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FS400 省會長家書七（2016 年 3 月）

淨化：從罪惡中皈依，向虔誠皈依

親愛的青年們、使命合作伙伴、慈幼家庭的兄弟姐妹們：

願主的平安常與你們同在！上個月我們回顧了我們主保聖人聖方濟各沙雷氏關於虔誠的教導，正如他在第二部著作《入德之門》中所闡述的。今年的三月份，絕大部分屬於神聖的四旬期，我想，比較適合細品一下聖方濟各沙雷氏關於『淨化：從罪惡中皈依，向虔誠皈依』的教導。皈依是我們當下喜用的詞，在聖方濟各沙雷氏的時代，他樂意遵從具有千年歷史的傳統，稱『淨化』。

皈依或者淨化是虔誠的前提。聖方濟各說，『任何靈魂，如渴望成為天主子的淨配，必須要「脫去舊人，穿上新人」（厄 4: 22, 24）。藉著離棄罪惡，消除一切可能阻止他與天主相結合的障礙。清除體內的毒素是重獲健康的開始。』

皈依或淨化，包含了雙向運動。用物理學的语言來講，就是離心運動（從罪惡中皈依）和向心運動（向虔誠皈依）。『從』與『向』兩個字表達了從一事物到另一事物的雙向行動。經過皈依淨化的人，是穿越了污穢的醜陋而到達潔淨的美好。

皈依的雙向運動『離』與『向』是瞬間的還是逐漸的？瞬間的皈依或淨化是極為罕見的。在《入德之門》第二部第五章中，聖方濟各寫道，『聖保祿，在頃刻之間洗滌盡淨，熱內亞的聖女加蒂連 (St. Catherine of Genoa)、聖女瑪達蘭 (St. Mary Magdalen)、聖女蓓拉稼 (St. Pelagia)、以及其他聖賢，也有如此這般的；然而，這種閃電式的洗滌，有近於奇跡，算是超性界的特殊，一如死人復活，算是自然界的例外，我們可以私心景仰，而不必一意希求。通常的洗滌和治療，無論他是身體方面的，或是心靈方面的，都須逐漸進行，隨時改良。[...] 從罪惡的深淵，而想爬向虔誠高峰的靈魂，宛如黎明的曙光，當它冉冉上升的時候，並不突然間驅逐了黑暗，卻是慢慢地。一分一秒地。俗話說：醫病服藥慢慢好，藥到病除保壽考。經驗告訴我們，無論心身的疾病，往往匆匆其來，姍姍而去，來時騎著駿馬，去時拖著方步。』

在竭力皈依中，聖方濟各提醒我們要留意**兩種可能的陷阱**：第一，灰心喪志的陷阱。我們在致力於一段虔誠生活之後，仍舊發現缺點多端，依然故我，於是開始焦慮，煩惱敗興，放棄追求虔誠；第二個陷阱是，心想自己盡了努力，業已皈依了，不需要再轉變了。聖方濟各寫道，『只要一息尚存，我們便不能停止洗滌靈魂，也不應中止這項工作：因此，雖然缺點斑斑，也不會叫我們裹足不前，因為我們知道，人格的完美，在乎向個人的缺點挑戰；我們也知道，不認清敵人，就無法打擊敵人，不與師與之會戰，就無法贏得勝利。我們的勝利，絕非在乎不受敵人攻擊，而在絕不向他們投降；他們千方百計地騷擾，我們奮勇堅強地抵抗。在這神聖的戰鬥中，有時也不免中彈負傷，這了也正是我們謙虛振作的好機會。務要切實記住：除非我人喪失了生命和恒心，則我們在這種神聖的大戰中，絕不會一敗塗地。我們明白知道，只有大罪才能殺害聖寵的生命，缺點和小罪是無能為力的；那麼，我們是否會一敗塗地，就只看我們的恒心如何了。達味求天主道，「懇切求吾主，救我於膽怯，奮起抗吾敵，莫令我滅裂」（參詠 54[55]:9，拉丁）。』在這場戰爭中，只要我們肯奮勇作戰，則最後的勝利，一定屬於我們。

