No kidding! We’ve all heard it before and with little thought we know it’s patently true: “you can’t take it with you.”

But there’s much kidding in the Pulitzer Prize winning social farce being performed on the Labuda Center’s main stage. Amid the happy madness of the young lovers’ families, and the madcap goings-on of their households, we can and should laugh at the encounters of the characters. But we might also consider learning from them.
For our patron, St. FRANCIS DE SALES (1567-1622), the drama of falling in love, getting married, and living life together is not merely the singular experience of two individuals. It is part of the divine magic, an essential cycle in the providential ordering of human history.

In his letters, he writes about what “a happy thing (it is) when two souls meet who love each other” in fulfillment of God’s plan for them and for the world. In his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, he notes that marriage is “honorable to all persons, in all persons, and in all things, that is, in all its parts.” Based on this comprehensive view of marital love – in which “there is communication of life, work, goods, affection, and indissoluble fidelity” – he teaches that marriage is the highest form of friendship.

But this Doctor of the Church is also a realist. He is quick to point out in his letters that “the state of marriage is one that requires more virtue and constancy than any other,” and he adds that “it is a perpetual exercise of mortification”! The foibles and follies that contribute to the everyday experience of a married couple are, in his view, distinctive of the all-too-human reality of relationships ... and indicative of our never-ending need for humility. And he reminds us that “when humility and meekness are good and true they preserve us from the inflammation and swelling that injuries usually cause in our hearts.”

In other words, when we learn to laugh at ourselves, and especially when we can laugh together with the ones we love, then we can be at peace. Then, realizing that you really can’t take it with you, we will enjoy here and now all that we have and all that we are.

*Enjoy the show!*

---

**Anne of Green Gables**  December 2 - 13, 2009

Imaginative, precocious, chatty, and charming – the little girl about whom this comfy and cozy show is written is nevertheless rather astute. To her is attributed this lyrical lesson: “You never know what’s around the bend / You just might find a bosom friend.”

The playful drama of the young orphan growing up on a picturesque farmland – complete with adolescent romance and misadventures – tells a tale that delights us all. In this fiction we seek to find the goods and values that making growing up – at whatever age – a happy adventure. No wonder this Anne, with her red-dyed pigtails, has become known in 36 languages and revered as an “icon” of children’s literature.

Whether on an English isle or an American city – or even in our Valley – one key to the narration of this story, and thus a central element to the development of our life stories, is the discovery of a “bosom friend.” The same holds true in the lives of saints, and here in Center Valley, we have a shining example of that in the lives of our patrons – FRANCIS DE SALES (1567-1622) and JANE DE CHANTAL (1572-1641).
Their long-time relationship, described by biographer André Ravier as “one of the greatest friendships that ever bound a [spiritual] director and his disciple,” is disclosed in the more than four hundred letters that Francis wrote to Jane! Together they experienced reciprocal affection, supportive concern, heartfelt dreams, and, ultimately, numerous crosses. As Wendy Wright puts it, “This friendship, born of their common love of God, was nurtured by their shared delight in each other’s spiritual gifts and their mutual quest for perfection.” They embodied what Francis de Sales would later write as an important instruction in his Introduction to the Devout Life: “Love everyone with a deep love based on charity ... but form friendships only with those who can share virtuous things with you.”

Whether in the history of holy patrons, or the frolicking exploits of the characters on stage, or the real relationships we have with our best good friends, may we always rejoice in the enduring value of those with whom we share the ups and downs of life.

Enjoy the show!

**Of Mice and Men** February 24 to March 7, 2010

More than thirty years ago, Dr. M. Scott Peck published what has become a classic book on the journey we call human life. The Road Less Traveled begins with a simple, declarative sentence that packs a powerful punch: “Life is difficult.” To make one’s way on this difficult road, Peck offers a straightforward critique of narcissism (the focus on oneself) and exhorts readers to engage the struggle always to become someone better. It’s not an easy road, but it surely is the most meaningful one.

