

St. Francis De Sales



Living In God's Love



Be calm regarding the changes of life. God, whose very own you are, will guide you through them all. He has kept you until now and he will lead you safely through all things. And when you cannot stand it, God will bury you in his arms. Be confident for tomorrow. The same everlasting Father who cares for you today will care for you then and every day. He will either shield you from suffering or give you unfailing strength to bear it.

- *St. Francis de Sales*

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Introduction

I have found great pleasure in reading St. Francis de Sales' works directly. His words are apt for every age. There is a freshness and depth which comes from encountering his own writings. For this reason, apart from the introduction, the text in this booklet is primarily his own words.

Francis was insistent that holiness is for everyone. He understood that spirituality starts from the heart and grows outwards. His approach is based on practical steps, especially advising people to regularly focus their attention on the Lord throughout the day and doing all things with good intentions. For instance, in order to have healthy teeth we brush them twice a day for a short time period, rather than for a prolonged period once a week. In a similar way, Francis' approach to holiness is based around a frequent awareness of the Lord's presence, inviting us to unite ourselves with Him throughout the day, in word and deed.

The Salesian spirit is very much relational. A good word to portray the Salesian way might be 'between'. For it is not that we glimpse God despite the people around us, but that we find Him precisely through and with them. Francis recognised the value of friendship, appreciating that love of God naturally leads to love for all people. Devotion is not only a matter of how long we pray but also how we enter into a relationship with God and neighbour.

As you will see, Francis used many images to convey his understanding of God, whose image and likeness is deeply engrained in all of us. In times when we can easily become distracted by social media,

television and even somewhat burdened by the wealth of information which technology has made possible, Francis reminds us, “The person who sees better, sees less. It is rare for those who know much to know well what they know. When we focus on one operation only, it is more intense.”

I hope you enjoy the booklet.



Francis de Sales- His Life and Legacy



Francis de Sales was born on the 21st August 1567 in the Château de Sales into the Noble Sales family of the Duchy of Savoy, in what is today Thorens-Glières, Haute-Savoie, France. His father was François de Sales, Lord of Boisy. His mother was Françoise de Sionnaz, the only child of a prominent magistrate. He was baptised Francis Bonaventura, after two great Franciscan saints. His father wanted him, as the first of his six sons, to attend the best schools in preparation for a career as a magistrate.

Education and Conversion

In 1583, Francis went to the Collège de Clermont in Paris, to study rhetoric and humanities. As a nobleman, he was accompanied by his own servant and priest tutor, Abbé Deage. To please his father, De Sales took lessons in the gentlemanly pursuits of riding, dancing and fencing. However, Francis was by nature a very spiritual man.

In 1584, Francis entered into a period of despair which would last for three years. The issue he struggled with was predestination, a theological topic hotly debated in both Catholic and Reform circles.

For the young de Sales the crisis over predestination presented itself as a personal dilemma. Was he fated to be parted forever from the God, the good, he loved so ardently? The fear of being separated from this most central and unifying focus of his life was devastating. It has been suggested that this fear arose from an interior conflict. Entranced by the charms of Parisian womanhood, urged on by the adolescent escapades of companions, the young Savoyard seems to have discovered within himself a leaning that was at variance with the morally disciplined life he had set out to cultivate. The crisis came to a head as he recognised his God-given ability to love in the present. The issue, felt at a deep level, was the realisation of radical human dependence. Francis needed to abandon himself unconditionally to the mercy of God. To do that involved accepting the idea that he might be eternally damned. Once he had done just this and cast away the attention he was giving to protecting himself from such a fate, he was able to perceive the great gift he was given. Now, regardless of what the future might hold, he was utterly free to love to the fullest of his capacity. And love he would in joyous celebration of the potential of the present moment.

In early 1587, Francis visited the old parish of Saint Étienne des Grès, Paris, where he prayed the Memorare before a statue of Our Lady of Good Deliverance, a Black Madonna. This prayer had an immediate consoling effect on him and he soon consecrated his life to God.



In 1588, Francis completed his studies at Collège de Clermont and enrolled at the University of Padua in Italy, where he studied law and theology. Francis' issue over predestination took on formal theological overtones at this time. He had been studying Thomas Aquinas and Augustine, regarding them as luminaries. But on the issue of predestination he parted their company, affirming that it was the will of God to save all of humankind. In a heartfelt account he recorded his struggle to rest in conscience with this decision, proclaiming his intention to glorify the divine name which had revealed itself on the cross not as "he who condemns" but as "Saviour". Francis worked out for himself a theological opinion that was in harmony not only with gospel teaching but also with his experienced sense of the unconditional love of God that creates, sustains and desires to redeem all humankind as well as with his felt sense of the freedom of the human will to choose or not to respond to this love. Ultimately, de Sales realised that God's mercy is greater than the choices a human person may make. This dual knowledge – of human freedom and the loving will of God toward humankind – formed forever after Francis de Sales' vision of the Christian life.

He completed his doctorate in 1592 and made a pilgrimage to Loreto, Italy, famous for its Basilica della Santa Casa and then returned

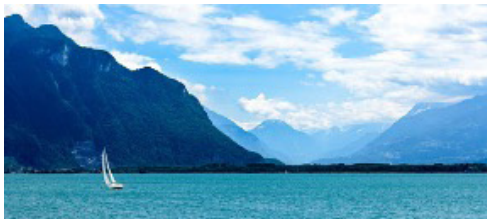
home to Savoy. His father had prepared a position as senator for Francis, the eldest child of his 13 children, as well as a wealthy noble heiress as his bride, but Francis refused to marry. Claude de Granier, Bishop of Geneva, intervened and in 1593 Francis was ordained. Immediately he received a promised appointment as provost of the cathedral chapter of Geneva.

Francis engaged in enthusiastic campaigns of evangelism in an area that had become almost completely Calvinist. In Thonon, despite Francis' zeal, courage and patience, he met with absolute failure, as the residents had made an agreement to refuse to hear the eloquent preacher. Several times he escaped death at the hands of assassins. He travelled to Rome and to Paris, where he forged alliances with Pope Clement VIII and Henry IV of France. In 1601 he was sent on a diplomatic mission to Henry IV, where he was invited to give Lenten sermons at the Chapel Royal. The morals at court reflected those of the king, which were notoriously bad, yet Henry became personally attached to Francis, and is said to have observed, "A rare bird, this Monsieur de Genève, he is devout and also learned; and not only devout and learned but at the same time a gentleman. A very rare combination."

Bishop of Geneva

In 1602 Bishop Granier died and Francis was consecrated as Bishop of Geneva. He resided in Annecy (now part of modern-day France) because Geneva remained under Calvinist control. His diocese became known throughout Europe for its efficient organisation, zealous clergy and well-instructed laity, monumental achievements in those days. It is estimated that he persuaded 72,000 Protestants to return to the ancient faith.

At Evian, on the south shore of Lake Geneva, St. Francis of Assisi appeared to him and said: “You desire martyrdom, just as I once longed for it. But, like me, you will not obtain it. You will have to become an instrument of your own martyrdom.” During his years as bishop, de Sales acquired a reputation as a spellbinding preacher and something of an ascetic. His goodness, patience and mildness became proverbial.



