

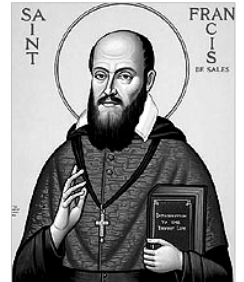
# FRANCIS DE SALES AND JANE DE CHANTAL

The Catholic Community at Connecticut College • September 29, 2007

*Living a deeply spiritual life doesn't require a harsh, cloistered existence. Francis de Sales popularized that idea with practical, gentle advice written for people in all walks of life. He suggests this simple yet effective prayer for times when our resolve to live faithfully falters: "God will help me; I will do better."*

Francis de Sales (1567-1622), was born to a large family in Savoy, France. His father wanted him to be a lawyer but Francis was always more interested in theology. He earned his law degree and was ready to enter politics. But Francis decided to follow his heart. He quit law, turned down an aristocratic marriage arranged by his father and became a priest.

Francis was an excellent preacher and a compassionate spiritual director. He successfully evangelized the diocese of Geneva, a Calvinist stronghold, and became bishop there when he was 35. His spiritual advice survives in several books and in his vast correspondence with those he directed – including Jane de Chantal (1572-1641), a young widow and mother he met in 1604. Together they founded the Sisters of the Visitation; both of them also worked closely with St. Vincent de Paul.



It is wrong, even heresy, Francis wrote, to think that holiness is not within the grasp of those living ordinary lives. He urges us to listen to God; whatever God directs us to do is ultimately good, he says, because God is love. His best writing is beautifully lush. Scholar Wendy Wright says, "In the dense imagery of Salesian metaphor, God's heart 'breathes,' in and out, and our hearts' desires breathe in concert, in inspiration and aspiration, with the heartbeat of God."



**“Let us belong to God ... in the midst of so much busyness.”**

Francis

“Our greatest fault is that we wish to serve God in our way, not in His way – according to our will, not according to His will. When He wishes us to be sick, we wish to be well; when He desires us to serve Him by sufferings, we desire to serve Him by works; when He wishes us to exercise charity, we wish to exercise humility; when He seeks from us resignation, we wish for devotion, a spirit of prayer or some other virtue. ... It is beyond doubt that if we were to wish to be Saints according to our own will, we shall never be so at all. To be truly a Saint, it is necessary to be one according to the will of God.”

Francis

**“Adversity is sent to us with as much love as prosperity, and as much for our good.”**

Jane

“There are a thousand little acts of virtue, such as bearing with the importunities and imperfections of our neighbors, not resenting an unpleasant word or a trifling injury, restraining an emotion of anger, mortifying some little affection, some ill-regulated desire to speak or listen, excusing indiscretion, or yielding to another in trifles. These things are to be done by all; why not practice them? The occasions for great gains come but rarely, but of little gains many can be made each day. ... Let us apply ourselves to follow well the path which is close before us.”

Francis

**“Become familiar with the angels and see how they are often present though unseen in your life.”**

Francis

Francis was canonized in 1665; Jane in 1767. His feast day is January 24. Hers is December 12.

## FINDING PEACE IN A TURBULENT WORLD: THE ADVICE OF ST. FRANCIS

“God conserves this great world in existence amid constant change wherein day unceasingly turns into night, spring into summer, summer into autumn, autumn into winter, and winter into spring. One day is never perfectly like another; some are cloudy, some rainy, some dry, and some windy. Such variety gives great beauty to the universe. It is the same with man. His life on earth flows away like waters that float and undulate in a perpetual diversity of movement. ...

Even though everything turns and changes around us, we must always remain unchanging and ever looking, striving and aspiring toward God. No matter what course the ship may take, no matter whether it sails to the east, west, north, or south, no matter what wind drives it on, the mariner’s needle never points in any direction except toward the fair polar star. Everything may be in confusion not only around us, I say, but within us as well.

Our soul may be overwhelmed with sorrow or joy, with sweetness or bitterness, with peace or trouble, with light or darkness, with temptation or repose, with pleasure or disgust, with aridity or tenderness. It may be scorched by the sun or refreshed by the dew. For all that, ever and always our heart’s point, our spirit, our higher will, which is our compass, must unceasingly look and tend toward the love of God, its Creator, its Savior, its sole and sovereign good. This absolute resolution never to forsake God keeps [our souls] steady amid the inconstancy and change that come from consolations and afflictions, whether spiritual or temporal and whether exterior or interior.”

*Introduction to the Devout Life*



### “Do not desire things that endanger your soul.”

Francis

“Whatever time you decide to give God in prayer, reserve it for Him alone and come before Him with your thoughts free and disentangled from everything else. This time no longer belongs to you. Even if you should spend the time acutely aware of your insufficiency and weakness, do not let that upset you. Rather rejoice in being a very good object for God’s mercy. Often ask yourself whether you can really say in all truth: ‘My beloved is mine and I am His.’ If you notice something in your being that does not belong wholly to God, take it, and offer it back to Him. You are all his! But do not dwell on your progress or lack of it. Our Lord wants you to receive and use faithfully the occasions of serving Him and of practicing virtue. Do not reflect either on the past or on the future. Each moment has its own task. You need only turn towards God and totally abandon yourself to His Providence. Ask Him to destroy everything in you that opposes His plans.”

Letter to Jane de Chantal



### “Do not worry about your process of perfection or about your soul. God, to whom it belongs and to whom you have completely entrusted it, will take care of it.”

Jane

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## QUESTIONS FOR CONTEMPLATION

1. Often we imagine a devout life is attainable only by contemplative monks and nuns. How can you ignore – or use – the distractions of secular life to further your relationship with God?
2. The more our exchanges with a friend concern charity, devotion and “Christian perfection,” Francis wrote, the more perfect the friendship. How would you evaluate your friendships in that light?
3. What does Francis mean when he says “become familiar with the angels?”

## MORE INFORMATION

The International Commission on Salesian Studies: [www.franz-von-sales.de](http://www.franz-von-sales.de)

Oblates of St. Francis de Sales: [www.oblates.org](http://www.oblates.org)

Salesian spirituality (meditations, commentaries, “retreats on the run”): [www.oblates.org/spirituality](http://www.oblates.org/spirituality)