Of Mice and Men, the classic literary tale by John Steinbeck turned into the drama you see on our main stage, likewise depicts the obstacles on the road to paradise, in particular the struggles involved in showing responsible care for another. What some depict as “the anti-parable of the American Dream” is a story of an unlikely pair of travelers and the rocky relationship with which their road in life is paved.

Four centuries ago, St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622) offered the world a map for this human journey. Among the many gems of wisdom in his class book, the Introduction to the Devout Life, are valuable insights with regard to humility and friendship. The former serves as a foundation for understanding ourselves, while the latter underscores the value of interpersonal relationships.

These virtues that carry us along the road – humility in ourselves and true friendship with others – are major themes in Salesian spirituality. As you see again the dramatic encounter of Lenny and George, consider these insights from some of the letters of our patron saint:

“We desire to be accepted despite our own miseries and always find them worthy of toleration; those of our neighbor always seem to us greater and heavier to bear.”
“You know the spot where our hearts meet – there they can see one another in spite of the distance of places.”

And as you journey along your own road with your fellow travelers, may the wisdom of the saints guide your way.

Enjoy the show!

---

**Dance Ensemble**  March 19 - 21, 2010

With recent research noting how 8- to 18-year olds now spend more than 7½ hours each day on entertainment media (and more than 10½ hours, if you account for multi-tasking), one wonders how dance will come to be appreciated by the next generation. With movement simulated by computer technology and characterization arising from graphic design, what will our culture make of real dancers exerting their artistic creativity live and in person?

On the Labuda Stage, you will see the answer!

When the human form, a marvel unto itself, embodies purposeful design and choreographed order, when the person gives expressive shape to ideas and inspirations, when the dancer displays her unique talents – that’s when beauty appears. And when we see it, we recognize something qualitatively superior to anything generated by a machine – because it is real.

Recently, Pope Benedict XVI commented on the artistic reality that goes to the core of who we are as human beings. In an event celebrating the tenth anniversary of his predecessor’s “Letter to Artists,” the pope asked:

> What is capable of restoring enthusiasm and confidence, what can encourage the human spirit to rediscover its path, to raise its eyes to the horizon, to dream of a life worthy of its vocation – if not beauty?

He also suggested an answer:

> Too often the beauty that is thrust upon us is illusory and deceitful, superficial and blinding. ... Authentic beauty, however, unlocks the yearning of the human heart, the profound desire to know, to love, to go towards the Other, to reach for the Beyond.

Through a variety of pieces, our ensemble invites you to know what these dancers see, to love what they believe, and to reach, along with them, to something, and Someone, greater than us all.

May their performance this weekend lift your spirits once again.
Guys and Dolls  April 28 to May 9, 2010

Gambling has a grip on us! Even beyond the fiscal and political concerns, the human spirit has always been fascinated with taking chances. The challenge posed by opportunities of “risk and reward” – in business, on a golf course, at the casino, or anywhere – entices us to step up or reach out or cast forth ... always in the hope of winning a prize.

ST. FRANCIS DE SALES (1567-1622) was not particularly fond of games of chance. In his Introduction to the Devout Life, he referred to such games as “not merely dangerous amusements” but as things “plainly bad and harmful.” (In context, he wrote this with reference to the dangers of life in a royal court.) Such a bleak assessment he based on two considerations: that games of chance are inherently unreasonable, since “the winner often has neither skill nor industry to boast of,” and that the pleasure one has in winning at them “can only be enjoyed at the expense of your antagonist.”

Yet, in the same book, our patron saint extols the value of recreation and the virtue of leisure, for this affords us beneficial opportunities to relax, to rest from our occupations, and to restore the spirit. What better way to take advantage of this today than to sit back and enjoy the delightful musical fable on our Act One stage. Characterized as a “great homage to ... fabulously flamboyant flimflam men and the floozies,” Guys & Dolls has as its aim not the celebration of vice but the joyful gaiety that comes with imaginative scenery, engaging caricatures, and jazzy showdancing.

Best of all there’s no risk here ... just the reward of entertainment. So enjoy the show!