

Narration of De La Salle's discussion with Schoolmasters regarding the subject of Providence

<p>Narrator:</p>	<p>It is late in the year 1682. De La Salle has taken his little band of schoolmasters to live in a rented house in the Rue Neuve. It is an enormous step for him – out of his own comfortable world in the inner city of the wealthy, to live with a group of men whose world he finds quite repugnant. They struggle on together, and for a while things go well. The little group is starting to develop into a disciplined community. But soon the novelty wears off. Some of them get tired of the rough conditions and the daily grind of teaching. Many of them leave. But more arrive to take their place, and they seem more suited to the life. De La Salle makes sure that their lives are properly regulated, but he is not in a hurry to have the community formally recognised: he wants to give it time, and to take advice. Some of his followers soon begin to feel insecure. What if the schools lose support? What if the whole enterprise falls apart? What will happen to them then? De La Salle tries to reassure them: they should have faith in God's providence. But that fails to convince them, and they become increasingly discontented.</p>
<p>Schoolmaster #1:</p>	<p>(tentatively) We need to talk to you, Monsieur De La Salle. We're really not very happy. We've discussing the situation amongst ourselves, and we would like to talk to you about our future.</p>
<p>De La Salle:</p>	<p>(reassuringly) By all means. I am happy to listen to your concerns. But surely you haven't forgotten what I was saying about Divine Providence.</p>
<p>Schoolmaster #1:</p>	<p>(with increasing passion) Oh yes, we know all about God's goodness and providence, Monsieur, but we still feel worried. There's just no security in this work. The whole thing could fall apart at any time, and we'd be left with nothing. We've all worked hard to learn how to teach, but if the schools don't continue, we'll have no income. Where will that leave us? We could all die of starvation and have to be buried in paupers' graves.</p>

Chorus of schoolmasters:	(General hubbub of agreement.)
De La Salle:	<p>(with pious concern, and increasingly moved by his own rhetoric) Men of little faith, by your lack of trust you set limits to a Goodness that has no limits in itself. If that Goodness is indeed infinite, universal, and continual – as you do not doubt – it will always take care of you and never fail you. You seek assurance, but does not the Gospel provide it? The words of Jesus Christ are your insurance contract; there is no compact more reliable, because God has signed it with blood and has affixed to it the seal of infallible truth. Why then do you grow distrustful? If the positive promises of God cannot calm your uneasiness and your concern for the future, what is the point of looking for an investment that will produce a comparable income?</p> <p>Consider the lilies of the field, for it is Jesus Christ himself, the Gospel, who urges you to reflect on them and on the wild flowers of the countryside and to see how richly God has adorned them and made them beautiful. They lack nothing, yet Solomon himself in all his glory was less splendidly attired. Open your eyes and see the birds that fly through the air or the little animals which creep upon the ground: not a single one of them lacks what is needed. God provides for their necessities. Possessing neither cellars nor barns, they find everywhere the food that Providence has prepared for them. They do not sow or reap, yet they find their sustenance. The heavenly Father takes care of them. If his generous and kindly concern extends to even the least insects which men trample underfoot and even to the grass that dries out and serves as fuel for the fire, how can you believe, you men of little faith, that he to whom you consecrate your labour will abandon you in your old age and leave you to finish in misery a life spent in his service?</p> <p>Therefore, stir up your trust in the Lord's infinite goodness, and honour God by leaving in the divine hands the care of your persons. Be not troubled about the present or disquieted about the future, but be concerned only about the moment you must now live. Do not let anticipation of tomorrow be a burden on the day that is passing. What you lack in the evening, the morrow will bring you, if you know how to hope in God. God will work miracles</p>

	rather than let you suffer want. In addition to the words of Jesus Christ, I offer you as proof the universal experience of the saints. Providence performs miracles daily, and they cease only for those who have no trust.
Narrator:	The schoolmasters look at each other, very reluctant to say anything. But they have had enough. The time has come to speak their minds.
Chorus of schoolmasters:	(General angry outcry.)
Schoolmaster #1:	It is all very well for you to be inspired by those fine words, Father, from your position of comfort. You lack nothing!
Schoolmaster # 2:	That's right. You've got your rich canonry and your fat inheritance. You've got security we can't even dream of. You've got no idea what it's like for us.
Schoolmaster #3:	Right! It's easy to talk about Providence when you're already well provided for. But we're NOT!
Schoolmaster #1:	If the schools fail, you risk nothing. It wouldn't even really affect you much. But we've got nothing. We are men without possessions or income or any other trade to fall back on. Where would we go, what would WE do if the schools fail, or if people get sick of us? We'd be totally ruined.
Chorus of schoolmasters:	(General agreement.)
Narrator:	This hostile response to his homily is unprecedented. De La Salle is thrown off balance by such a challenge to his integrity. But – he is honest enough to accept that they are right.
De La Salle:	(quietly) I have been reduced to silence. As long as I am not poor myself, I have no right to speak as I once did on the subject of poverty. I cannot speak of abandonment to Providence, so long as I am comfortably insured

	against penury; nor about perfect confidence in God, if my sound investments leave me no reason for worry.
Narrator:	As his early Biographer puts it, the voice of the Holy Spirit joins in with the voices of the schoolmasters, and calls to him even more clearly and vehemently in the depths of his heart. He has to confront the real truth of his text from Matthew's gospel; and then he has to act on it.