Lake Geneva, Switzerland

Mystical Writer

Francis' qualities are easily understood through reading his writings which he has left for the Church. The most famous of these is *The Introduction to the Devout Life*, which - unusual at the time - was written especially for laypeople. In it, he counsels charity over penance as a means to progressing in the spiritual life. Francis also left many highly valued letters of spiritual direction, including those with Jane Frances de Chantal, compiled in the *Letters of Spiritual Direction*.

Founder and Death

Along with St. Jane Frances de Chantal, Francis founded the women's Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary (Visitandines) in Annecy in 1610. In December 1622, Sales was required to travel in

the entourage of Charles Emmanuel I, Duke of Savoy, for the Duke's Christmas tour of his domain. Upon arrival in Lyon, he chose to stay in the gardener's hut at the Visitandine monastery of that city. While there, he suffered a stroke, from which he died on December 28th 1622.

Veneration After His Death

St. Francis de Sales has been styled "the Gentleman Saint", because of his patience and gentleness. His remains are located in the church of the Monastery of the Visitation in Annecy, which he had founded with Chantal who was also buried there. Many miracles have been reported at his shrine. Francis was beatified in 1661 by Pope Alexander VII, who then canonized him four years later. He was declared a Doctor of the Church by Pope Pius IX in 1877 and his feast day is celebrated on 24th January, the day of his burial in Annecy in 1623.

Patronage

In 1923, Pope Pius XI proclaimed him the patron saint of writers and journalists, because he made extensive use of broadsheets and books both in spiritual direction and in his efforts to convert the Calvinists of the region. Francis is widely regarded as one of the greatest spiritual advisers in the history of the Church.

He developed a sign language in order to teach a deaf man about God. Because of this, he is the patron saint of the deaf.

Congregations

In the 19th century, his vision for religious communities was revived. Several religious institutes were founded during that period for men and women desiring to live out the spiritual path which he had

developed. The Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales was founded by the Abbé Pierre Mermier in Annecy, France, during 1838, and became the first congregation to adopt his spirituality in the 19th century. The political disturbances in the country, especially the French Revolution, had a spiritual impact on the people of France. Sensing the signs of the time, Fr. Mermier took upon himself the task of spiritual renewal in his people by preaching parish missions. The religious institute of the Salesians of Don Bosco, founded by St. John Bosco in 1859, was originally named the Society of Francis de Sales, and was placed under his patronage.

Introduction to the Devout Life



My object is to teach those who are living in towns, at court, in their own households, and those whose calling obliges them to a social life, as far as externals are concerned. I grant that the guidance of individual souls is a labour, but it is a labour full of consolation, even as that of harvesters and grape-gatherers, who are never so well pleased as when they are most heavily laden. It is a labour which comforts and invigorates the heart by the comfort which it brings to those who bear it.

What True Devotion Is

Fasting and praying, combined with angry and insulting speeches, a person such as this is conventionally called religious, but in no sense truly devout. Devotion makes us ready and loving in performing as many works as possible. The converted sinner journeys along as far as God commands him, but slowly and weakly, like a person recovering from illness. When he attains a true spirit of devotion, then, like a sound man, he runs and leaps in the way of God's commands and hastens gladly along the paths of heavenly counsels and inspirations.

The world runs down true devotion, painting devout people with gloomy, unpleasant and dismal characteristics. The Saints, our Lord and the Holy Spirit tell us “a devout life is very sweet, very happy and very loveable.” The world sees devout people praying, fasting, and denying themselves sensual indulgement, things seen as hard and difficult. The inward, heartfelt devotion which makes all these actions pleasant and easy is not seen by the world. Devotion is the real spiritual sweetness which removes all bitterness: it cures the poor of sadness; it averts sadness from the lonely; it averts sadness and gladness with an even mind and fills hearts with a wondrous sweetness.

Devotion Is Suitable To Everyone

When God created the world, he commanded each tree to bear fruit; and even so he bids Christians- the living tree of his Church- to bring forth fruits of devotion, each one according to his kind and vocation. A different exercise of devotion is required of each, at different stages of their lives. Furthermore, such practice must be modified according to the strength, the calling and the duties of each individual. Would it be appropriate if the father of a family were as regardless in making provision for the future as a Capucin? Appropriate for a Bishop to lead the solitary life of a Carthusian? For an artist to spend all day in the church?

Devotion which is true hinders nothing, but perfects everything. Everyone fulfils his special calling better when subject to the influence of devotion: family duties are lighter, married love truer, every kind of occupation more acceptable and better performed where that is the guide. It is an error to seek to banish the devout life from the mechanic's workshop. There are various other kinds of

devotion well-suited to lead those whose calling is secular along the paths of perfection. We have people who retreated to solitude and some who led a higher life in the world which seems so antagonistic to it. Be sure that wheresoever our lot is cast we may and must aim at the perfect life.

Purifying The Soul is a Gradual Process Ending Only When We Lose Life or Courage

We dare not aspire to miraculous and extraordinary acts of grace. The ordinary purification, whether of body or soul, is only accomplished by slow degrees, step by step, gradually and painfully. The soul which rises out of sin to a devout life has been compared to the dawn, which does not banish darkness suddenly, but by degrees. Your wings must grow before you can fly. The cure which is gradually affected is always the surest. We must be brave and patient in this undertaking. It is a dreadful thing to see souls beginning to grow disheartened because they still find themselves still subject to imperfection after having made some attempt at living a devout life and yielding to the temptation to give up in despair and fall back.

On the other hand, there is extreme danger to those souls who imagine themselves purified at the very start if their journey, seeking to fly before they have wings. These are in great danger of relapse through having left their physician too soon. "It is but lost labour to rise early and late take rest." The work of the soul's purification neither may nor can end save with life itself: accept your imperfections for "God's strength is made perfect in weakness" and remind yourself that it is in Jesus' wounds that we are healed. Our very perfection lies in diligently contending with our faults. Success is achieved not in being unaware of our weaknesses, but in not consenting to them.

Advice on Prayer

Go to prayer in faith, remain there in hope, go out only in love. The greatest method of prayer is to have no method at all. Nevertheless, there are some points of advice to mention which you may find useful. Begin all prayer by an act recognising the Presence of God. Call to mind that he is not only present in the place where you are, but very specially in your heart and mind, which he kindles and inspires with his holy presence. Prayer in the morning is highly advised, for our God is called light itself, The Sun, and Our Lady the Day Star. It is at this time that our minds are most fresh. The Rosary is a very useful devotion when rightly used. One Our Father said devoutly is worth more than many prayers hurried over. Prayer should always be concluded with an act of thanksgiving.



Our Lady of the Rosary, All Saints' Church, Ballymena

Remember that you pray with your heart and not with your mind. Often, recognising God's presence and his stillness is a most powerful prayer in itself. A key path to holiness is to take time throughout the day to be briefly uplifted by holy thoughts. Simple phrases like "Jesus, I trust in you," or "Sacred heart of Jesus, I place all my trust in you" can rapidly lead to a road of peace and calmness.

