

Praying with Images from St. Francis de Sales: August



August 1:

Look at your Abbess (Mary) in all the circumstances of her life. In her room at Nazareth she shows her modesty in that she is afraid, her candor in wanting to be instructed and in asking a question, her submission, her humility in calling herself a handmaid. Look at her in Bethlehem: she lives simply and in poverty, she listens to the shepherds as though they were learned doctors. Look at her in the company of the kings: she does not try to make any long speeches. Look at her at the time of her purification: she goes to the temple in order to conform to church customs. In going to Egypt and in returning she is simply obeying Joseph. She does not consider she is wasting time when she goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth as an act of loving courtesy. She looks for Our Lord not only in joy but also in tears. She has compassion on the poverty and confusion of those who invited her to the wedding, meeting their needs. She is at the foot of the cross, full of humility, lowliness, virtue, never drawing any attention to herself in the exercise of these qualities. (**SelLet** 159)

August 2:

We know what Abraham's servant did in order to see whether Rebecca was fit to be the wife of his master's son: he asked her for a drink of water, to see whether she would give it willingly, and also to his camels. A little courtesy, a humble virtue, but the sign of a much greater one. (**SelLet** 159)

August 3:

It seems to me that it is always a matter of great reproach to mortals that they should die without having thought about death; but it is doubly wrong for those whom Our Lord has favored with the blessing of old age. Those who get their armor ready before the alarm sounds are always better prepared than people who rush round collecting their breastplate, thigh pieces and helmet when the alert has actually been given. (**SelLet** 54)

August 4:

A magnet attracts iron, amber attracts straw and hay: now whether we are hard in heart as iron or feeble and helpless as straw we should follow the attraction of this sovereign little Child, the real magnet of hearts. (**SelLet** 260)

August 5:

You are taking to the high seas of worldly life, but do not on that account change your captain, your mast, your sails, your anchor, your fair breeze. Always keep Jesus as your captain, his cross for your mast on which to spread the sails of your good resolutions; let your anchor be deep trust in him and then sail on happily. May the favorable breeze of heavenly grace fill your sails more and more and carry you safely and joyfully into the haven of a blessed eternity, which is my true and heartfelt wish. (**SelLet 90**)

August 6:

We must act on the minds of others as far as possible as the angels do, graciously and without coercion. (**SelLet 68**)

August 7:

Strawberries and cherries are picked before even the most delicious kinds of pears and apples; but that is because they are in season at a different time. Let God gather to him whatever he has planted in his garden: he takes nothing out of season. (**SelLet 141**)

August 8:

May we be for ever attached to the cross and may a hundred thousand arrows pierce us, provided that our heart has first been pierced by the burning shaft of the love of God. May this arrow make us die that holy death which is worth more than a thousand lives. I shall go and beg this of the Archer who bears the quiver. (**SelLet 129**)

August 9:

O, my daughter, if we could only for once really say this sacred name from our heart! What sweet balm would spread to all the powers of our spirit! How happy we should be, my daughter, to have only Jesus in our understanding, Jesus in our memory, Jesus in our will, Jesus in our imagination! Jesus would be everywhere in us, and we should be all in him. (**SelLet 144**)

August 10:

O Lord Jesus, save, bless, confirm and preserve this heart which it has pleased you to call wholly to your divine love; and since you have led it to consecrate itself to your holy Name, may your holy Name fill it as with the balm of divine charity, spreading in perfect unity an odor of manifold sweetness for the edification of its neighbor. (**SelLet 228**)

August 11:

I will add to this as a general reflection that when we cannot properly distinguish whether we have really done our duty as we should in some

instance, and are wondering whether we have offended God, we must humble ourselves, beg God to forgive us and ask for more light on another occasion, completely forget what has happened and go on our way as usual; for curious and eager research into whether we have done right or not undoubtedly springs from self-love which makes us want to know for sure whether we are worth anything, whereas a pure love of God prompts us to say to ourselves: beggar and coward that you are, humble yourself and put your trust in God's mercy, ask forgiveness in any case; and promising God yet again that you will be faithful, just carry straight on. (**SelLet** 167)

August 12:

A bird chained to its perch is not conscious of its captivity and does not feel the pull of its chain until it wants to fly; in the same way an unfledged nestling only finds out that it cannot fly when it makes the actual attempt. And the remedy for this, my dear daughter, is not to struggle, not to make eager attempts to fly as your wings have not yet grown and you lack power for too great an effort. Be patient until you get the wings of a dove, and then you can fly. (**SelLet** 78)

August 13:

There had been a heavy snowfall and the courtyard was over a foot deep in snow. John went and swept a little clearing in the snow and threw some corn to feed the pigeons who all came together to this refectory to eat in the most peaceful and sedate way; and I took delight in watching them. You would not believe how greatly these little creatures edified me, for they never made a sound, and those who had finished feeding before the others flew away to a place close by to wait. And when they had cleared about half of what was there, a number of small birds who had been watching from afar came to join them; and all the pigeons that were still feeding retired to one corner so as to leave more room for the smaller birds who then settled down to their meal without the pigeons disturbing them in any way.

