###  "St. Francis de Sales, Communicator. Inner Pilgrimage, Wisdom in the Art of Communication"

Fr Gildasio Mendes do Santos

"Everything in the Church is love: everything lives in love, for love and of love."

It is with this expression that St. Francis de Sales, unique in his time, began a true revolution in the way of communication. The word communication is the key to the theology and spirituality of the saint, who made an inner pilgrimage in the wise and loving search for God.

Communication as the interpretive key to the life and doctrine of St. Francis de Sales refers to a richness and multiplicity of aspects that find their foundation in the theology of the Trinitarian mystery in which man by grace and vocation is called to participate. Francis de Sales embodies a model of communication that, both in its content and in its dynamics, is inspired by the Gospel.

This is the foundation on which Francis de Sales based and developed his ability and art of relating to people, considered in their context of origin, in their formation, in their history, in their existential struggles, and in their most authentic aspirations. For him, communication means making a gift of oneself to others, making them participants in one's own experience, and establishing authentic relationships of friendship. In fact, communication is effective only when one is capable of creating ties, opportunities to meet, and proximity. Communication is fruitful when it allows communion, the exchange of one's own experiences.

Francis starts from a fundamental principle: God communicates out of love. This love is God's gift to his creatures, who freely respond to this love with a filial spirit, loving surrender, and joyful commitment that translates into a path of holiness in collaborating with God's project in the world.

With this vision rooted in the notion of the gift and gratuity of God's love, Francis de Sales opened an original path of spirituality, communicative art, and pastoral action.

Saint Francis is a communicator who lived his life and carried out his works with creativity and intensity. This demonstrates his important and decisive way of communicating, which continues to be relevant today: living a spiritual life open to the inner dynamism of heart and soul, in union with God, in service to others.

Saint Francis de Sales, born in 1567, was the son of the Lord of Boisy, an ancient and noble family of Savoy. He lived at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries and participated in moments and events of great cultural, social, political and religious change. He was able to understand the great transformations of society and culture and to dialogue with the mystical, cultural, and educational currents of his time.

The formation of Francis was extremely thorough, broad and profound. In Paris he did his studies, dedicating himself also to Theology, and at the University of Padua those of Jurisprudence, which he concluded brilliantly with a degree in Canon Law and Civil Law.

Through his writings, letters, sermons, prayers and poems we can interpret some aspects of his inner greatness and his vision of God and the world and, through his choices and decisions, highlight some ideas about his vocation and mission as a communicator.

When we talk about St. Francis as a communicator, a question initially becomes necessary: why did the Church choose St. Francis de Sales as the patron saint of Catholic journalists and writers?

On January 26, 1923, Pope Pius XI proclaimed St. Francis de Sales the patron saint of Catholic journalists and writers. The Church recognizes in his life and work a reference for the world of communication.

This is how Pontiff Paul VI described him in his apostolic letter Sabaudiae gemma of January 26, 1967:

"Saint Francis de Sales is a man of keen insight of mind, a strong and clear intelligence, penetrating judgment, incredible loving-kindness and goodness, smiling gentleness of demeanor and speech, the quiet ardor of an always industrious spirit... sublime elevation of mind and love of beauty, desirous of giving to others the supreme goods: heaven and poetry...".

Pope Benedict XVI, writing on St. Francis de Sales, refers to the great value of his writings for the Church.

"In a season of intense mystical flowering, the Treatise on the Love of God is a true and proper summa, and at the same time a fascinating literary work. His description of the journey towards God starts from the recognition of the 'natural inclination' inscribed in the heart of man, even though a sinner, to love God above all else. Following the model of Sacred Scripture, Saint Francis de Sales speaks of the union between God and man by developing a whole series of images of interpersonal relationships. His God is father and lord, spouse and friend; he has maternal and nurturing characteristics; he is the sun, of which even the night is a mysterious revelation".

Saint Francis was an innovative and original writer. His main works are the Introduction to the Devout Life (Philothea), his first pastoral work, widely read and translated into many languages; the Treatise on the Love of God, one of the texts that has had more influence in the literature and Christian spirituality of the Church. These two texts have contributed enormously to the spiritual life of the Church and inspired various schools of spirituality. His Letters, in a familiar and affective style, are true treasures of spiritual accompaniment and prayer life. His homilies and sermons, in a simple, profound and intimate style, are to this day a spiritual testament for all generations.

Four hundred years after his death, his vision and style of communication continue to be current and alive in the life of the Church.