



Tau Maria Franciscan Formation Meditations
The Nativity of John the Baptist
http://www.oblates.org/dss/sundays_salesian/2012_06_24.php

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Meditation – Self Denial in the Following of Christ

"I make you a light to the nations that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

Salesian Perspective

Francis de Sales [3rd Order Franciscan] wrote: "I have often wondered who is the most mortified of the saints that I know, and after some reflection I have come to the conclusion that it was St. John the Baptist. He went into the desert when he was five years old and knew that our Savior came to earth in a place quite close by, perhaps only one of two days' journey. How his heart, touched with love of his Savior from the time he was in his mother's womb, must have longed to enjoy Christ's presence. Yet, he spends twenty-five years in the desert without coming to see our Lord even once; and leaving the desert he catechized without visiting him but waiting until Our Lord comes to seek him out. Then, after he has baptized Jesus, he does not follow him but stays behind to do his appointed task. How truly mortified was John's spirit! To be so near his Savior and not see him, to have him so close and not enjoy his presence! Is this not a completely detached spirit, detached even from God himself so as to do God's will and to serve God, as it were to leave God for God, and not to cling to God in order to love him better? The example of this great saint overwhelms me with its grandeur." (Stopp, Selected Letters, Page 74)

"How truly mortified was John the Baptist's spirit." What does Francis de Sales mean? The American Heritage Dictionary defines *mortify* as "to discipline by self-denial or self-inflicted privation." John did, indeed, discipline himself: he denied himself many things in order to be faithful to his understanding of who God wanted him to be: a light to the nations, a light to highlight the coming of Jesus.

Think about it: John spends thirty years in the desert preparing to announce Christ's coming. Despite growing up in the same general area, John meets Christ only once - when he baptized him at the Jordan River - only to remain behind as Jesus recruited others to be his apostles and disciples! John never sees his cousin again before dying in prison at the hands of one of King Herod's executioners.

John was faithful to the role God wanted him to play in the plan of salvation: John played that role supremely well. Listen to what Jesus himself said: "I tell you the truth: among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist." (Matthew 11:11) "Yet," Jesus continues, "Anyone who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." John shows us that being faithful to God's will often requires that we deprive ourselves of the desire to "have it all" and to dedicate ourselves to discerning - and embracing - our unique roles in God's plan of salvation.

In ways unique to our states and stages of life, God calls us, too, to be "a light to the nations." Are we prepared to practice the discipline that being that light may require? Are we prepared to follow Christ by staying right where we are?

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Saints Quotes

<http://saintsquotes.net/Selection%20-%20Mortification.html>

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'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me. –

St. Matt. xvi. 24.

'The more one mortifies his natural inclinations, the more he renders himself capable of receiving divine inspirations and of progressing in virtue.'

St. Francis de Sales

'Be careful not to admit into your society those delicate and sensitive people who are afraid of the slightest pin-prick, who cry out and complain at the least pain, who know nothing of the hair-shirt, the discipline or other instruments of penance, and who mingle, with their fashionable devotions, a most refined fastidiousness and a most studied lack of mortification.'

St. Louis Marie de Montfort, 'Letter to Friends of the Cross'

St. John of the Cross says, that he who teaches that exterior mortification is not necessary is not to be believed, although he should perform miracles. '

St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori

'He who gives little importance to exterior mortifications, claiming that interior mortifications are more perfect, clearly shows that he is not mortified at all, exteriorly nor interiorly.'

St. Vincent de Paul

'Without mortification nothing can be done.'

St. Philip Neri

'Some subordinate their progress in perfection, which consists in denying their desires and likings out of love for God, to their own tastes and whims. So strong is this inclination that even if they are commanded by obedience to do something which is to their liking, they immediately lose their desire for it, and all interest in it, because their one desire is to do their own will.'

The saints did not act this way.'

St. John of the Cross

'Without a doubt, one of the things which keeps us from attaining perfection is our tongue. When one has reached the point of no longer committing faults in speech, he has surely reached perfection, as was said by the Holy Spirit. The worst defect in talking is talking too much. Hence, in speech be brief and virtuous, brief and gentle, brief and simple, brief and charitable, brief and amiable.'

St. Francis de Sales

In short, he mortified himself in every possible way, according to the opportunities which offered themselves for so doing, but in so secret and careful a manner that it was difficult, except for those who watched him very closely, to discover it.

He used to say that even trifling sufferings gave opportunities for the most useful mortifications; and for this reason he bore most patiently with the stings of flies, great and small, which would settle on his head, and even draw blood. He endured all kinds of bodily discomforts without a complaint, and without showing the slightest repugnance to them, receiving all from the hand of God.'

St. Jane Frances de Chantal, of St. Francis de Sales