

Francis, Humanist & Friend

Socially Francis moved with fluidity between the secular and the church worlds. Given his formal education and his diversity of interests in literature, science, diplomacy, and civility, he is characterized as a humanist. By living amidst these two worlds, and differentiating between them, he was able to craft a spirituality that integrated both the human and Christian dimensions (Power, 9).

The manner in which he lived gives further depth to the humanism that became part of Salesian spirituality. Francis was ordained a priest in his mid-twenties and later a bishop in his mid-thirties, but he never set foot in a seminary—he found the spiritual life in the everyday. Admittedly he wanted to be a priest from childhood, but he only disclosed this to his cousin Louis de Sales, his spiritual director and mother. As a result, Francis' "lay education" which centered on humanities and law was meant to please his father, but by studying theology, Francis found this pleasing to himself.

What stands out about Francis was his deep personal capacity of and appreciation for friendship. By valuing both human and divine friendship, he identified that this to be what we are made for. In all his friendships he brought a heart gifted for love, and by growing in these friendships, it gave rise to a spirituality that made friendship possible, whether with a widow or with a king.

Question: What qualities stand out for you in friendship?