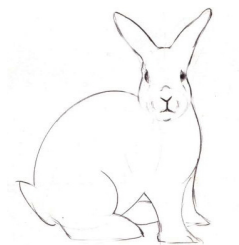
If a statue which had been placed in a niche in some room had the ability to speak and were asked "Why are you there?" it would answer, "Because my master, the sculptor, has put me here." "Why don't you move about?" "Because he wants me to be perfectly still." "What use are you there? What use will you gain by staying like this?" "I'm not here for my own benefit, but to serve and obey the will of my master." "But you don't see him." "No, but he sees me and is pleased that I am where he has put me." "But wouldn't you like to move about and get closer to him?" "No, not unless he ordered me to." "Isn't there anything at all that you want then?" "No, because I am where my master has put me, and all my happiness lies in pleasing him." Well, what a good way of praying, and what a fine way of staying in God's presence: doing what He wants and accepting what pleases Him! It seems to me that Mary Magdalene was a statue in her niche when, without saying a word, without moving, and perhaps even without looking at Him, she sat at our Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. When He spoke, she listened; whenever He paused, she stopped listening; but always, she was right there. A little child who is at its mother's chest when she has fallen asleep is really where it belongs and wants to be, even though neither of them makes a sound.

Further Note on Prayer

Remember that above all, prayer is a way to strengthen your relationship with God. Simplicity is advised, “Think of me and I will think of you.” He is our Father, and as his children, we are dependent on him for everything. Nevertheless, as children, we are invited to trust that he will provide us with everything that we need. Would a father be pleased with his child if all he received were demands from his child to meet their desires? A truly faithful child is content with whatever he has at that moment.

On Holy Communion

Receive the Blessed Sacrament often, so that you may learn to receive it better; because the more frequently one does something, the better he or she gets at it. Mountain hares turn white in winter because they live in, and feed upon, the snow; therefore, by feeding upon this Divine Sacrament of beauty and goodness and purity, you too will become lovely, holy and pure.



On Patience

The greatest happiness of anyone is to possess his soul, and the more perfect our patience, the more fully we possess our souls. A really patient servant of God is ready to bear inglorious troubles as if they were honourable. A brave person can easily bear contempt, slander and false accusation from an evil world; but to bear such injustice at the hands of good men, of friends and relations, is a great test of patience. But it is a thing which very often happens, and sometimes two worthy men who are both highly well-intentioned after their own fashion, annoy and even persecute one another grievously.

Be patient not only with the main trials which beset you, but also with the accidental and accessory annoyances that arise out of them. Often, we find people who are in the state of imagining themselves ready to accept a trial in itself, who are impatient of its consequences. We hear one person say, "I should not mind poverty, were it not that I am unable to bring up my children and receive my friends as handsomely as I desire." We are wise to accept any trial that God may send us.

When you are justly blamed for a fault you have committed, humble yourself deeply and confess that you deserve the blame. If the accusation be false, defend yourself quietly: this is due respect to truth. If you remain accused, remain calm and do not press your defence – you have had due respect for truth, now have the same for humility. By acting thus, you will retain your good name, or the affection you are bound to entertain for peace, humility and gentleness of heart.

Complain as little as possible of your wrongs, for as a general rule, you may be sure that complaining is sin; self-love always magnifies

our injuries. Above all, do not complain to people who are easily angered and excited. If it is necessary to complain to someone, either to seek a remedy for your injury, or in order to soothe your mind, let it be some calm, gentle spirit, greatly filled with the love of God. Otherwise, instead of relieving your heart, your confidants will provoke it to still greater disturbance; instead of taking out the thorn that pricks, they will drive it deeper.

A really patient person neither complains nor seeks to be pitied; and will speak simply and truly of his trouble. Just as the best honey is that made from thyme, a small and bitter herb, so that virtue which is practised amid bitterness and sorrow is the best of all virtues. "In our suffering, we share the suffering of Jesus Christ, so in Heaven we may share his glory." "The sufferings on Earth, which we all have, are nothing compared to the glory that is to be revealed to us." The angels envy us because we are able to suffer for our Lord, while they have never suffered anything for him. St. Paul, who was lifted to heaven amid the joys of paradise, did not count himself blessed except because of his infirmities, and in the Cross of our Lord. When you suffer in your body, speak the same words as the apostle: "From now on let no person trouble me; for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus" (Gal. 6:17). Suffering borne well will carry you closer to heaven than if you were the healthiest person in the world! Paradise is a mountain up which we climb better with a body broken and injured than with one healthy and whole.

Gaze often inwardly upon Jesus Christ crucified, naked, blasphemed, falsely accused, forsaken, overwhelmed with every possible grief and sorrow, and remember that none of your sufferings can be compared to his, either in kind or degree, and that you can never suffer anything

for him worthy to be weighed against what he has born for you.

Consider the pains which martyrs have endured and think how even now many people are bearing afflictions beyond all measure greater than yours. Say to yourself, “Of a truth, my trouble is comfort, my torments are but roses compared to those whose life is continual death. Their troubles weigh them down with a grief that is tenfold greater than mine.” Think of your peers who have died before you.

The Enemy makes use of sadness to try good men with his temptations: just as he tries to make bad people merry in their sin, so he tries to make the good sorrowful amid their works of piety; and while making sin attractive so as to draw people to it, he strives to turn them from holiness by making it disagreeable. The Evil One delights in sadness and melancholy, because they are his own characteristics. He will be in sadness and sorrow through all Eternity, and he would be pleased to have all others the same.

Sorrow may be good or bad according to the several results it produces in us. And indeed there are more bad than good results arising from it, for the only good ones are mercy and repentance; whereas there are six evil results, namely, anguish, sloth, indignation, jealousy, envy and impatience.

The “sorrow of the world” disturbs the heart, plunges it into anxiety, stirs up unreasonable fears, disgusts it with prayer, overwhelms the brain, deprives the soul of wisdom, judgement, resolution and courage, weakening all its powers; in a word, it is like a hard winter, blasting all the earth’s beauty, and numbing all life; for it deprives the soul of sweetness and power in every faculty. Should you, my

daughter, ever be attacked by this evil spirit of sadness, make use of one or more of the following remedies. Prayer is a sovereign remedy, it lifts the mind to God, Who is our only Joy and Consolation. But when you pray, let your words and affections, whether interior or exterior, all tend to love and trust in God. “O most Loving Lord, Sweet Saviour, Lord of my heart, my Joy, my Hope, my Beloved, my Bridegroom.” Make use of hymns and spiritual songs; they have often frustrated the Evil One in his operations.

Of Wishes

Do not desire crosses, unless you have borne those already laid upon you well – it is an abuse to long after martyrdom while unable to bear an insult patiently. The Enemy often inspires people with ardent desires for unattainable things, in order to divert their attention from present duties, which would be profitable, however trifling in themselves.

Combining Due Care For Reputation With Humility

A good reputation, though not very important, is very useful, not only as an attractive feature of life, but as a protection to our other virtues, especially those which are weakly. The necessity of acting up to our reputation, and being what we are thought to be, brings a strong though kindly motive power to enhance a generous disposition. Let us foster all our virtues, because they are pleasing to God.

Those who are very sensitive about their reputation are like those people who are perpetually physicking themselves for every ailment;

they mean to preserve their health, but practically they destroy it. Those who are very fastidious over their good name are likely to lose it entirely, for they become fanciful, fretful and disagreeable. As a rule, indifference to insult and slander is a much more effective remedy than resentment and vengeance. An excessive fear of losing reputation indicates mistrust of its foundations, which are to be found in a good and true life. Those towns where the bridges are built of wood are very uneasy whenever a sign of flood appears, but they who possess stone bridges are calm. Hence, a soul built up on solid, Christian foundations is the strongest.

