

Praying with Images from St. Francis de Sales: January



January 1:

If you feel inclined to vanity, think often of the misery of this human life; consider how troublesome these vanities will be to the conscience on the day of your death; how unworthy they are of a generous heart; that they are but toys and amusements of little children; and so on. Speak often against vanity, and even though you feel reluctant, do not cease to despise it. By this means you will commit yourself against vanity even as regards your honor. (**Intro.** 4.10 311-312)

January 2:

Anxiety is the greatest evil that can befall us except sin. Sedition and internal troubles ruin a nation utterly and prevent it from being able to resist a foreign invasion. Similarly, when we are troubled and restless we lose our power to maintain the virtue which we have acquired. We also lose the means of resisting the temptations of the enemy who then makes every effort to fish, as they say, in troubled waters. (**Intro.** 4. 11 – 314)

January 3:

Birds remain captive in the nets and traps because, when they are entangled in them, they flutter and struggle wildly in order to escape; by doing that they always entangle themselves the more. Therefore when you are taken up by the desire to be delivered from some evil or to obtain some good, place yourself above all in peace and tranquility. (**Intro.** 4. 11 – 314)

January 4:

Examine more than once every day, but at least evening and morning, whether your soul is in your hands or whether some passion or anxiety has robbed you of it. (**Intro.** 4. 11 – 314)

January 5:

God keeps this wonderful world in existence amidst constant change. Thus day passes into night, spring into summer, summer into autumn, autumn into winter and winter into spring. One day never exactly resembles another: some days are cloudy, some rainy, some dry, some windy. Variety gives great beauty to the universe. It is the same with man, who has been called by the Ancients "an epitome of the world." He is never in the same state. (**Intro.** 4. 13 – 318)

January 6:

Though everything turns and changes about us, we must always remain firm, our eyes fixed on God seeking him and moving towards him. A ship may sail in different directions, north or south, east or west, driven by various winds, yet the needle of its compass will always point towards the pole star. . . . The highest point of our heart, of our spirit, of our superior will, which is the needle of our compass, must always be turned to God, our Creator, and Savior, our unique and sovereign good, tending continually towards him. (**Intro.** 4. 13 – 319)

January 7:

But when this devotion is put to the test, it is found to be similar to showers of a very hot summer which fall in great drops on the earth without soaking it serving only to produce mushrooms. In fact these tears and feelings of tenderness fall on a sinful heart without penetrating and so are of no use to it. In fact these tears and feelings of tenderness fall on a sinful heart without penetrating and so are of no use to it. . . . Because of this, these poor persons would not give up one single paisa of the ill-gotten goods they have, would not renounce any of their evil attachments, and would not inconvenience themselves in the least to serve the Savior for whom they have shed tears. The good movements they had are only spiritual mushrooms. (**Intro.** 4. 13 – 321)

January 8:

A child will shed tender tears, if he sees his mother bled with lancet; but if at the same time his mother, for whom he has been weeping, asks him for an apple or for sweets that he has in his hand, he will not part with them. Such are most of our feelings of devotion: seeing the thrust of the lance which pierced the heart of Jesus crucified, we weep tenderly. . Alas, Philothea, it is right to weep over this painful Passion and Death of our Savior and Redeemer. But why then do we not give him the apple which we hold in our hands and which he asks for so earnestly? In other words, why do we not give him our heart? It is the only apple of love which our dear Savior wants for us. (**Intro.** 4. 13 – 321)

January 9:

Our hearts are trees, our affections and passions are their branches and our works or actions are their fruits. (**Intro.** 4. 13 – 323)

January 10:

A mother to win over her child puts sweets into his mouth one after the other with her own hand. If the child were able to understand, he would find greater pleasure in the sweetness of his mother's loving attention and caresses than from the sweetness of the sweets. Philothea, it is a great thing, indeed, to have feelings of sweetness, but it is supreme sweetness to realize that God, like a loving mother puts them with his own hand into our mouth, our hearts, our soul and our mind. (**Intro.** 4. 13 – 324)