希望我們大家，你和我，都能在此四旬期及聖周內得以淨化和皈依！

在耶穌、瑪利亞、若瑟、聖方濟各和鮑思高神父內，摯愛你們的省會長斐林豐神父



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FS400 Provincial Letter 7 (March 2016)

Purification: Conversion from Sin, Conversion to Devotion

Dear Young People, Dear Lay Mission Partners, Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Salesian Family,

The peace of the Lord be with you always! Last month we reviewed our Patron St. Francis de Sales' teaching about Devotion, as expressed in his second masterpiece, *The Introduction to the Devout Life* (the *Philothea*). This year most of the month of March falls within the sacred season of Lent. So I think it is fitting to dwell on what St. Francis de Sales teaches us regarding "Purification", "Conversion from Sin and Conversion to Devotion". "Conversion" is a word that we like to use today. In his time, St. Francis of Sales, along with a thousand-year-old tradition, liked to speak of "Purification".

Conversion or **Purification is the precondition for Devotion**. St. Francis says: "the soul that aspires to the honour of being the spouse of the Son of God must 'put off the old man and put on the new' (Eph 4:22.24). She does so by forsaking sin, and removing and cutting away every obstacle which may prevent her union with God. The beginning of a new state of health is to be purged of our poisonous humours."

Conversion, Purification, includes a **double movement**. Using the language of physics, we could speak of a centrifugal movement (Conversion from Sin) and a centripetal movement (Conversion to Devotion). The two prepositions "from" and "to" are meant to indicate this double movement from something to something. The converted, purified, person passes from the ugliness of dirt to the beauty of cleanliness.

Is conversion, this double movement from and to, **instantaneous or gradual**? Instantaneous conversion/purification, is extremely rare. Normally, conversion/purification is gradual. In Chapter 5 of Part II of the *Philothea*, St. Francis writes: "St. Paul in a single moment was cleansed with a perfect purgation. So also were St. Catherine of Genoa, St. Mary Magdalen, St. Pelagia, and certain others. But this kind of purgation is as miraculous and extraordinary in the order of grace as the resurrection of the dead is in that of nature, and therefore we ought not to expect it. The ordinary purification and healing, whether of the body or of the mind, takes place only little by little, by passing from one degree to another with labor and patience. [...] The soul that rises from sin to devotion may be compared to the dawning of the day, which at its approach does not expel the darkness instantaneously but only little by little. The cure, says the aphorism, which is made slowly is always the surest. The diseases of the heart, as well as those of the body, come posting on horseback but depart slowly and on foot".

In the work of conversion, St. Francis warns us against **two possible pitfalls**: first, the pitfall of becoming discouraged, as we see ourselves still so imperfect, and so give up striving for devotion; second, the pitfall of thinking, after a little effort has been made, that we are already converted and need no longer strive for conversion. St. Francis writes: "The exercise of purifying the soul neither can nor should end unless with our life itself. Let us not be disturbed at the sight of our imperfections, for our perfection consists in fighting against them. And how can we fight against them without seeing them, and overcome them without encountering them? Our victory consists not in being unconscious of them, but in refusing to consent to them, and not to consent to them is to be displeased with them. It is absolutely necessary, for the exercise of our humility, that we should sometimes suffer wounds in this spiritual welfare. But we are never overcome, unless we lose either our life or our courage. Imperfections or venial sins cannot deprive us of our spiritual life, for this is lost only by mortal sin. It only remains that we do not lose our courage. "Save me, O Lord!" said David, "from cowardice and discouragement" (cf. Ps 54[55]:9 Latin). It is happy for us that in this warfare we shall always be victorious, provided that we are willing to fight."

Wishing you and me a happy experience of purification and conversion in this Lent and Holy Week, in Jesus Mary Joseph StFrancis DonBosco, I am, Yours affectionately,

Fr. Lanfranco M. Fedrigotti, Provincial