Be just and fair in all you do. Always put yourself in your neighbour's place, and put him in yours, and then you will judge fairly.



Stone bridge at Antrim Castle

Gentleness Towards Others

Resist all faults of our brethren gently. Nothing so stills the elephant when enraged as the sight of a lamb. Remember, it is better to learn to live without being angry than to imagine one can moderate and control anger lawfully. Sometimes, in a law court, the officials make more noise than those they are trying to quieten. If necessary, apologise quickly, for “Fresh wounds are soonest closed.”

Mary Magdalene tried to hold on to Our Lord: she wanted him for herself. His appearance was not as she had wished it to be, which is the why she looked at him without recognising him. She wanted to see him arrayed in glory, not in the common clothes of a gardener. Yet in the end, she knew it was he when he said to her “Mary” (Jn 20:14-16). You see, it is Our Lord dressed as a gardener whom we meet by day, here and there, in our daily lives that present themselves to us. We often want more noble-seeming challenges in life. But those that seem the most noble are not the best. Before we see him in his glory, he wants to plant many humble flowers in our garden, according to his plan. This is why he is dressed the way he is. Our task is to let our hearts be ever united to his, and our wills to his pleasure.



Gentleness Towards Ourselves

One very important direction in which to exercise gentleness is with ourselves: maintain a quiet, steady, firm displeasure at our own faults. Many people fall into the error of being angry with themselves because they have been angry, thus keeping up a chronic state of irritation which adds to the evil of what is past and prepares the way for a fall at the first occasion. All this anger and irritation with oneself fosters pride. A judge gives sentence more effectively by speaking deliberately and calmly than if he is loud and angry. Similarly, a parent's tender and affectionate remonstrance has far more weight with his child than anger and sternness. Therefore, if we judge our own heart gently, encouraging it to amendment, its repentance will be much deeper and longer lasting. When you have fallen, lift up yourself and your heart humbly in quietness before God, without marvelling that you fell. Heartily lament that you should have offended God and begin anew to cultivate the lacking grace, with a deep trust in his Mercy and a bold, brave heart.

When you aim to attain some good thing, strive, above all else, to keep a calm, restful spirit. Examine yourself often, at least night and morning, as to whether "your heart is in your hand."

Attending to Business Life Calmly and Carefully

The care and diligence due to our ordinary business are very different from anxiety and restlessness. The angels care for our salvation, and seek it gently and diligently, but they are completely free from anxiety. Remember that care and diligence go hand in hand with calmness



and peace. Be careful and diligent in your affairs. God, who commits them to you, wills you to give them your best attention; but strive to maintain your inner peace. Imagine yourself carrying a very delicate vessel containing the most precious of oils. How gently and calmly would you move, speak and conduct yourself!



Every form of excitement affects both judgment and reason and hinders a correct performance of the very thing which excites us. “Make haste slowly.” “There is one that labours and takes pains and is so much the more behind.” We are always soon enough when we do well. “The bumble bee is so much more noisy than the honey bee, but it makes nothing except noise.”

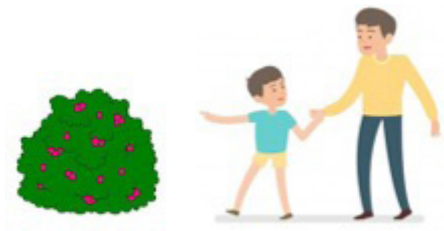


Accept the duties which come before you quietly, and try to complete them methodically, one after another. The more things you apply yourself to, the less perfectly will you do each of them, because your strength is limited. Thus a person attentive to many things is less attentive to each of them.

Always be in a calm demeanour, do everything calmly and in a gentle spirit. Do not lose your peace for anything whatsoever, even if your whole world depended on it. Do everything for God, uniting yourself to him in word and deed. Walk very simply with the cross of the Lord and be at peace with yourself.

In all your affairs, rely solely on God's providence, by which means alone your plans can succeed. Meanwhile, on your part, work on in quiet co-operation with him, and rest satisfied that if you have entrusted entirely to him, you will always obtain a measure of success which is most profitable to you. Imitate a child, whom one sees holding tightly with one hand to its father, while with the other it gathers blackberries from the hedge. Even so, while you gather and use this world's goods with one hand, always let your other be in your Heavenly Father's, and look around from time to time to make sure he is satisfied with what you are doing.

Always strive to maintain calmness. Dedicate yourself to serve the Lord with steadfastness, attentiveness and meekness. That is the true way to serve him. If you can, refrain from trying to do all things, but instead focus on doing some one thing; this way you will do much. Embrace the challenges and mortifications that most often present themselves to you, for that is the first duty to be done. After that, you can take up the others. Lovingly kiss the crosses that the Lord himself lays upon your arms, without looking to see whether they are of precious or aromatic wood. They are more truly crosses when they are made of a wood that smells dirty and is considered useless.



On Judging Others

“Judge not, and you shall not be judged,” said the Saviour of our souls. “Condemn not and you shall not be condemned.” Are we never, then, to judge our neighbour you ask. Never, my child. It is God who judges a criminal brought before the court of law. He uses magistrates to convey His sentence to us; they are His interpreters and have only to proclaim His law. If they go beyond this, and are led by their own passions, then they do themselves judge, and for doing so they will be judged. It is forbidden for all people alike, to judge one another.

Those who keep careful watch over their conscience are not often liable to form rash judgments, for just as when the clouds lower, the bees make to the shelter of their hive, so really good people shrink back into themselves, and refuse to be mixed up with the clouds and fogs of their neighbour's questionable doings, and rather than meddle with others, they concentrate their energies on their own improvement and good resolutions.

How to Maintain Purity

Be exceedingly quick in turning aside from the slightest thing leading to impurity, which can grow rapidly. For it is easier to fly from such evils than to cure them. Human bodies are like glasses, which cannot come into collision without risk of breaking; or like fruits, which, however fresh or ripe, are damaged by pressure. Seek out good and holy people, read and ponder holy things; for the Word of God is pure, and it will make those pure who study it.



On Poverty of Spirit Amid Riches

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.” Your heart should be open to heaven. There is a wide difference between having poison and being poisoned. It is the Christian's privilege to be rich in material things, and poor in attachment to them, thereby having the use of riches in this world and the merit of poverty in

the next. Remember that it is not possible to take great pleasure in something without becoming attached to it.

Our possessions are not ours.' God has given them to us to cultivate. Remember, the love of God is calm, peaceful and tranquil, and so the work done for the love of God is gentle, trustful and quiet. Frequently dispose of part of your income by giving some of it to the poor. It is true that God will restore it to you, not only in the next world, but in this.

On Friendship

Foremost among the soul's affection is love. Love is the ruler of every motion of the heart. We are what we love. Remember friendship is the most dangerous of all affections, because it is impossible to be closely bound to someone without sharing his qualities. Friendship implies mutual love. True friendship is modest, straightforward, loving, pure, has no sighs except for Heaven, no complaints except that God is loved not sufficiently.

“A faithful friend,” we are told in Holy Scripture, “is a strong defence, and he who has found one has found a treasure.” And again, “A faithful friend is the medicine of life.”

Of Society, Solitude and Recreation

Either to seek or to shun society is a fault in one striving to lead a devout life in the world. We are told to love one's neighbour as one's self. Our own devout life will be enriched by intercourse with other devout souls. Simplicity, gentleness and modesty are to be desired in all society. A quiet cheerfulness should be your aim.