January 11:

The mother gives sweets to the child so that he may kiss her. Let us then kiss the Savior who gives us so much sweetness. Now to kiss the Savior is to obey him, keep his commandments, fulfill his will, and follow his desires. In short, it is to embrace him tenderly with obedience and fidelity. (**Intro.** 4. 13 – 325)

January 12:

I advise you, if you experience such a remarkable abundance of consolations, tenderness, tears and delight or anything extraordinary regarding them, to faithfully communicate these to your spiritual director. Thus you will learn how to regulate them and how to act with regard to them. As it is written: Have you found honey? Eat what is sufficient for you (Proverbs 25:16). (**Intro.** 4. 13 – 325)

January 13:

As a mother refuses to give sugar to her child suffering from worms, so God deprives us of his consolations when we take some vain pleasure in them and are subject to the worms of presumption: It is good for me, my God, that you have humbled me. Yes, for before I was humbled, I had offended you (Ps. 119:71, 67). (**Intro.** 4. 14 – 327)

January 14:

Sometimes we rest on a bed of sensible delights and passing consolations like the sacred Spouse in the Song of Songs (5:2-6). Our Beloved knocks at the door of our hearts; he inspires us to resume our spiritual exercises. But we bargain with him, because we are displeased to cast aside these vain amusements and deprive ourselves of these false satisfactions. Therefore he goes away and leaves us in our sloth. (**Intro.** 4. 14 – 327)

January 15:

When we do not care to gather the sweetness and the delights of the love of God in its proper time, he withdraws them from us in punishment of our sloth. The Israelite who did not gather the manna early in the morning could not do so after the sunrise, for it all melted away (Exodus 16:21). This is only what we have well deserved because we have been so unfaithful and disloyal to his love that we have refused to practice it in order to follow the love of worldly things. Alas, if you still keep some of the flour of Egypt you cannot have the manna of heaven. (**Intro.** 4. 14 – 327)

January 16:

The rain revives plants which have green leaves, but as to those which have none at all, it takes away from them even the life which they might have had, for it rots them completely. (**Intro.** 4. 14 – 328)

January 17:

Humble yourself profoundly before God, being aware of your own nothingness and misery: Alas, what am I left to myself? Nothing else, Lord, than a parched land, split in all directions, thirsting for the rain from heaven, while the wind scatters it and reduces it to dust. (**Intro.** 4. 14 – 328)

January 18:

Depart from here, unfruitful north wind that dries up my soul; come, gentle wind of consolations and blow through my garden (Song 4:16), and its good affections will spread a fragrant odor. (**Intro.** 4. 14 – 328)

January 19:

Follow with great simplicity and humility the advice he gives you. God, who loves obedience very much, often renders profitable those counsels which we accept from others, especially from spiritual directors, though they may not seem to be of much use. God made the waters of the Jordan a source of healing for Namaan, which Eliseus seemingly without any human reason had ordered him to use (2 Kings 5:9-14). (**Intro.** 4. 14 – 329)

January 20:

In the midst of all our spiritual dryness and desolation let us be full of courage. Let us wait patiently for the return of consolations, always continuing on our way. Let us not leave out exercises of devotion. Rather, if possible, let us multiply our good works. Since we cannot present to our Beloved sweets that are juicy, let us offer him dried ones. It is all the same to him, provided that the heart which offers them to him is firmly determined to love him. (**Intro.** 4. 14 – 329)

January 21:

In fine spring weather, bees make more honey and have fewer young ones. On account of the fine weather they are so busy gathering honey from the flowers that they forget producing their young ones. But when the spring is chill and cloudy, they produce more young ones and gather less honey. Since they are unable to go out to gather honey, they occupy themselves with increasing and multiplying their number. Philothea, we often find ourselves in the bright spring time of spiritual consolations. We are so absorbed in gathering and enjoying them that we perform much fewer good works because of the abundance of these sweet delights. On the other hand in spiritual dryness and barrenness, to the extent we find ourselves deprived of delight in devotion, we increase genuine good works. (**Intro.** 4. 14 – 330)

January 22:

Our actions are like roses which are more beautiful when fresh, yet have a greater fragrance and power when dry. Even so, though our works done with tenderness of heart are more pleasing to ourselves - to ourselves I say, who only consider our own satisfaction - yet when performed in a state of spiritual dryness and desolation, they have a greater fragrance and are more valuable in the sight of God. (**Intro.** 4. 14 – 330)

January 23:

God usually gives a foretaste of heavenly delights to those who begin to serve Him. This is to withdraw them from worldly pleasures and encourage them in the search for divine love. It is like a mother, who puts honey on her breast to entice and allure her little child to suckle. (**Intro.** 4. 15 – 333)

January 24:

Nevertheless, this loving God, in his wise design, takes from us the milk and honey of consolations. This is to wean us so that we may learn to eat the dry but more solid bread of a vigorous devotion, practiced as it is tested in the midst of distastes and temptations. (**Intro.** 4. 15 – 333)

January 25:

Very great storms sometimes arise in the midst of dryness and desolation. Then we must fight steadily against temptations because they are not from God. But we must bear patiently with the feelings of dryness as God has ordained them for our training. (**Intro.** 4. 15 – 334)

January 26:

We are like birds which fall at once to the ground unless they increase the movements and strokes of their wings to keep themselves in flight. That is why, dear Philothea, it is necessary that you renew and repeat very often the deliberate decisions you have made to serve God. (**Intro.** 5. 1 – 337)

January 27:

Even a good clock needs be wound twice a day, in the morning and in the evening. Besides this, it has to be dismantled every year, to clean the rusty parts, to straighten those that are bent and to replace the worn out. Thus, whoever has a deep concern for his dear heart must wind it up daily to God, in the evening and in the morning, by means of the exercise mentioned above. Besides, he must examine its conditions several times, rectifying and readjusting it. Finally, at least once a year, it should be dismantled and all its parts examined in detail. In other words, all its desires and passions are to be examined to remedy all the defects that may be there. (**Intro.** 5. 1 – 337-8)

January 28:

The Clock-maker oils the wheels, the springs and all the moving parts of the clock with fine oil so that it may run more smoothly, and be less liable to rust. Similarly, the devout person after this exercise of dismantling his heart, to review it well, must anoint it with the Sacraments of Confession and Holy Eucharist. This practice will renew your strength diminished by time, give fervor to your heart, bring fresh greenness to your deliberate decisions and make the virtues of your spirit flower again. (**Intro. 5. 1 – 338**)

January 29:

Were not the cords with which God drew your little boat to this safe harbor, cords of love and charity? (Hosea 11:4). (**Intro. 5. 2 – 340**)

January 30:

Bees take pleasure in honey, and wasps in garbage. In the same way, the good find happiness in Jesus Christ and have a most tender love for him. But the wicked take pleasure in vanities. (**Intro. 5. 4 – 344**)

January 31:

What love have you for your own heart? What trouble do you take to care for it in its illness? You owe it this care, in order to help it and to obtain help for it when it is tormented by passions, and to lay all else aside for that. (**Intro. 5. 5 – 346**)

*Note: St. Francis de Sales addressed the Introduction to “**Philothea**,” a name meaning “one who loves God.”*

Reference:

Intro – St. Francis de Sales, INTRODUCTION TO THE DEVOUT LIFE (Complete and Unabridged – Second Revised Edition). Translated and Edited by Antony Mookenthottam, MSFS, Armind Nazareth, MSFS, Antony Kolencherry, MSFS. Bangalore: S.F.S. Publications, 1995