



## Simple Attention

The whole world has been living in a state of uncertainty for close to two years now. We still do not have a solution to the global problem that has kept us from doing what we have been accustomed to doing. We still can't see the light at the end of the tunnel.

We aren't built for uncertainty. We hate cliffhangers or ambiguous endings – movies, shows and books that leave the audience to decide how the main characters live out the rest of the story don't do very well. We often come away from these open-ended narratives feeling frustrated, even cheated.

As we navigate these cycles of outbreaks, restrictions and lockdowns, we need to find a way to deal with this prolonged state of uncertainty and the anxiety and frustration that it inevitably produces in all of us.

We can look to the legacy that St La Salle and the early Brothers have left us. Today, we look at the idea of **simple attention** and how it can help us in these interesting times.

### EXCERPTS FROM LASALLIAN THEMES VOL 2:

59. Simple Attention (Contemplation) ([delasalle.me/themes0259](https://delasalle.me/themes0259))



De La Salle's understanding and description of simple attention, although derived primarily from his own experience, were certainly influenced by Carmelite spirituality, which, in his time, was greatly affecting almost all the schools of spirituality in Europe. His earliest biographers point out that De La Salle made retreats with the disalced Carmelite Priests, and that he had a special devotion to Saint Teresa of Avila, "from whose writings he had imbibed his great spirit of mental prayer". De La Salle would have had access to the works of both John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, since a French translation of Teresa's writings had been published in 1601, and John's works were published in Paris in 1695.

De La Salle declares that simple attention **attracts the heart gently but effectively to the practice of virtue and produces a strong and supernatural affection for good, even in the face of difficulties and repugnances.**

The practice of virtue that results from the prayer of simple attention is, then, less the effect of a personal resolution consciously added to prayer than it is the **result of detachment from created things and the attraction to good**, sentiments that are aroused in the heart by the experience of simple attention itself. (continued on next page)

During the prayer of simple attention a person dwells primarily in the respectful and receptive awareness of God's presence. But simple attention can also be directed to a mystery of faith (the Incarnation or the Passion for example, to a specific occasion in the life of the Lord as he teaches a virtue, or to the truth of a maxim of Scripture.

In the prayer of simple attention, the mind and heart become centred in a state of sustained, loving awareness of the presence of God, **without reasoning or discursive thought, but simply dwelling, actively and ardently**, in a disposition animated, devout and affectionate attention.

Simple attention centres the person in the presence of God during the time of prayer with the same faith-inspired awareness and the same intimate union of wills as the spirit of faith does in the ordinary experiences of life.

In a time where our minds are drawn to dwell on the negative, St La Salle invites us to remember that, despite all the bad news that we see, where we came from and where we are meant to go is good, is God, is love.

Simple attention, or contemplation, is a practice that takes us away from the negative feedback loop that we find ourselves in and grounds us to what is good. It reminds us that our hearts long for belonging and love above everything else.

Practically speaking, simple attention is another one of those timeouts that we need to give ourselves to deal with the chaos that life throws at us. It is a necessary regular pitstop in this unexpected road trip that we all find ourselves in – a trip that, at this point, still has to show us the happily ever after that we are desperately seeking.

Simple attention is how St La Salle lived out the popular maxim “we are not what we do, what we say, what we feel”.

From a mindfulness point of view, **it is about finding some space in the mind, less judgement, a greater sense of perspective**, in which we see this fundamental truth for ourselves in a very direct and personal way.

Andy Puddicombe, a popular speaker on mindfulness says it is about “**recognizing that just because a thought appears in the mind, we are not that thought, and just because we might feel a certain way at a particular time, we are not that feeling.**”

He continues to say: “When we take our thoughts too seriously, life becomes heavy. When we identify with our emotions too strongly, we begin to get lost in them. When we assume our words define us, we start thinking too much. And when we are unable to find any sense of forgiveness with the things we fail to get right in life, then we begin to feel bitter.”

(access article here: <https://bit.ly/3CbkwoP>)

Yes, we live in interesting, dangerous times, but we have to remind ourselves that there is something beyond what we are experiencing. **We have to remind ourselves that we were made for greatness and love.**

Lasallian Reflection is developed by the Lasallian Formation for Mission Team.

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