It is wonderful how attractive a gentle, pleasant manner is and how much it wins hearts. As the body is poisoned through the mouth, the heart is through the ear. Be extremely watchful against uttering any unseemly words or expressions. Never speak evil of any person, directly or indirectly. Take pains to mention a favourable aspect of the scandal-bearer. Be very careful when speaking with your neighbour: look upon your tongue as a sharp razor. Let your words be kindly, frank, simple and true. Best to use few, but let them be good quality, well-chosen words.

We must occasionally relax the mind, and the body needs some recreation also. Recall St. John the Evangelist, sitting, caressing a partridge: "I recreate myself from time to time, in order to return more vigorously to contemplation." It is a great mistake to be so strict as to grudge any recreation either to others or to one's self. Walking, enjoying nature and games of skill are good. One must avoid excess, either in the time given to them or in the amount of interest they absorb, to prevent them from becoming an occupation, which far from resting and restoring the body, have the opposite effect.

Avoid Trifling With the Words of Worldly Wisdom

We have seen men and women pass the whole night, even several in succession, playing at chess or cards - what can be a more dismal, unwholesome thing than that? But the world has not a word to say against it, and their friends are not troubled. But give up an hour to prayer, and they worry for you and call the doctor.

Is it not as plain as possible that the world is an unjust judge; kind to its own children, harsh and uncharitable to the children of God?

If we give in to the world and laugh, dance, and play as it does, we will be scandalised; if we refuse to do so it will accuse us of being hypocritical or morbid. If we spend any length of time in confession, it will speculate on what we have so much to say about! If we are brief, it will suggest we are keeping back something! Let us leave the blind world to make as much noise as it may; let us be firm in our ways, unchangeable in our resolutions. Perseverance will be the test of our self-surrender to God.

Of all worldly possessions, the most precious is a good name. Slander is a kind of murder for we all have three lives: a spiritual life depending on the Grace of God; a bodily life, depending on the soul; and a civil life, consisting in a good reputation. Sin deprives us of the first, death of the second, and slander of the third. But the slanderer commits three severe murders with his idle tongue: he destroys his own soul and that of whom he speaks of, as well as causing civil death to the object of his slander. But bear in mind that we must never, in our wish to shun slander, foster or flatter vice in others; but we must call evil evil, and sin sin, and so doing, we shall serve God's glory. When you speak of your neighbour, look upon your tongue as a sharp razor in the surgeon's hand, about to cut nerves and tendons; it should be used so carefully, as to ensure that no particle more or less than the truth be said. And finally, when you are called upon to blame sin, always strive as far as possible to spare the sinner.

Resisting Minor Temptations

There are an infinite number of minor temptations that a victory over them is fully as important as over the rarer but greater ones. These temptations are a perpetual trial to even the most devout, therefore we ought to prepare ourselves for this warfare. Be assured that every



victory won over these little foes is a precious stone in the crown of glory which God prepares for us in Paradise.

Take patiently the minor annoyances such as a headache, stomach pain, daily discomforts, loss of internet connection, impatient colleague, the broken glass, the little shyness some people feel in openly performing religious duties; and be sure that all of these sufferings, as small as they are, if accepted lovingly, are most pleasing to God who has promised a whole ocean of happiness in return for one cup of cold water.



Of Dryness and Spiritual Barrenness

Remember to seek the Consoler, not the consolations. Sometimes people imagine dry, distasteful services to God as being unacceptable to his divine majesty. On the contrary, our actions are like roses, which, though they may be more beautiful when fresh, have a sweeter and stronger scent when they are dried.

The Need of a Good Courage

However much we may admire and crave for light, it is likely to dazzle our eyes when they have long been accustomed to darkness; and on first visiting a foreign country, we are sure to feel strange among its inhabitants, however kind and courteous they may be. Even so, my child, your new life may be attended with some inward discomfort, and you may feel some inward discouragement and weariness after you have taken a final farewell of the world and its follies. Should it be so, I pray you take it patiently, for it will not last – it is merely the disturbance caused by novelty; and when it is gone you will abound in consolations. At first you may suffer somewhat under the loss what you have enjoyed among your vain, frivolous companions; but would you forfeit the eternal gifts of God for such things as these? The empty amusements which have so far amused your mind until now may rise up attractively before your imagination, and strive to win you back to rest in them; but are you bold enough to give up a blessed eternity for such deceitful snares? Believe me, if you will but persevere, you will not fail to enjoy a sweetness so real and satisfying that you will be constrained to confess that the world has only gall to give as compared to this honey, and that one single day of devotion is worth more than a thousand years of worldly life.

But you see before you the mountain of Christian perfection which is very high, and you exclaim in fearfulness that you can never ascend it. Be of good cheer, my child. When the young bees first begin to live, they are mere grubs, unable to hover over flowers, or to fly to the mountains, or even to the little hills where they might gather honey; but they are fed for a time by the honey laid up by their predecessors, and by degrees the grubs put forth their wings and grow strong, until they fly abroad and gather their harvest from all the country round.

Now we are yet but as grubs in devotion; but if we begin to take shape through our desires and resolutions, our wings will gradually grow, and we may hope one day to become spiritual bees, able to fly. Meanwhile, let us feed upon the honey left to us in the teaching of so many holy men and women, praying to God that He would grant us dove's wings, so that we may not only fly during this lifetime, but find an abiding resting-place in eternity.



Becoming Peaceful

If anyone desires to be delivered from his troubles out of love of God, he will strive patiently, gently, humbly and calmly, looking for deliverance to God's goodness and Providence rather than to his own industry or efforts; but if self-love is the prevailing object, he will grow hot and eager in seeking relief, as though all depended more upon himself than upon God. This can make the initial disturbance even worse.

Anxiety arises from an unregulated desire to be delivered from any pressing evil, or to obtain some hoped-for good. Nevertheless, nothing tends so greatly to enhance the one or retard the other as over-eagerness and anxiety. Birds that are captured in nets are inextricably entangled therein, because they flutter and struggle so

much. Therefore, when you desire to be delivered from some evil or to reach some hoped-for good, strive above all to keep a calm, restful spirit – steady your judgment and then go quietly and easily after your object. Diligence and perseverance go hand in hand with calmness and peace. If you must discuss your situation with someone, it is very important to do so with a calm and restful spirit.

Our soul inhales through the ear and exhales through the mouth. Let us then protect our ears from evil words which can speedily impact the heart. Always remember that you have dedicated your heart to God. Be steadfast and devout - this pleases God. Let us remember that our souls are poisoned through the ear as much as bodies through the mouth.



Meditations For Living In God's Love

Be sure, if you seek to lead a devout life, you must not merely forsake sin; but you must further cleanse your heart and mind from all affections leading to sin. I have therefore set out a series of meditations to unclog yourself from these distractions, helping to make you diligent, ready and frequent in good works, in which lies the essence of true devotion. These meditations are useful to do once or twice a year. When combined with the sacraments, these meditations are especially useful.

I have prepared them to be used one after the other, one each day, as early as possible, for the morning is the best time for all spiritual exercises; and then you can ponder and ruminate it through the day. Complete them with a piece of paper and a pencil so that you can return to them in future.

