

# Seeing

## WITH THE HEART OF JESUS

DEAR FRIENDS OF THE SACRED HEART,

Anyone who is familiar with Antoine de Saint Exupery's classic story of *The Little Prince* will recall the unusual personalities which the little prince encountered on his interplanetary exploits. From each a valuable lesson was gleaned, whether it be from a king, or a conceited man, a tippler, a businessman, a lamplighter, or a geographer. All seemed to have their unique idiosyncratic slant on life... a slant that often left the prince quite baffled and characteristically exclaiming "grown-ups certainly are very odd."

It was only when the prince reached the planet Earth that the mysterious significance of his journey seemed to unravel. Here he met a sort of wisdom that he found no where else on his long, tiring travels. Here the insights and friendship of a snake, and a fox, and a stranded pilot were to color the remarkable desert landscapes which the prince traversed both interiorly and exteriorly until he arrived at his final homeward destination.

From the lips of a fox he would learn a simple yet profound secret: "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye." The narrator of the story tells us that the little prince upon hearing these words repeated them to himself so that he would be sure to remember them... "What is essential is invisible to the eye. It is only with the heart that one can see rightly."

So simple yet so profound a message conveyed in the sparsest of words... to reflect upon... to lead one 'homeward' as the little prince. Do these words not mean that externals are of secondary importance? Not that they do not have their proper place, but rather that they are not **the essential**. They do not possess the ultimate meaning of what living is all about.

When we encounter the complexities of life, or meet with absurdity that can defy our wildest imaginations, when we, like the little prince, journey into unfamiliar territory, then maybe we will have the blessed good fortune of meeting our own kind of "fox" who will remind us of the essentials. And the words which will be uttered to us may indeed be worth listening to and repeating. They, like the words of the fox, may be gifts that enlighten our inner consciousness and challenge us to a clearer understanding of things. They may be telling us to re-think what we have henceforth experienced as important, but which in essence was only superficial.

Once we have had the experience of really seeing with the heart, of catching hold of realities that do not slip through our fingers, or temporarily tantalize our senses, then our homeward journey truly begins. Then, no matter how many deserts or "planets" we traverse, we will have the inner compass of our hearts to guide us toward vistas of truth, beauty, and wholeness.

It is a fact that the story of *The Little Prince* does not directly mention God by name, but there is a transcendent presence that, nonetheless, permeates its pages. Its underlying morale underscores the unfulfillment of lives lived in the pursuit of flimsy fortunes, impoverished motives, and ridiculously outdated customs. Ultimately, it summons us to re-examine our own journeys and the people and events that inhabit them. It asks us to reassess what we hold as of 'prime importance.' It calls us to view our surroundings with the piercing gaze of the heart and open ourselves to the sacred depths where the heart of our incarnate God is dwelling.

Throughout the history of spirituality one of the strongest attributes of the saints and holy ones have been their ability to trust in God. Yet, at the same time, we realize that one of the major temptations featured in the pages of holy Scripture and tradition is just the opposite. We, as humans, are tormented by who or what to trust in. We vacillate from the sublime to the ridiculous. Few stay on the narrow path of total trust in our invisible God, but one can hardly doubt that it is one of the most important components to our growth in the spiritual life.

In our own Salesian tradition (which follows the teachings of Saint Francis de Sales), the great teacher of trust, besides Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque, is the nineteenth century Visitandine, Mother Mary de Sales Chappuis. Called the "Good Mother" due to her innate abilities to draw people's hearts to the Heart of Jesus, she possessed exceptional graces to discern the will of God, not only in her own life but in the lives of others. Because of her own deep interior life of prayer, steeped in the writings of Saint Francis de Sales, and her winning, warmth of heart, she assumed important positions as Mistress of Novices and Superior. She was most particularly dedicated to the Spiritual Directory of Saint Francis de Sales, and ardently advocated its practices, especially that of keeping oneself in the continual presence of God. She saw this practice as a means of reparation (for personal sins and for the sins of others).

Two valuable teachings emerged from the Good Mother's fidelity to her Salesian practice. They came to be known as "the way" and "couper-court." "The way" meant the soul's acceptance of present circumstances as God's good pleasure. It implied a deep, deep trustfulness of God's watchful providence over everything that happens. "It is the union of our whole selves with our Lord by our actions, our desires, our sentiments and affection, our "heart" (as explained by the founder of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, Louis Brisson, OSFS). Those who wish to place themselves in "the way" give their whole heart to the Lord, without holding anything back. The "Good Mother" clearly saw this practice as having immense ramifications for renewing the world. When we **will** our intentions to be those of God's, we more closely align our world with God's overall plan of salvation.

Another facet of the Good Mother's teaching is encapsulated in the french expression "couper-court," which literally means "to cut short." Utilizing a spiritual application, it recommends that any reflections or thoughts which lead to self-indulgence, self-absorption, or self-pity, and which make us unduly absorbed in ourselves, be cut short, freeing us to gently turn our hearts and minds back to an awareness of God's presence. In cultivating this practice, we derail our inner defences from mounting a confrontation on anyone and anything that opposes our self-interests. It has the value of calming us to see with more clarity what is really important in a given situation, and thereby invoking the assistance of the spirit of God.

In a world where we are constantly exposed to superficial means of solving our dilemmas, it is refreshing to realize that there are methods used by the saints that show us the better way. They are the ones who so often "look with the heart" and have a keener glance into what will bear the best fruit in the end. That seems to be the enduring message of the classic *The Little Prince*: we are not to be led astray by all kinds of strange teachings. At rock bottom we are to look to the essentials, that is, the Lord of Creation, the Sacred Heart, the Divine Mercy.

The philosopher, Albert Camus, once made the insightful statement: "In the midst of winter, I finally learned that there was within me an invincible summer." The seed of God's presence which lies deep within each of us awaits that touch of grace, that willing nod of co-operation and response on our part to begin the process of transformation, the greening of our spirits, if you will. So let us journey onward with confident trust that the joy which knows no limits and which will be ours in the final possession of the Heart of Jesus. +

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*This talk on Sacred Heart Spirituality was given in our Gathering Room on February 2nd, 2020. If you would like to attend similar presentations by the Sisters, our next talks will be held on Sunday, March 1st, 2020 at 4:00 p.m.*