

January 24, 2023



Center for Spiritual Development

Daily Reflections

JOURNEYING THROUGH CHALLENGING TIMES

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MEMORIAL OF SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES BISHOP AND DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

By Sister Jane DeLisle, CSJ

"Here am I Lord; I come to do your will."

PSALM 40:8a,9a

Reflection

Our reflection yesterday was centered upon a divided kingdom. It is fitting that today we celebrate the feast day of St. Francis de Sales, who was Bishop of Geneva, and noted for his deep faith, and gentle approach to the religious divisions in his homeland, that were sewn by the Protestant Reformation. He was born on August 21, 1567, near Annecy, France, and died on December 28, 1622, in Lyon, France.

Francis was educated in Annecy, Paris, and Padua, and was ordained a priest

in 1593. He developed a great reputation as a writer, preacher, and debater in defense of the Catholic faith. In 1602, Francis was ordained Bishop of Geneva, with his cathedral residence in Annecy. One of the most important challenges he faced in his diocese was the reform of the clergy. He is most remembered for ministry that focused on serving the people of the diocese, offering spiritual encouragement, preaching on the love of God, and walking with the faithful as a spiritual director.

St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane Frances de Chantal founded an order of cloistered nuns, the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary, in 1610. Part of the initial inspiration that proved to be well ahead of its time, was the ministry of the sisters to visit and assist people outside the cloister walls.

The preaching of St. Francis focused on the positive, joyful, and life-giving reality of Gospel living. This was somewhat novel in a time when division reigned between Catholics and Protestants, who often employed the gospel as a weapon of condemnation and as a threat against sin.

St. Francis linked joy and suffering together through love. He reminded the people that there was no sanctity without suffering. At all times, there has been an abundance of suffering in life. He exhorted his flock to embrace trials and painful experiences joyfully, as he had learned to do, by uniting them to the sufferings of Christ. That is not what one wants to hear when feeling miserable. Yet, for St. Francis, the outpouring of God's love enabled believers to bear all things, and eased their way in life. He encouraged the faithful to look for the glimmers of light and grace everywhere, since the love of God was always with them.

Most importantly, St. Francis encouraged people in every occupation and situation to pursue what he called "the devout life." He wrote over 2,000 letters of encouragement in the spiritual life for all people. He urged continued growth in God's love through prayer and action. St. Francis experienced God as loving, gentle, sublime, and approachable.



Portrait of Francis de Sales in Annecy
Photo by Sr. Karin Nürnberg, CSJ

For Pondering

Choose from the following quotes of Francis de Sales and let them speak to your life. (Taken from the booklet: *Golden Counsels of St. Francis de Sales.*)

“A thousand times a day cast your whole heart, your soul, your anxiety on God with great confidence, and say with the psalmist: ‘I am yours, Lord; save me.’”

“Do not fear future evil in this world, for perhaps it will never come. But in

any event, if evil should come, God will strengthen you. If God commands you to walk on the waves of adversity, do not doubt; do not be afraid. God is with you; have courage and you will be delivered.”

“In the model of Francis, we are urged to be patient with everyone, but above all with yourself. Don’t be disturbed by your imperfections, and always have the courage to pick yourself up after a fall. Be glad to know that you make a fresh start each day. There is no better way to grow toward perfection in the spiritual life than by always starting over again, and never thinking that you have done enough.”

“But most importantly, don’t lose heart; be patient, wait, and do all you can to develop a spirit of compassion. There is no doubt that God is holding you by the hand; if he allows you to stumble, it is only to let you know that if he were not holding your hand, you would fall. This is how he urges you to hold more tightly to him.”

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