First Meditation

1. Place yourself in the presence of God.
2. Ask Him to inspire your heart.

Considerations

1. Consider that but a few years ago you were not born into the world, and your soul was as yet non-existent.
2. God brought you out of this nothingness, solely out of His goodness, not because He had any need of you.
3. Consider that you are adapted to live eternally, and to be perfectly united to God's Divine Majesty.

Affections and resolutions

1. Humble yourself before God, saying with the Psalmist, O Lord, I am nothing in respect of you and wouldn't I be lost if You had not called me?
2. Give God thanks: O God, you created me out of nothing. How can I ever do enough worthily to praise your holy name, and give you thanks?
3. Confess your own shame: O Creator, so far from uniting myself to you, I have rebelled against you through my unruly desires and ignored your goodness, as though you had not created me.
4. Prostrate yourself before God: O my soul, know that the Lord is my God, it is He that has made me. From now on, I will not seek to rest in myself. I will do such and such a thing... I will endure such troubles, I will alter my ways and follow my Creator, and realise that I am honoured by His calling me.

Conclusion

1. Thank God: Bless the Lord, O my soul, and praise His holy name with all my being, because His goodness called me forth from nothingness, and His Mercy created me.
2. Offer: O my God, I offer you my whole self and dedicate my life to you.
3. Pray: O God, strengthen me in these resolutions. Dear Lord, I commend myself and the whole world to your service. Pray the Our Father.

At the end of your meditation, linger a while and gather, so to say, a little spiritual bouquet from the thoughts you have dwelt upon, the sweet perfume of which may refresh you throughout the day. Note down your resolutions in a little booklet or safely on a piece of paper.

Second Meditation

1. Place yourself in the presence of God.
2. Ask Him to inspire your heart.

Considerations

1. Consider the material gifts God has given you - your body, your health, your friends. Consider, too, how many persons more deserving than you are without these gifts; some suffering in health or sunk in poverty, while God has willed you to be better off.
2. Consider the mental gifts He has given you. Again, God has favoured you with a decent and suitable education, whilst many have grown up without one.
3. Further, consider His spiritual gifts. You are a child of His Church. How often has He given you His sacraments? What inspirations and interior light, what reproofs He has given to lead you aright; how often He has forgiven you, how often delivered you from occasions of falling; what opportunities He has granted for your soul's progress! Dwell on the details, see how loving and gracious God has been to you.



Affections and resolutions

1. Marvel at God's Goodness. How good He has been to me.
2. Marvel at your own ingratitude. How unworthy am I? I have set the depth of my ingratitude against the depth of Your grace.
3. Kindle your gratitude. My whole soul should serve the Lord.
4. Go on, refrain from this or that material indulgence; let your body be wholly the servant of God, Who has done so much for it: set your soul to seek Him by this or that devout practice suitable to you. Make diligent use of the means provided by the Church to help you to love God. Resolve to be constant in prayer, in hearing His word and obeying His inspirations and counsels.

Conclusion

1. Thank God for the clearer knowledge He has given you of His benefits and your own duty.
2. Offer your heart and all its resolutions to Him.
3. Ask Him to strengthen you to fulfil them faithfully by the Merits of the Death of His Son. Pray the Our Father. Gather the spiritual bouquet.

Third Meditation

1. Place yourself in the presence of God.
2. Ask His grace.
3. Consider yourself to be on your deathbed, in the last extremity, without the smallest hope of recovery.

Considerations

1. Consider the uncertainty of the day of your death. One day your soul will quit this body - will it be in summer or winter? Will it be suddenly or with warning? Will it be owing to sickness or accident? Will you have time to make your last confession? All of these things about which know absolutely nothing: all that we know is that die we shall, and, for the most part, sooner than expected.
2. Consider that then the world is at end as far as you are concerned; there will be no more of it for you; it will be altogether overthrown for you. For what mere trifles I have ventured and frittered away my time on earth! Then you will see that what we preferred to Him was nothing. But, on the other hand, all devotion and good works will then seem so precious and so sweet: why not tread that pleasant path?
3. Consider the universal farewell which your soul will take of this world. It will say farewell to riches, pleasures, and idle companions; to amusements and pastimes; to friends and neighbours, husband, wife and child; in short, to all creation. And lastly, it will say farewell to its own body which it will leave pale and cold, to become repulsive in decay.
4. Consider that the whole world, after burying you, will scarcely give you another thought. "God rest his soul," men will say, and that is all.



Affections and resolutions

1. Throw yourself into God's arms. May that hour be blessed and favourable to me.

2. Despise the world. Forasmuch as I know not the hour in which I must quit the world, I will not grow fond of it. O dear friends, beloved ones of my heart, why should I cling to you with a tie which must needs be broken?

I will prepare for the hour of death and take every precaution for its peaceful arrival; I will thoroughly examine the state of my conscience and put in order what is wanting.

Conclusion

Thank God for inspiring you with these resolutions: offer them to His Majesty: ask Him to grant you a happy death by the Merits of His Dear Son's Death. Ask the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints. Pray the Our Father. Gather the spiritual bouquet

Fourth Meditation

1. Place yourself in the presence of God.
2. Ask Him to inspire you.

Considerations

1. A time will come when all men shall rise from the dead and be judged. Consider the majesty with which the Sovereign Judge will appear, surrounded by all the Saints and Angels; His Cross, the sign of grace to the good and of terror to the evil, shining brighter than the sun.
2. The Sovereign judge will separate the evil and the good, setting one on His Right Hand, the other on His Left - an eternal separation, for they will never meet again.
3. This separation made, the book of conscience will be opened, and all people will behold the badness of the wicked, as well as the goodness of His followers, the results of the grace they have received. Nothing will be hidden. Consider the final sentence of the wicked. "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and His angels. Dwell upon these awful words. Go," He says - forever banishing them from His Presence. Think about what that eternity of suffering implies.
4. Then consider the sentence of the good. "Come," the Judge says - O blessed, loving word with which God draws us to himself and receives us in His Bosom. He will say, "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world."



Affections and resolutions

1. Ponder the thought of the souls being lost or saved. Detest your sins and dedicate yourself to bringing God's peace and love into the world.

Conclusions

Offer God your heart, and ask Him for the grace to use it well. Our Father, etc.

Fifth Meditation

1. Place yourself in the presence of God.
2. Humble yourself and ask for His aid.
3. Picture to yourself a dark city, reeking with the flames of sulphur and brimstone, inhabited by citizens who cannot escape.

Considerations

1. The lost are plunged in their infernal abyss, suffering indescribable torture in every sense and every member; and having used their members and sense for sin, it is just that through them, they should suffer now. Those eyes which delighted in impure, vicious sights now behold devils; the ears which took pleasure in unholy words now are deafened with yells of despair; and so on with the other senses.
2. Beyond all these sufferings, there is one greater still, the privation and pain of loss of God's Glory, which is for ever denied to their vision.
3. Consider how hard the pains of Hell will be by the reason of their eternal duration. If the irritating bite of an insect, or the restlessness of fever, makes an ordinary night seem so long and tedious, how terrible will the endless night of eternity be.



Affections and resolutions

Resolve to act differently and to dedicate yourself in prayer and deeds to love God and others.

Give thanks, offer yourself, pray.