I admired this charity; for the poor pigeons were so loath to disturb the small birds to whom they were giving alms, that they all clustered together at one end of the table. I admired the discretion of the smaller birds who did not come to beg till they saw that the pigeons had nearly got to the end of their meal and that there was still plenty left over. In short, I could not restrain my tears to see the loving simplicity of the doves and the way the small birds trusted their charity. I doubt if a sermon would have touched me so deeply. (**SelLet** 230)

August 14:

Keep firm in your resolutions; stay in the little boat in which I have launched you; come storm, come tempest, may Jesus reign in you, and indeed you will not perish. He will be asleep, but in his own good time and place he will waken so as to restore your calm. (**SelLet** 125)

August 15:

I should like to impress on your mind what is written in the Book of Kings: God is not in the mighty wind, nor in the earthquake, nor yet in these fiery

flames but in the soft and gentle stirring of a breeze that we can hardly feel. Let yourself be ruled by God, do not think about yourself so much. (**SelLet** 43)

August 16:

O how impossible to tell, my Lord and God, how consoling it will be to love one another in heaven in this full sea of charity, when even these little brooklets of love give us so much! (**SelLet** 95)

August 17:

When we were small, how eagerly we put together little bits of tiles and wood and mud to make houses and tiny buildings! And if someone smashed them, how very miserable we were and how we wept; but now we see how very unimportant it all was. One day we shall experience the same thing in heaven when we see that what we clung to in this world was nothing more than a child's fancy. (**SelLet** 152)

August 18:

It is a good thing to say that you are not what the world thinks you when it thinks well of you, for the world is a charlatan, and always exaggerates both good and evil. (**SelLet** 109)

August 19:

From one day to the next we should entrust our general wish for perfection to God's providence; and as we look to him for this, we should cast ourselves into God's arms like a little child who in order to grow, simply eats what its father provides day by day, hoping that he will provide according to its appetite and need. (**SelLet** 162)

August 20:

Go straight on, and always in God's sight. God takes pleasure in seeing you make your little steps; and like a good father who holds his child by the hand, he will conform his steps to yours and will be quite happy not to go any faster than you. What are you anxious about? Whether you are taking this road or that other way, going fast or slow? All that matters is that he is with you, and you with him. (**SelLet** 160)

August 21:

I am inclined to think that if you could prevent this bustling eagerness you would gain a great deal; for it is one of the greatest traitors encountered by devotion and true virtue. It pretends to kindle us for our profit but all it does is to chill our fervor, only making us run so as to trip us up. That is why we must beware of it at all times but more especially during prayer. (**SelLet** 148)

August 22:

May we, please God, look less at the condition of the road along which we are toiling, and keep our eyes fixed on him who leads us and on the blessed land

which is our goal. Why should we worry whether we are passing through the desert or through meadows, provided that God is with us and that we are going to paradise? (**SelLet** 83)

August 23:

You will see that in spite of the fact that the road twists and turns we shall get there in the end and that Our Lord will lead us by way of the desert to his promised land; and from time to time he will give us something that will make us prize the desert more than cultivated ground where the corn grows in due season but where no manna falls. (**SelLet** 210)

August 24:

Imagine that you were a courtier of St. Louis: this saintly king (and your king is at present holy by innocence) liked the people about him to be brave, courageous, generous, cheerful, courteous, affable, frank, polite; but above all he wanted them to be good Christians. And if you had been with him you would have seen him laugh merrily when occasion offered, speak out boldly when the need arose, maintaining a brave outward show of royal splendor and dignity, like another Solomon; and the next moment you would have seen him serving the poor at the hospitals, and in short marrying civil virtue to Christian virtue, and majesty to humility. And this, in a word, should be your aim: to be no less brave for being Christian and no less Christian for being brave. And this implies being a very good Christian, that is to say, very devout, pious, and if you can, spiritual, for, as St. Paul says: the spiritual man discerns all things; he knows the right time and order to practice every virtue. (**SelLet** 89)

August 25:

You should often kiss the crosses which Our Lord has himself put into your arms; do not stop to find out whether they are made of precious and fragrant wood: they are crosses all the more when they are made of vile, worthless, foul-smelling wood. (**SelLet** 136)

August 26:

Let us lift our heart on high, my very dear Mother, and look upon God's heart which is so good and so loving towards us; let us adore and bless all that he wills for us: let him cut and shape us as he wishes, for we are his for ever. (**SelLet** 209-210)

August 27:

Do not allow your mind to be preoccupied with a vain promise of tranquility, delight, merit; but hold up your heart to your spouse, completely empty of all affections other than his chaste love, and beg him to fill it purely and simply with the inclinations, desires and wishes which are in his own heart, so that like a pearl oyster your heart only conceives by the dew of heaven and not by the waters of the world; and you will see that God will help us and that. We shall do well, choosing rightly and putting our ideas into effect. (**SelLet** 124)

August 28:

It is a strange thing, but one confirmed by experience and by various authors, that when a horse, however fine and strong, follows in the trail and

tracks of a wolf, it becomes torpid and stumbles. It is not possible for us who live in the world to avoid being soiled with its dust, even though we may only be in contact with it by the soles of our feet in passing. (**SelLet** 54)

August 29:

No place is comfortable to those who are sick of a fever: they spend a quarter of an hour in one bed and then they want to change over to another. There is nothing wrong with the bed but the trouble is that their own fever torments them wherever they find themselves. A person who is not suffering from the fever of his own self-will puts up with everything; provided that he is serving God he does not care in what capacity God uses him, and as long as he is doing God's divine will he has no personal preference. (**SelLet** 59)

August 30:

An even temper, gentleness and sweetness are rarer than perfect chastity but no less desirable for that. I commend these virtues to you, my very dear daughter, because the flame of good example depends on them as on oil in a lamp; nothing edifies others more than a loving good temper. (**SelLet** 247)

August 31:

A person who has real liberty of spirit will leave his prayer with an unruffled face and a heart well disposed towards the importunate friend who has disturbed him. (**SelLet** 70)

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Reference:

SelLet - St. Francis de Sales: Selected Letters (trans. Elizabeth Stopp). New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960.