In our second reading this evening, Saint Paul tells the Corinthians that they have been sanctified and that they are called to be holy with all those who “call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This evening we are gathered together to do just what our forebears in Corinth and our forebears in the faith have done for two millennia: we are gathered to “call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Calling “upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” is the foundation of this DeSales University Heritage Week 2008, which culminates on Thursday with the Feast of Saint Francis de Sales, who never ceased to “call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”—as priest and bishop, lawyer and provost, prolific author and doctor of the Church.

Indeed, his motto was “Live Jesus.”

Anyone who has perused Saint Francis de Sales’ Introduction to the Devout Life or his Treatise on Divine Love—not to mention his numerous other written works, but to focus on the most famous—is sure to know that a key component in his spirituality is to encourage all of us—no matter what our state in life—to be comforted by our ability to “call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Neither Saint Paul nor Saint Francis, though, is the author of that motif. It is a traditional biblical motif, a common heritage of Judaism and Christianity, that goes back to the Book of Genesis, to Seth, in whom the lineage of Adam and Eve is reconstituted with the birth of Enosh. The Scriptures relate that “at that time men began to call upon the name of the Lord.” The name of Enosh appears again in the Gospel of Luke, wherein Luke gives Jesus’ genealogy as far back as “... the son of Enos[h], the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.”

The Son of God. Jesus, the Son of God. The Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the bedrock of our heritage from the Eternal Father. It is Jesus who is the supernatural Rock from whom our ancestors drank in the desert of the Exodus and from whom we drink today.

Ours is a heritage from God himself, mediated by Jesus Christ, and made manifest in the holy ones, the saints, the ones who were faithful throughout life and to whom God has given “the crown of life,” like Saint Francis de Sales, under whose patronage we gather today.

The Acts of the Apostles recounts that at the birth of the Church the earliest disciples were to be found “attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, [partaking] of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.” From this
description and others, the portrait is one of simplicity in the service of God and man. Thus, not long after Pentecost, when Peter and John are on their way up to the temple to pray and a cripple asks alms of them, Peter says, “I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.”

In other words, if you were to ask the earliest disciples for the very best they have to offer, it would be this: “to call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” And, if you were to ask later disciples, for example, the Oblates of Saint Francis de Sales, they would say the same thing: the very best they have to offer is to help others to “call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

We gather this evening to inaugurate Heritage Week 2008.

Now, a heritage is often an elusive presence. The English word “heritage” can be traced through the Middle French heriter, through the Late Latin hereditare, all the way back to the Greek word cheir, for “hand.” A heritage, whether material or immaterial, is something handed down from one generation to the next.

When a heritage is a physical object, like a painting or a piece of jewelry, we usually refer to it as an “heirloom,” a valuable material object handed down from one generation to the next. Because it can be handled, studied according to the laws of physics, or placed in a museum, we have little trouble grasping its significance. The same holds true for a large estate of property or holdings.

But when a heritage is immaterial, something metaphysical, it is less easy to describe. Using the word “inheritance” to describe such a heritage is a tad redundant because both terms share the same root. Other words come close—legacy, bequest, endowment, bestowal, provision, birthright, and so forth—but they fail to satisfy, to get to the heart of the matter; for a spiritual heritage is, indeed, a matter of the heart. It is a matter of the heart in the ancient Hebrew understanding of lebab, the inner man, mind, will, heart.

Our Christian heritage is not an heirloom or estate. It is not something simply material. Rather, it is a relationship, an intimate relationship with God, that is only made possible through the Incarnation, through God’s becoming one of us.

Jesus tells his disciples: “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.”

That is, he has shared everything with us. All that the Father has given him, he has given to us. And, quite literally, this patrimony, this gift of the Father through the Son in the Spirit is more than we could have ever asked for: insight into the mind, the will, the heart of God.

But there is more. Ours is no static heritage. It is a living patrimony, for our relationship with Jesus is ongoing. “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”
And, here we are gathered in his name. And he is in our midst as we call upon his holy name. For this reason, our worship tonight is unlike any other worship, because our heritage is unlike any other heritage. We did not inherit silver and gold: nothing so inconsequential as mere material things did we inherit, but only the thing that is most important, namely, a relationship with the Second Person of the Trinity, an insight into God, a state of true peace in this life and in the next because we know to “call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Our Christian heritage is a relationship with the Lord.

In the Book of Exodus, we are told that “the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.”

As the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us, “Jesus has been counted worthy of as much more glory than Moses.... Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ was faithful over God’s house as a son. And we are his house if we hold fast our confidence and pride in our hope.”

And, we by our baptism into Christ’s death and resurrection, by our sharing of his body and blood in the Eucharist, are his brothers and sisters, “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.”