Sixth Meditation

1. Place yourself in the presence of God.
2. Invoke His aid.

Considerations

1. Imagine a lovely calm night, when the heavens are bright with stars: add to the beauty of such a night the utmost beauty of a summer's day - the sun's brightness not hindering the clear shining of moon or stars - and then be sure that it all falls short of the glory of Paradise. O bright and blessed country, O sweet and precious place!
2. Consider the beauty and perfection of the countless inhabitants of that blessed country; the millions and millions of angels, Cherubim and Seraphim; the glorious company of Apostles, martyrs, confessors, virgins and saints. O blessed company, any one single member of which passes all the glory of this world, what will it be to behold them all, to sing with them the sweet Song of the Lamb? They rejoice with a perpetual joy, they share a bliss unspeakable, and unchangeable delights.
3. Consider how they enjoy the Presence of God, Who fills them with the richness of His Vision, which is a perfect ocean of delight; the joy of being ever united to their Head. They are like happy birds, hovering and singing for ever within the atmosphere of divinity, with fills them with inconceivable pleasures. There, each one sings the praises of the Creator, "Blessed are You forever, O Dear and Precious Lord and Redeemer." And He in His turn pours out His ceaseless Blessing on His Saints: "Blessed are you, Mine for ever, who have served me faithfully, and with a good courage."



Affections and resolutions

1. Admire and rejoice in the Heavenly Country.
 2. Reprove the coldness of your own heart for having until now so little sought after that glorious abode. Why have I so long lingered, indifferent to the eternal happiness set before me? How could I neglect such real treasures for mere vain and contemptible earthly matters?
 3. Aspire earnestly after that blessed abode. From now on I will look forward to my heavenly homeland. I will go forth with my soul, towards its promised rest.
 4. Resolve to give up such things which hinder you on the way, and to do other things which will help you.
- Give thanks, offer, pray.

Seventh Meditation

1. Place yourself in the presence of God.
2. Ask Him to inspire you.

Considerations

1. Imagine yourself alone with your Guardian Angel in an open plain. Suppose the Angel set before you Paradise, full of delights and joys; and on the other hand Hell, with all its torments. Consider that you are most truly standing between Hell and Paradise, and that both the one and the other are open to receive you, according to your own choice.
2. Consider that the choice you make in this life will last forever in the next.
3. Consider too, both are open to receive you according to your choice. Yet God gives one by reason of His Justice, the other by reason of His Mercy, all the while desires unspeakably that you should select Paradise. Your good Angel is urging you with all his might to do so, offering you countless graces on God's part, countless helps to attain it.
4. Consider that Jesus Christ, enthroned in Heaven, looks down upon you in loving invitation: "O beloved one, come unto Me, and join for ever in the eternal blessedness of My Love!" Behold His mother yearning over you with maternal tenderness - "Courage, my child, accept the Goodness of my Son, and my earnest prayers for your salvation." Behold the saints, who have left you their example, the millions of souls who long after you, desiring earnestly that you may one day be forever joined to them in their song of praise, urging upon you that the road to Heaven is not so hard to find as the world would have you think. "Press on boldly, dear friend," they cry.

“Whoever will ponder the path by which we came here, will discover that we attained these present delights by sweeter joys than any this world can give.”

The Choice

1. O Hell, I detest you now and forever I abhor your griefs and torments. I turn to You, O Blessed Paradise, eternal glory, unfading happiness, I choose you forever as my abode, your glorious mansions, your precious and abiding tabernacles. O God, I bless Your Mercy, which gives me the power to choose. O Jesus, Saviour, I accept Your Eternal Love, and praise you for giving me a place in that blessed New Jerusalem, where I shall love and bless you for ever.

2. Dwell lovingly upon the example set before you by the Blessed Virgin and the Saints and strive to follow where they point you. Give yourself up to your Guardian Angel, that he may be your guide, and give you courage anew to make this choice.



Eighth Meditation

Considerations

1. Place yourself in the presence of God.
2. Humble yourself before Him and ask His Aid.

Considerations

1. Imagine yourself alone with your Guardian Angel in an open plain, and represent to yourself on the left hand the Devil sitting on a high and mighty throne, surrounded by a vast troop of worldly people who bow down before him, doing him homage by the various sins they commit. Study the appearances of these miserable people, some raging with fury, envy and passion; others pale in their craving of wealth, or madly pursuing every vain and profitless pleasure; others sunk and lost in vile, impure affections. See how all alike are restless, wild, and how they despise one another.
2. On the other hand, behold Jesus Christ crucified, calling these unhappy people to Him. Behold the company of devout souls and their guardian Angels, contemplate the beauty and calmness of this religious Kingdom. What lovely, pure people. See how all these pious souls know how to live devoutly, in gentleness and listening to the Voice of their Lord, all seeking to enthrone Him more and more with their hearts.
They rejoice in peaceful, sober joy; they love, but their love is altogether holy and pure.
3. Surely you have renounced Satan and his miserable troop; by the good resolutions you have made, but nevertheless you have not yet wholly reached the King Jesus, or altogether joined His company of devout ones.
4. The Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph and hundreds of thousands more who were once like you, living in the world, call upon you and encourage you.

5. The crucified King Himself calls you by your own name: “Come, O my beloved, come, and let Me crown thee!”

The Choice

1. O world, O proud king, monarch of evil, I detest you and all your works.

2. I turn to You, O Sweet Jesus, King of Blessedness and of eternal glory, I cleave to You with all the powers of my soul, I adore thee with all my heart and trustfully submit myself to Your holy laws.

3. O Blessed Virgin Mother of God, you shall be my example. I will follow you with all reverence and respect.

4. O my Guardian Angel, bring me to this heavenly company, stay with me until I have reached them, with whom I will sing forever, in testimony of my choice, “Glory be to Jesus, my Lord!”



Francis Meets Jane Frances de Chantal



In 1604, Francis met Baroness de Chantal, a young widow who had come with her father to hear Francis preach a series of Lenten sermons in Dijon. Since the death of her husband several years earlier, Jane had been struggling with an emerging sense of vocation, of being called to give herself utterly to the service of God. But with four small children and the requirements of her position as baroness, she was floundering between desire and the painful and taxing facts of her daily life. In her widow's despair, she had begun to discover new depths of religious aspiration, and a new sense of hunger for God.

It was during the loneliness of her widowhood and during his rise to public service and visibility that Jane and Francis met. The relationship of director and directee soon blossomed into a lasting friendship.

This friendship was nurtured by their shared delight in each other's gifts and their mutual quest for perfection. In 1610, they co-founded the Visitation of Holy Mary in Annecy, Savoy, a congregation for women who felt drawn to a life of religious commitment but who were not sufficiently young, robust, or free of family ties to enter one of the austere, reformed women's communities or who were simply not attracted to the physical austerity of these houses.

The Visitation offered to women such as these a home – simple and modest in its physical ascetic demands yet rigorous in its interior pursuit of authentic Christian charity – where they could blossom and become “daughters of prayer.” The women followed a simplified monastic routine, saying a shortened version of the daily office, engaging in modest work. There was a provision made for a limited number of laywomen to come within the community for brief periods of refreshment and retreat.

The Visitation community was the culmination of Chantal's deepest personal longing to find a way to uncompromisingly abandon herself to her religious impulses while still caring for the needs of her children and her extended family. Her then youngest daughter, Françoise, went with her and stayed within the community; her eldest daughter, Marie-Aimée, recently married to Francis' own brother, Bernard, resided nearby. Jane was free to move in and out of the community cloister as her maternal duties required. During the years that followed she was able to arrange for her son's and daughter's education and marriages, and settle the estates left by her father-in-law.

