



SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES SEMINARY

*New Heart, New Spirit.*

I grew up in a family of six boys, so I had a fun childhood. We would often play hide and seek in the basement, covering the windows with thick layers of newspaper to ensure absolute, pitch-black darkness. Once, two of my brothers grabbed me out of my room, where I was innocently minding my own four-year old business, took me to the abyss that was the basement, tied me to a pole and went back upstairs. Eventually, I worked myself free, but first experienced some gruesome moments of sheer terror as I stood trapped in the dark.

Don't we all have moments like that? Those times when life just falls apart and we stand immobilized and trapped, facing the terrifying darkness of suffering, fear, depression, illness and death. Sometimes, it feels like God has dragged us into the basement, tied us to a pole and promptly abandoned the scene. We can feel lost, like we are nowhere and nobody. We call out for help, only to be met by the echo of our own fear and hopelessness.

Lent is a time when we go into the dark on purpose, just like the Israelites journeyed forty years in the wilderness and Jesus passed forty days of prayer and fasting in the desert. Lent is a time to push away the crutches and distractions that prop up our fragile sense of self and wholeheartedly face the sin, neediness, fear and poverty in our lives. Marked with ashes, reminded that "we are dust and to dust shall we return," the Church renews its radical dependence on God—His mercy, love, grace and forgiveness. If I go through my whole life whistling in the dark, desperately trying to reassure my frightened self that everything is ok, never facing the abyss of my own sinfulness, dependency and mortality, I will never really have lived, for I will not have come to know the saving mystery of Jesus Christ.

All of us need a companion/guide to help us through the journey from the place of slavery into the wild and finally arriving in the Promised Land. The Scriptures, the sacraments, the teaching of the Church, the writings of the saints, our family and friends all serve as steady guideposts and companions. More and more Catholics, however, are also turning to spiritual direction for assistance in their progress of Christian discipleship. A director may be a priest, deacon, religious or lay person, may have some professional training or not, but is certainly a person of faith, prayer and compassion, actively engaged in the spiritual life. Only a fool would attempt to scale Mount Everest without a guide; so too, anyone trying to scale the heights of holiness needs a mentor.

Our seminarians receive intense spiritual formation in the life of prayer, the revelation of the Scriptures, the teachings of the saints, the methods of pastoral counseling and the art of spiritual direction. As formators, we remind them often that many people will actively seek them out for guidance, advice and spiritual direction. As always, the human person is thirsty for God. Go to any bookstore and you will find racks of books on spirituality. A particularly beautiful and apt title for a parish priest is "Doctor of Souls." Here at Saint Francis de Sales Seminary, we are working hard to ensure that the new doctors on the team know the contours of the human heart and the physiology of the soul, so that they serve well. Happy Lent! What are your thoughts/experiences concerning spiritual direction? Let me know!

Very Reverend Donald J. Hying