Ever since I was young, my parents had instilled in me the catchphrase *DYB* – do your best. At the time, this lesson was applicable to/directed towards academic achievement, but today it serves as a virtue I practice in all aspects of life. I worked very hard to get excellent grades in high school. On top of this, I taught religious school, was a leader on the tennis team and did community service. Although I enjoyed my activities and academic success, they were not derived from the love of family, humanity and God. Rather, at this time in my life, I was driven ultimately by fear.

Our culture has evolved to a point where children are driven to succeed by all the wrong reasons. From a young age, we are taught that in order to be successful in life, you need to get into a good college. The requirements for admission are not only academics, but also extra-curricular activities, community service and leadership roles. While some students develop a passion for their extra activities, others find it a burden.

Thinking back to how I felt during this time in my life helped me discover the root of this cultural issue. Parents, such as my own, care for their children so much that they will do whatever it takes to give them the best chance at a ‘happy life.’ Unfortunately, doing whatever it takes translates into spending whatever it takes. All the programs I was enrolled in as child, all the tutors that I have had and especially the four years of my collegiate studies have certainly cost more money then I would like to imagine. In turn, the child feels a sense of obligation to succeed.

But when does this noble sense of obligation to thy mother and father transform into fear? The root lies somewhat in capitalism, but mostly in economic materialism. The media and our culture are a reflection of one another slowly changing over time. With college admission (as well as the workforce) becoming more and more competitive, students must have higher credentials to even be recognized. Students are turned away from colleges because they don’t have the grades, enough Advanced Placement courses, or leadership activities then the next candidate. The realization that they are judged by a piece of paper and some numbers strikes fear into kids as young as middle school. All of the sudden, *DYB (do your best)* just doesn’t cut it and leads to a slew of other social problems such as cheating.
Furthermore, students feel that if they fail, they will not live the ‘happy life’ portrayed in the media. The American dream is still alive in our culture but has been jaded over time. Although it’s true that the American dream has always had its ties with materialism, it started off as the ambition for immigrants to live a comfortable life without persecution or starvation. Nowadays, most of society wants the life that has been portrayed to us through the media. I am not talking about Hollywood and sports superstars (although they certainly do not help!!!), rather a house in the suburbs, a six figure income and a time-share in Aruba.

But deep down, all that is desired is the ability to provide for our children as our parents provided for us. The discerning part is that with prices always on the rise and our increasingly competitive society, can we afford to send our children to college? Will we be able to give our children the best chance at a ‘happy life’?

This mentality that our culture has created is wrong; we should be driven by faith and not by fear! Francis de Sales wrote that with the single exception of sin, anxiety is the greatest evil the can happen to us. Through our culture, we have lost sight of the Lord that watches over us; for he is how we are able to have our ‘happy life’ mentioned earlier. The good news needs to be spread that faith is what leads us in our path. “Avoid anxiety and worries, for nothing so impedes our progress towards perfection” (Letters of Spiritual Direction, 125). Since media is reflection of culture and culture is a reflection of its people, it is our responsibility to determine our needs. “Let us leave all that to Providence... God knows better than we what we need and provided we keep his commandments He will turn all things to our good” (The Spirit of St. Francis de Sales, 63). I believe this to be one of the core messages the 42nd World Communications Day.

The pursuit of academic achievement and extra curricular activities should be for the students’ self betterment and not for a hopeful edge in the college admission process. With faith, everyone can pursue endeavors that they truly can enjoy. The same can be thought of for people in the workaday world. Employees are tied to their desk by fear of financial insecurity when faith could set them free to follow their dreams, knowing that the Lord is with them. Francis de Sales was once asked how he has able to expose himself to danger (when dealing with Heretics) so freely. He replied “It is not from boldness, nor from simplicity of soul, but from entire confidence in the Providence of God” (The Spirit of St. Francis de Sales, 45).

This essay is not just about faith over fear, but also present over future. I’d like to share a story that recently happened with my sister. Emily is a senior in high school that is not only an honors student, but involved with over a dozen extra-curricular activities. On weekdays, she usually does not get home till around 10 o’clock from rehearsal, a capella, teaching religious school, tutoring...etc. This is when she starts her homework and according to my mother, falls asleep at the computer. Extremely ambitious, she overworks herself and in turn is prone to forget about living in the present.

It was the weekend of my Grandparents’ 60th wedding anniversary and all of our extended family was invited to this wonderful and joyous occasion. All of us were able to go except my sister, who could not go because of a prior a capella commitment. She could have broken her arrangements for such an occasion, but her focus on the future was too strong.
Our Grandparents may never have the opportunity for such an occasion again in the future; only in the present could this be celebrated. Just as Francis de Sales always found time for God, we must find time for our family.

Part of the Salesian Spirit is focusing on the focus on the present day. In Treatise on the Love of God, Francis de Sales uses the power of imagination and the centrality of heart to rely this virtue. “There are souls who make great plans to perform wonderful services for our Lord by way of lofty deeds and extraordinary sufferings, but they are deeds and sufferings for which no occasion presents itself and perhaps will never present itself... as they think great future crosses, they carefully shirk the burden of lesser crosses actually present” (Treatise on the Love of God, 268). Francis de Sales reminds us that we live in the present. For students, cultural pressure makes it hard not to look towards the future, but we must do our best not to leave the present behind.

To this day, I still live by the saying DYB but it is applied more evenly throughout my entire life. I believe that what we can learn from Salesian Spirit is truly endless and beneficial to our progression and happiness in life. Today, I am happy to say that I am driven primarily by faith and not fear. Through our faith, our culture will progress and “the quest for the truth and for developing communion between persons and people” will be realized (John Paul II, Address to the Conference for those working in Communications and Culture).

The pressure on the youth of the nation is not getting any lighter. As earlier as middle school, children are being placed on academic tracks. As a society, we must ask ourselves if this is the right thing to do. I hope that one day we can shift our culture towards a healthier and truer pursuit of a ‘happy life.’

BIBLIOGRAPHY