Letters

As a busy bishop, Francis' day was always full, but he managed to find time to write letters to the faithful during several hours in the early morning before the activity of the day closed in upon him. Like Francis, Jane wrote highly personalised letters to her correspondents amidst the routine of her own day at the Visitation.

Extracts From the Letters of St. Francis de Sales

Let us all belong to God, in the midst of so much busyness brought on by the diversity of worldly things. Where could we be a better witness to our fidelity than in the midst of things going wrong? Solitude has its assaults, the world its busyness; in either place we must be courageous, since in either place divine help is available to those who trust in God and who humbly and gently beg for his fatherly assistance.

When the enemy is at the door, we must completely ignore him and keep the door closed. We mustn't even say "Who is it?" Finally, he will grow tired of shouting and will leave you in peace. So, courage then! Things will improve soon. So long as the enemy doesn't get in, the rest doesn't matter. Still, it's a very good sign that he is raging and beating at the door; it's a sign that he doesn't yet have what he's after. If he had it, he would no longer carry on this way. He would come in and stay. Remember this so as to never get caught up in scruples.

The temptations against faith go directly to the understanding to draw it to argue and to get caught up in all these things. When a temptation against faith starts raising questions in your mind, do not even argue with him, instead run to Jesus with your full affection and trust. "Get behind me Satan!" it is written. Say impassioned

words such as “Jesus I trust in you.” What I am trying to say is that we have to strike back with the heart and not with the mind, with intense feelings and not with arguments. It’s true that at such times of temptation our poor will is without feeling. So much the better. Its blows will strike the enemy that much harder. And when he discovers that instead of delaying your progress, he is giving you the opportunity of expressing countless virtuous affections, particularly that of affirming your faith, he will finally leave you alone.

Soon we shall be in eternity and then we shall see how insignificant our worldly preoccupations were and how little it mattered whether some things got done or not; however, right now, we rush about as if they were all-important. When we were children, how eagerly we used to gather little pieces of broken tile, little sticks and mud with which to build houses and other tiny buildings, and if someone knocked them over, how heartbroken we were and how we cried! But now we understand that these things didn’t amount to much. One day it will be like this for us in heaven, that some of the things that we clung to on earth were only really childish attachments. I’m not suggesting that we shouldn’t care about these little games and trifling details of life, for God wants us to practise on them in this world; but I would like to see us not so frantic and strained in our concern about them. Let’s play our childish games since we are children, but at the same time, let’s not take them too seriously. And if someone wrecks our little houses or projects, let’s remain calm, because when night falls and we have to go indoors – I’m speaking of our death – all those little houses will be useless; we shall have to go in to our Father’s house. Do faithfully all the things you have to do but be aware that what matters most is your salvation and the fulfilment of that salvation through true devotion.

The Wisdom of St. Jane Frances de Chantal

We cannot always offer God great things, but at each instant we can offer him little things with great love.



All God wants is our heart.

Hell is full of the talented, but Heaven is full of the energetic.

Sometimes, when our Lord asks us to do some good work, all he really wants is our willingness to do the work, and not its accomplishment.

Hold your eyes on God and leave the doing to him. That is all the doing you have to focus on.

Advice of St. Francis de Sales

It is too true that I who write about the devout life am not myself devout, but most certainly I am not without the desire to become so, and it is this wish which encourages me to teach you.

A good way to learn is to study, a better to listen, and the best to teach.

Have patience with all things, but especially with yourself.

The measure of love is to love without measure.

Anxiety is the greatest trouble which can befall a soul except sin. God invites you to pray, but He forbids you to worry.

Do everything quietly and in a calm reserve. Do not lose your inner peace for anything whatsoever, even if your whole world seems upset.

Strive to see God in all things and consent to do his will joyously.

Strive to do everything for God, uniting yourself to him in word and deed. Walk very simply with the cross of the Lord and be at peace with yourself.

Nothing is so strong as gentleness, nothing so gentle as real strength.

Our words are a faithful index to the state of our souls. For God is Word.

Go to prayer in faith, remain there in hope, go out only in love.

Suffering borne well will carry you closer to heaven than if you were the healthiest person in the world!

Focus yourself on completing the lap you are on. There are those who get distracted by thinking about the final lap before they have even set off. Stay present, my dears.

Do not love anything too much, even virtues, which we sometimes lose by our excessive zeal.

Bear in mind that the bee, while making its honey, lives upon a bitter food: and in like manner, we can never make acts of gentleness and patience, or gather the honey of the truest virtues, better than while eating the bread of bitterness, and enduring hardness.

We shall never be conquered until we lose either life or courage.

Accustom yourself to speak rather gently, to walk slowly, to do everything quietly and in moderation; you will see that in three or four years' time you will have regulated this hasty impetuosity. Maintain this practice at all times, everywhere. Now I know perfectly well that you will slip a thousand times a day over all this; but that should be no problem, provided that at every time you become aware of them you make an effort to calm them.

The children of this world are separated from one another because their hearts are in different places; but the children of God whose hearts are where their treasure is and who all have the same treasure – which is the same God – are consequently always bound and united together.

When we are truly wise, we work for God.

The things of most worth are not cultivated without labour.

Let your acquaintances be many but your advisors one in a thousand.

Great occasions for serving God come seldom, but little ones surround us daily.

Trial brings us to a greater purity of heart.

Be who you are and be that well.

Each of us has different gifts to offer the world, and comparison will only distract us from the amazing gifts we have been given. Recognise that God has equipped you with a very particular mission, one that only you are equipped to carry out.

Half an hour of meditation per day is essential, except when you are busy - then a full hour is needed.

Time spent in prayer helps us to take a step back and see our lives more clearly. Only prayer will help us get our priorities in order.

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“It is not those who commit the least faults who are the most holy, but those who have the greatest courage, the greatest generosity, the greatest love, who make the boldest efforts to overcome themselves, and are not immediately apprehensive about tripping.”

- *St. Francis De Sales*

Booklet produced by Brian Wilson, who is part of the Divine Mercy Belfast Prayer Group.

You received this booklet through the generosity of another. As an act of charity and for the salvation of souls, God willing, you will be inspired to order a number of copies, so that others will "Seek the Lord while He is still to be found."

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Divine Mercy Prayer Group,
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079 9998 1771

From the Republic of Ireland-
Contact: Martin 'Jim' McFadden
Tel: 087 206 9481

Email: divinemerzybelfast@gmail.com
www.divinemerzybelfast.com

Memorare

Remember, O most gracious Virgin
Mary,
that never was it known that anyone who
fled to your protection,
implored your help, or sought your
intercession, was left unaided.
Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto
you, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother.
To you do I come, before you I stand,
sinful and sorrowful.
O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise
not my petitions,
but in your mercy, hear and answer me.
Amen

Devotion is the real spiritual
sweetness which takes away
all bitterness, it cures the
poor of sadness, it averts
sadness from the lonely, it
is a warmth in winter and
refreshing dew in summer, it
accepts gladness and sadness
with an even mind.

-St. Francis de Sales

Divine Mercy Chaplet in Song every Friday at 3pm.
Sacred Heart Church, Oldpark Road, North Belfast.

Email: DivineMercyBelfast@gmail.com

www.DivineMercyBelfast.com