

2014 CIOFS Ongoing Formation Program

Theme I: Saint Louis and Spiritual life¹



“Turn your life Godwards”

“Dear son, my very first teaching is to love God with all your heart and all your strength for without that no-one is worth anything.” (From a spiritual testament to his son by St. Louis)

“Men are strange; they make a crime out of my assiduity in prayer but would say nothing if I spent hours playing cards or dice, tracking wild beasts or hunting birds.” (Attributed to St Louis by Joinville)

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: “SAINT LOUIS – A ROYAL ORANT”

St Louis prayed a great deal. Every day he attended mass, prayed the divine office (breviary) and spent long periods in prayer. When he could, he withdrew to the Cistercian abbey of Royaumont to deepen his communion with God in meditation and prayer, and through this renewal, to go ever more frequently “from gospel to life and life to gospel”.

His inner life was rooted in his desire to follow Christ and to be united with him in the debasement of the cross. Ever avid to learn, he enjoyed listening to the

teachings of theologians. He gladly welcomed St Thomas (Aquinas) and St Bonaventure to dine at his table.

Saint Louis had a strong awareness of sin and of divine forgiveness; did not his mother Blanche de Castile tell him: “My son, I love you, AFTER God, more than all things, however I would rather see you dead than guilty of a single mortal sin”? He went to confession every week and submitted his body to a severe asceticism. He also gave generous alms to the poor, whom he willingly served in person.

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE: “THE CHALLENGE OF INNER LIFE”

The Gospel is the foundation of the inner life of Saint Louis and of any true Christian. Saint Louis often meditated on the Word of the Lord and never missed an occasion to have it explained to him.

If we cannot pray the divine office (hours) as Saint Louis did, we can at least be careful to link every hour of our life to the paschal hour of Jesus. Let us make time each day for a moment of prayer, of communion with Christ and an opening of our heart to the Holy Spirit. May we remind ourselves that fasting fortifies prayer and directs our strength towards the service of the poor (GC 13, 3; 15, 3).

¹ Source: <http://www.catholique78.fr/8-themes-approfondir-0010200>. Theme adapted with the kind permission of the Diocese de Versailles.

Let us use the means that the Church gives us to increase our love of God and of our brothers: the Eucharist feeds our life and gives ultimate meaning to all our commitments. Reconciliation restores our link to God and to others (Rule 7).

FROM SAINT LOUIS TO TODAY

Group Discussion: choose some of the following questions to help your exchanges.

Spiritual Life

St Louis managed to reconcile his royal duties with a fervent and intense practise of Christianity. What space do we allow, in our often-busy daily lives, to our inner life of prayer? (Cf. Rule 8)

We take on various responsibilities: family, profession, clubs and associations ... what means can we use to step back and see these commitments in their true light? How can we help young people to discover their inner spiritual life (Cf. GC 8, 2)?



Sacraments

St Louis participated frequently and intensely in the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation: how do these sacraments nourish my faith and commitments as a Christian? How can I make this clear to those who are close to me?

Formation (Religious/Spiritual Education)

Ever mindful of the teachings of theologians, St Louis attached great importance to the understanding of faith. Do we feel this need to

deepen our understanding of faith? What can we do to better understand our faith and root it in His Word (Rule 4, GC 8, 2)?

Of the world

St Louis gave little consideration to how he appeared to others, but sought to be true in God's eyes. When and where do I manage to overcome my attachment to this "appearance"? What can help me to free myself from my fear of how others see me?

Following Christ

St Louis had a particular desire for communion with Christ of the Passion. What does living in union with Christ, poor and crucified mean for me? (cf. Rule 10, GC 10)



LIVING ACCORDING TO THE 2ND VATICAN COUNCIL

Let us listen to the echoing call and invitation of the Church and choose for the coming month, a road to conversion, a point to focus on in our life as baptised Christians. Discuss your chosen focus point in your fraternity.

“ Since Christ, sent by the Father, is the source and origin of the whole apostolate of the Church, the success of the lay apostolate depends upon the laity's

living union with Christ, in keeping with the Lord's words, "He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit, for without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).



This life of intimate union with Christ in the Church is nourished by spiritual aids which are common to all the faithful, especially active participation in the sacred liturgy. (5) These are to be used by the laity in such a way that while correctly fulfilling their secular duties in the ordinary conditions of life, they do not separate union with Christ from their life but rather performing their work according to God's will they grow in that union. In this way, the laity must make progress in holiness in a happy and ready spirit, trying prudently and patiently to overcome difficulties. (6) Neither family

concerns nor other secular affairs should be irrelevant to their spiritual life, in keeping with the words of the Apostle, "What-ever you do in word or work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Col. 3:17)."²

LIVING THE GOSPEL (Mt 6, 1-18)

Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

This is how you are to pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and do not subject us to the final test, but deliver us from the evil one. If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions.

When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you.

² Decree on the apostolate of the laity *Apostolicam actuositatem*, §4