As heirs, as sons and daughters of God, as those in an intimate and dynamic relationship, our worship and prayer are deeply rooted in the heart: not in the saccharine and overly-sentimental way in which the world speaks of the heart, but in that Hebrew understanding of lebab, the inner man, mind, will, heart.

For that reason, Saint Augustine of Hippo, the Doctor of Grace, uses the heart as his primary metaphor for the profundity that is the core of each human person and as a metaphor for the affective aspect of faith in God.

Saint Augustine writes in his Confessions, “You have made us and directed us toward yourself and our heart is restless until we rest in you.”

Yes, our hearts are restless until they rest in God, until they call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This evening we commemorate a saint whose heart came to rest in God in a most profound way. A saint who drank deeply of the wisdom of Holy Scripture and also of Saint Augustine and the other great theologians of the Church.

We commemorate a saint who was able, with God’s grace, to speak so much about the heart, in fact to describe its workings so eloquently, as to be declared a doctor of the Church and commonly referred to as the “Doctor of Love.”
Saint Francis de Sales has left us a very specific heritage under the umbrella of our Christian heritage: a vision of a world of hearts, of a symbiosis of human hearts among each other in perfect union with the divine heart.

Saint Francis’ vision may be summed up in a few words that he wrote about preaching to a brother bishop, who also was the blood brother of his friend, confidant, and co-worker, Saint Jane Frances de Chantal. Saint Francis de Sales wrote: “Our words must be set aflame not by shouts and unrestrained gestures, but by inward affection. They must issue from our heart rather than from our mouth. We must speak well, but heart speaks to heart, and the tongue speaks only to men’s ears.”

“Heart speaks to heart.”

For Saint Francis, “heart speaks to heart” is the clearest description of the relationship of love between persons. Love is the means by which the persons of the Holy Trinity are bound to one another. Love is the means by which the persons of that same Holy Trinity are bound to humanity. Love is the means by which human persons are bound to one another.

Here Saint Francis echoes the words of Saint Paul: “And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.”

We are nothing without love. And there is no Christianity without love.

As Jesus said, “If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”

It is in the heart that God dwells with us. And it is with and through the heart that we dwell with one another.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

How better could this commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ be realized than by following the simple motto of Saint Francis de Sales: “Live Jesus”?

And how best to “Live Jesus”?

There is no better way than by listening to him: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”
This evening we are gathered to do just that. In this holy sacrifice of the Mass, we find rest. Here is our principal moment to have Jesus in our hearts through holy communion with him. And here is our principal moment to learn from him how to be “gentle and humble of heart.”

Here we gather to “call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” in the Eucharist, which is at once “the source and summit of the Christian life,” and the impetus for all our works of charity.

It is our prayer this evening that this Eucharist will enliven us to carry on the heritage of our faith and of Saint Francis de Sales in particular.

For the spirituality of the Doctor of Love is as necessary now as it has ever been. Saint Francis articulated a spirituality that spoke to a sixteenth-century world in religious crisis. Since that time, his insights have been an inestimable guide in drawing people closer to God’s love, to God’s heart.

Our world is also a world in religious crisis, a world that is desperate for God’s love and for insight into God’s heart. Saint Francis’ insights are as relevant now as ever.

But a few years ago, Saint Francis’ application to our age was noted by Pope Paul VI. On the four-hundredth anniversary of Saint Francis’ birth, Pope Paul wrote, “No one of the recent doctors of the church more than St. Francis de Sales anticipated the deliberations and decisions of the Second Vatican Council with such a keen and progressive insight. He renders his contribution by the example of his life, by the wealth of his true and sound doctrine, by the fact that he has opened and strengthened the spiritual ways of Christian perfection for all states and conditions of life.”

What did Pope Paul mean?

Pope Paul meant to remind us that the Church’s Second Vatican Council reiterated what she had always taught: that each one of us—whether a priest, whether a religious, or whether a lay person—is called to be holy. Vatican II in our own day, much like the Council of Trent in Saint Francis’ own day, saw the need for the renewal of piety in the world, that the whole of the world might come to “call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Let us pray that the renewal of piety in the Church may continue through the heritage of Saint Francis de Sales, particularly here, at his namesake, DeSales University with its Salesian Center for Faith and Culture.

Our Heritage Week 2008 is a moment not merely to recall, but to renew, a relationship with the Lord. Ours is a relationship with him that goes to our innermost selves, to our minds, to our wills, but most especially to our hearts.

Ours is a heritage, bequeathed to us by God and by his holy one, Saint Francis de Sales, to “Live Jesus,” and ever to “call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
Notes

1. 1 Corinthians 1:2. Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A.
2. Genesis 4:26; cf. 1 Chronicles 1:1.
5. Revelation 2:10.
12. Romans 8:17.
15. 1 Corinthians 13:2.
19. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11; see also *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1324.
20. See *Presbyterorum ordinis*, no. 5; see also *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1324.