

Praying with Images from St. Francis de Sales: December



December 1:

Those who lie on the herb agnus castus become chaste and modest. (Pliny) Even so by resting your heart on our Lord, who is the true chaste and immaculate Lamb, you will see that your soul and heart will soon find themselves purified of all defilement and unchastity. (**Intro.** 3. 13 – 206)

December 2:

The halcyons make their nests like the closed palm of the hand and leave only a small opening from the top. They put them on the seashore and yet they remain so strong and impenetrable that, even when washed by the waves, water never enters them. Thus always floating, they remain in the midst of the sea, on the sea and masters of the sea. (Pliny) Your heart, Philothea, is to be like that, open only to heaven, impenetrable to riches and perishable things. (**Intro.** 3. 14 – 207)

December 3:

There is always a difference between, keeping poison and being poisoned. The pharmacists almost all keep poisons, to make use of them in different circumstances. But they are not for that matter poisoned because they do not have poison in their bodies but only in their shops. So too you can own riches without being poisoned by them. (**Intro.** 3. 14 – 207)

December 4:

This fire of love is more active and more penetrating than it appears to you. You think of receiving only a spark of it, and you will be astonished to see that in an instant it has seized your whole heart, reduced all your good resolutions to ashes and your reputation to smoke. (**Intro.** 3. 18 – 220)

December 5:

Just as those who walk on level ground do not need a helping hand, but those who are on a dangerous and slippery path support one another to walk more safely, so too those who are religious do not need particular friendships. But those who are in the world do need them, to save themselves and help one another, in the midst of so many difficult paths they have to cross. (**Intro.** 3. 19 – 223)

December 6:

Those who shift the gravel of the river Tagus separate the gold which they find in it, to carry it away with them, and leave the sand on the river bank. In the same way, those who commune in a good friendship, ought to separate the sand of imperfections and should not allow it to enter their spirit. (**Intro.** 3. 22 – 232)

December 7:

There are two sacred texts, like two mighty columns, to support Christian life strongly. One is that of the Wise Man: Whoever fears God shall also have a good friendship (Sirach 6:17). The other is that of St. James: The friendship of this world is the enemy of God. (James 4:4) (**Intro.** 3. 22 – 234)

December 8:

Those who deal with rural agricultural matters assure us that, if some word is written on an almond seed that is quite entire, and put back in its shell carefully and properly folded and closed, and thus planted, and then every fruit which the tree produces will have the same word written and engraved on it. As for myself, Philothea, I could never approve the method of those who begin by the exterior such as the bearing, the dress or the hair in order to reform a man. On the contrary, it seems to me that we should begin by the interior: Convert yourself to me, says God, with your whole heart (Joel 2:12). (**Intro.** 3. 23 – 234)

December 9:

I wish, therefore, dear Philothea, to engrave and inscribe on your heart, before everything else, this holy and sacred maxim: LIVE JESUS! After that, I am sure that your life which comes from your heart, like the almond tree from its kernel, will produce all its actions which are its fruits inscribed and engraved with the same word of salvation. Just as this gentle Jesus will live in your heart, he will live also in your conduct and appear in your eyes, in your mouth, in your hands, even in your hair. (**Intro.** 3. 23 – 234)

December 10:

As the heart is the source of actions, they are such as the heart is. (**Intro.** 3. 323 – 234) In short, he who has won the heart of man, has won the whole man. (**Intro.** 3. 324 – 235)

December 11:

The stags run badly during two seasons: when they are too fat and when they are too lean. We are greatly exposed to temptations when our body is too well-nourished and when it is greatly weakened. The one makes it insolent while at ease, the other renders it desperate while ill-at-ease. (**Intro.** 3. 23 – 235)

December 12:

Sacred Scripture in a hundred ways, the example of the Saints and natural reasons strongly recommend the mornings as the best and most fruitful part of the day. Our Lord is even called the rising Sun (Zechariah 3:8; Lk. 1:78) and our Lady the Dawn of the day (Song 6:9), (Intro. 3. 23 – 238)

December 13:

Do you see, Philothea, Balaam is the cause of the evil and he strikes and beats the poor ass, which cannot do anything. . . . Alas! dear friend, you are beating the poor ass, you are afflicting your body. It can do nothing to help you to overcome your evil. (Intro. 3. 23 – 238)

December 14:

Think good thoughts and I shall not have impure feelings. Frequent modest people and I will not be vexed by lustful desires. Alas! It is you who throw me into the fire and you do not want me to burn. You are casting smoke into my eyes and you do not want them to be irritated. (Intro. 3. 23 – 239)

December 15:

To cure the itch, there is not so much need of washing and taking bath as purifying the blood and toning the liver. Thus to cure ourselves of our vices it is evidently good to mortify the flesh. However, it is necessary above all to purify our affections and renew our hearts. (Intro. 3. 23 – 239)

December 16:

There are some social gatherings useless for anything else than recreation. These take place by mere change from serious occupations. Though we must not be addicted to them yet we can give them some time meant for relaxation. (Intro. 3. 24 – 240)

December 17:

The vine planted among olive trees bears oily grapes which have the taste of olives. A person who finds himself often in the company of virtuous people cannot but share their qualities. (Intro. 3. 24 – 241)

December 18:

Besides the mental solitude, to which you may turn in the midst of the greatest transactions, you must always love the real solitude of a place. You need not go into the deserts like St. Mary of Egypt, St. Paul, St. Antony, Arsenius and other solitary Fathers. Instead remain in your room, in your garden, or elsewhere for a short while. (Intro. 3. 24 – 242)

December 19:

Doctors get a good knowledge of the health or the illness of a man by examining his tongue. Our words are signs of the qualities of our souls: By your words, says the Savior, you will be justified and by your words, you will be condemned (Mt. 12:37). (**Intro.** 3. 26 – 245)

Day 20:

Distill as much as you can - as it is said about the spouse in the Songs of Songs - the delicious honey of devotion and of things divine, drop by drop, sometimes into the ears of one, sometimes into the ears of another. (**Intro.** 3. 26 – 245-6)

December 21:

The sharper a dart, the more easily it enters into our bodies. Similarly the more pointed an evil word is the more it penetrates into our hearts. (**Intro.** 3. 27 – 247)

December 22:

When charity meets with evil, it turns away its face from it and takes no notice of it. Even it closes its eyes before seeing it at the first rumor of evil it hears. Then it believes by a holy simplicity that it was not the evil but some shade or phantom of evil. (**Intro.** 3. 28 – 251)

December 23:

If an action were to have a hundred faces we must look at the most beautiful. (**Intro.** 3. 28 – 252)

December 24:

Bees seeing mist or cloudy weather go back to their hives to prepare honey. So too, the thoughts of good persons do not judge about confused objects or hazy actions of neighbors. Rather, to avoid falling into such occasions, they withdraw themselves into their hearts to prepare there good resolutions for their own improvement. (**Intro.** 3. 28 – 253)

December 25:

We always want this and that, and although we have our sweet Jesus resting on our heart we are not satisfied; and yet this is all we can possibly need and desire. One thing alone is necessary—to be near him. Now tell me, my dear daughter, you know, don't you, that at the birth of Our Lord the shepherds heard the angelic and divine songs of heavenly beings; this is what the scriptures tell us. But nowhere does it say that Our Lady and St. Joseph, who were closest to the child, heard the angels' voices or saw the marvelous radiance; on the contrary, instead of hearing the angels sing they heard the child crying, and by the wretched light of some poor lantern they saw the eyes of this divine boy full of tears and saw him chilled by the cold. Now tell me frankly, would you not rather have been in the dark stable which was full of the baby's crying, rather than with the shepherds, ravished with joy and gladness by sweet heavenly music and the beauty of this marvelous light? (**SelLet** 120-121)

December 26:

David speaking of slanderers says: They have sharpened their tongue like a serpent (Ps. 140:3). The serpent's tongue is forked and has two points, says Aristotle. Such is the tongue of the backbiter that with a single sting he poisons the ear of the listener as well as the reputation of the person of whom he is speaking. (Intro. 3. 29 – 254-5)

December 27:

The hemlock is not in itself a strong poison but mild enough so that it can be easily remedied. But when it is taken with wine it is impossible to cure it. Similarly slander which in itself will pass lightly into one ear and come out by the other, as they say, settles down in the brain of the listeners when it is presented in some cunning and pleasant jest. (Intro. 3. 29 – 255)

December 28:

While I speak of my neighbor, my tongue in my mouth is like a lancet in the hand of surgeon who intends to make an incision between the nerves and the sinews. The incision which I make should be so precise that I say nothing more or nothing less than what it really is. (Intro. 3. 29 – 258)

December 29:

Truthfulness, simplicity and sincerity in speech are a great ornament to Christian life. (Intro. 3. 30 – 260)

December 30:

The hunter asked how such a great man like him could spend his time in such a silly and mean amusement. St. John asked him: "Why don't you carry your bow always bent?" "For fear," replied the hunter, "lest remaining always bent it loses its power to stretch when I need it." "Do not be surprised," retorted the Apostle, "if I relax somewhat the concentration and attention of my spirit to take a little recreation so that soon after I may apply myself to contemplation with greater earnestness." (Intro. 3. 31 – 261)

December 31:

A woman's husband returns home from afar. As soon as she sees him returning and hears his voice, though she may be fully engaged in work held back by some urgent preoccupation, her heart is not held back but leaves all other thoughts to think of her husband who has just come back. It is the same with those who love God greatly. However busy they may be when the thought of God comes to them, they find the return so delightful, that they give little attention to anything else. (Intro. 5. 4 – 344)

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

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