

A Year with Fr. Brisson



celebrating the centenary of the death of the Servant of God

THE REVEREND LOUIS BRISSON

(1817-1908)

priest and founder of the institutes of the
Oblates and Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales

First Friday Reflection (#1)

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by

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As it is for all the Christians, the Lenten season is for us Oblates of St. Francis de Sales a special time to convert and to renew our lives. Our founder Father Louis Brisson helps us to benefit in a special way of this liturgical time. I would like to present some main ideas of Father Brisson on Lent.

1. First of all, we are human beings. He asks: *"Do the Oblates not have their spiritual miseries, their self-love, their sensitivities, their jealousies, their interior rebellions against what annoys them and causes them to suffer?"* (Chapter - February 7th 1894). He remembers that corporal mortifications are not imposed on us in our Constitutions, *"but, - he says - do we not have something much better than corporal mortifications in our Directory? The Capuchin Father charged with revising our Constitutions was struck by not encountering any formal mortifications in them. He wanted to introduce a few but a Cardinal dissuaded him by saying to him: 'Let the Oblates apply themselves to observing all the point of their Directory and they will find in this punctuality mortifications for every moment, and more crucifying than fasts and the discipline'. Ah, well, that is something we do not hear often enough.... May our Directory - better understood and better practiced - be our great mortification during this Lent. Let's ask this of God, of our holy Founders, and especially of the Good Mother who knew how to find therein the secret of holiness"* (February 7th 1894).

2. The goal is to reach the conformity of our life to the Will of God. That is what holiness means to us. *"That is really what holiness is for us. All the practices of mortification and of fasting which are*

performed in other religious orders are all intended to lead the soul to this - conformity to the Will of God" (Chapter - March 6, 1895).

3. Nobody will reach a life of holiness, a life of union with God, if one doesn't have enough courage and an interior decision to persevere walking on this way. It is not a simple and easy adventure, but it is a daring journey. We have to fill ourselves with a lot of courage and perseverance. *"It is much easier to prepare oneself for this spiritual fortune by the methods of St. Francis de Sales provided one has a lot of the necessary courage... This must not be something indifferent, soft or personal. Our heart is supposed to beat with a totally generous feeling while accepting every humiliation, every divine permission... During this lent, let's be of good courage. Let's apply ourselves carefully to this, and we shall become good, holy, religious" (March 6th 1895).*

4. The way to holiness is not a magical one, but consists in progressing step by step, often through difficulties and temptations. What takes us to holiness is not the imagination, but the small and constant actions. *"In the guidance of souls, it is important to remember this, to preserve oneself from the false idea that the good God sends His angels to a soul that finds itself completely enlightened. Sanctity is not like that, sanctity - or holiness - is fidelity at every moment; in the slightest things... In our life the graces of God are not attached to the imagination, but to personal action; to fidelity... Let every one understand that what is in the life of the Good Mother is very true. The souls who receive more by this method are those who have been the most exact in their observances. These graces are never given to the imagination but to action... The important thing is to start by doing in order to be able to understand. This is why our holy Founder and the Good Mother recommend that we have good courage" (March 6th 1895).*

5. We have to have the courage and the determination not to give in as we walk on the way of holiness. The temptation to abandon everything is always there. As Saint Francis de Sales teaches us, we have to have patience with everybody, but especially with ourselves. This Salesian principal is good to remember at this point. *"St. Francis de Sales often reminds us that we must have good courage. Let us, then, have good courage during this Lent. Let's have good courage to employ the means that we have of sanctifying ourselves, and not only in our mind and heart, but also in our body and our exterior acts. If we could all form the good habit of being faithful to our Directory; if we make our direction of intention faithfully in all our actions, in such a way that we always have something to offer God, and, in particular, the pain and mortification which are to be encountered in every action of an Oblate! With this we would have to become saints; this is the most efficacious method of achieving that, and all of us would succeed. If, on the contrary, we follow our own inclination, if we wish to give in to the pleasures which claim our senses, our mind and our heart, we shall achieve nothing... Let us take the resolution during Lent to accept trouble and mortification every time they are encountered on our path: this is how we shall be truly religious and Oblates of St. Francis de Sales. Let's try and see" (Chapter - March 11th 1896).*

+ May God Be Blessed +