult than the performance of many external acts of penance. But once you begin this Directory life of prayer, you will want to hold on to it. As Oblates, we endeavor to use these interior acts of prayer in our daily ministry of Catholic education on every level, from grade school to university. The same spirit is found in parishes and missions where Oblates work. This spirit relies on a sense of humility.

I follow the Salesian spirit in my daily counseling sessions, at Courage meetings, in preaching on Sundays in parishes, and in responding to critics of the Courage and Encourage ways of life. In brief, I strive to exercise my priesthood in imitation of St. Francis de Sales.



In stressing the need which every priest, whether diocesan or religious, has for an interior life of prayer, I certainly do not intend to minimize the value of our external activities. All priests have very significant external acts to perform every day. The most important is the administration of all the sacraments save holy orders, which is ordinarily reserved to bishops. In the writings of St. Francis de Sales, however, the most important act that a priest performs is the offering of Jesus in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Each day centers around the Mass, either in preparing for it from the evening before (hence, in the past, the observance of *le grand silence*), or in offering thanks to the Holy Trinity at the end of Mass.

At my ordination in 1944, I resolved that I would say Mass every day, as long as my health allowed. I have often been asked, "Father, does a priest have to say Mass every day?" The answer is no. Only once was I asked—in 1947 by a ten-year-old girl—"Father, do you like to say Mass?" The answer is yes! Even in their sickness, some priests continue to say Mass every day.

The administration of the sacrament of Reconciliation, the anointing of the seriously ill, and the confirming of converts are all actions in which the priest acts in persona Christi, in the person of Christ. Those who aspire to the priesthood should ask themselves whether they are willing to act in Christ's place in administering the sacraments. Pope John Paul II biographer George Weigel put it very accurately: a priest is an icon of Christ. This is his identity, not whether he is an administrator of an apostolate, or chaplain to the New York Yankees, or a brilliant canon lawyer. I remember autographing one of my books for a Vatican archbishop who said, "Address it 'Father.' 'Father' is my most important title."

To read the rest of the chapter, and to learn more about the life of Father Harvey, please visit www.frjohnharvey.com, a website created by a long-time Courage member and friend. You can also reach the site by using the QR code to the left.