

THE HEART OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

Thirty-one Considerations
Upon the Interior Virtues
Of This Great Saint



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We bless the idea that inspired this little book and consecrated each day of the month to the veneration, but above all to the special imitation of our beloved St. Francis of Sales, and we gladly recommend the study of the mediations here collected. The elevated and divinely inspired sentiments which adorned the soul of this blessed Prelate are here set forth in happily chosen words and with an inimitable force of expression, and they point clearly to the Source from which the virtues that animated his whole life were derived.

+ C. MARIE
Bishop of Annecy

THE FIRST DAY

Perfect Conformity of St. Francis to the Will of God

St. Francis de Sales desired only the greater honor of God and the most perfect accomplishment of God's Divine Will. He used to say that the Will of God was the supreme law of his heart, and that in this life, though we must offer up our toil and labor as prayer to God, the best prayer that we can make consists in our complete submission to God's Will.

M. Favre, his confessor, assures us that he firmly believed that St. Francis de Sales was, in the depths of his soul, in constant, intimate communication with our Lord and Savior, and had a particularly enlightened knowledge of His mysteries. Thus Francis was never seen to be disturbed or annoyed at the occurrence of unexpected events, even when these followed closely one upon the other; he accepted them as coming from the hand of a loving God and did not judge them from a merely human point of view or even according to their intrinsic importance, but only regarded the design of the One willed them. Therefore Francis was constant in prayer, always governing his heart according to the good pleasure of God, trusting himself with childlike confidence to Divine Providence.

The mainspring of all Francis' actions was the Will of God. The chief spiritual exercise of our Francis de Sales consisted in doing everything for God and accepting everything from the hand of God, just as it was presented to him by Providence, and by this means he preserved his soul in constant peace and union with God (*St. Chantal.*)

A Spiritual Bouquet

Let us consider the great number of benefits, both interior and exterior, and also all the interior and exterior sufferings which God in His justice and mercy has ordained for us. Let us lovingly embrace them with open arms, resigning ourselves entirely to His most holy Will, and in this immolation of ourselves let us sing as an eternal canticle of praise, 'Thy Will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.' (On the Love of God, Bk. IX., chap 1)

THE SECOND DAY

His perfect self-abnegation in conformity to the Will of God

The perfect self-abnegation of his angelic heart was most admirable. Bitter and sweet, toil and rest, life and death, were equally agreeable in his eyes and Francis de Sales never had the slightest preference for one rather than for the other before the Divine Majesty had revealed His Will, and then his decision was immediately made. He accomplished this peacefully, without struggle or combat in the superior part of his soul, without yes or no, without perhaps, or alas, or except.

The Holy Scriptures tell us that the waters of Shiloh flowed silently, that is to say, so quietly that their ebb and flow were scarcely perceptible. In like manner Francis de Sales practiced conformity to the Divine Will, so calmly and sweetly that not the slightest disturbance was ever observed in him. But then how could

any disturbance possibly take place in a heart like his, the desires of which were annihilated, lost, merged, and consumed in the good pleasure of God? Within him all was in perfect peace, for he possessed no will of his own, but left God to will in him and for him. (*Pere de la Riviere.*)

A Spiritual Bouquet

If I wish for nothing but pure water what does it matter to me whether the water is contained in a golden chalice or in a simple glass? What does it signify whether the holy Will of God is manifested to me in affliction or in consolation, provided that in every case I only wish for and desire what God wants from and for me? (Of the Love of God, Bk. IX., chap IV.)

THE THIRD DAY

The constancy of his love shown in his conformity to the Will of God

There was never any heart more tender in its love of God nor more resolute and constant in the struggle to arrive at conformity to the Divine Will than was that of St. Francis. He had impressed deeply on his mind that truth that God does all things for our good. This firm conviction preserved him in almost indescribable peace and equanimity, in the midst of the most untoward occurrences. He astonished all who beheld him under these circumstances; for it may truly be said that the winds and waves of tribulations and adversities of this life beat against him as against a firm rock which they could neither shake, nor stain with their foam.

Francis de sales had fixed the eye of his soul steadfastly on the Will of God and advanced, stood still, retreated or proceeded, according as our Lord directed. It was not enough for him merely to abstain from offending against the love of God; he sought to be pleasing to it; he was not content merely to please God, he desired to please God very much; he was not satisfied merely with not giving Him cause for dissatisfaction, he made every effort to give Him satisfaction, but he not stop merely at satisfaction, he wished to give the fullest possible satisfaction, and had he known that by any particular way he might have at all promoted the fulfillment of the Divine Will, he would immediately have adopted it, even should it have cost him his life. (*Pere de la Riviere.*)

A Spiritual Bouquet

Once every week examine yourself as to whether you love the holy Will of God above all else, and this not only in endurable but in unendurable circumstances. (Letters.)

THE FOURTH DAY

His recollection of the presence of God

It appears to me, wrote Francis de Sales, that we are always in the Presence of God, even while we are asleep, for we fall asleep before His eyes, agreeably to His good pleasure: He lays us in bed like statues in their niches, and when we wake we find Him near us. He has not moved any more than we have, and thus we have remained in His Presence, only our eyes were closed.

The Saint declared in confidence that every morning when he awoke he felt himself possessed by the thought of the Presence of God. This could not be the effect of imagination, for during the night this faculty is confused restless and wandering; but this holy man had the grace of feeling every morning, as soon as he was awake and in full possession of his senses, that he was most tenderly loved by God and was loaded with the choicest blessings of Heaven. O God! How superabundant is Your mercy. From the first break of day You did watch at his bed as if to draw back the curtains on his awakening, and to greet him as a friend. (*Pere de la Riviere.*)

A Spiritual Bouquet

Recall the Divine Presence as often as possible during the day by one of the four methods which I have pointed out to you, consider what God is doing and what you are doing. You will see that His eyes are directed towards us and unceasingly fixed on us with ineffable love. (Devout Life, Part II, chap. XII.)

THE FIFTH DAY

His modesty and reverence in the presence of God

Francis de Sales was so mindful of the Presence of God that our Venerable Mother asked him one day, 'Father, are you always in the Presence of God?' He gladly replied, 'Dear Mother, you seem to think that it is a privilege of yours to remain in the Presence of God; but is He not everywhere? And must we not always think of Him? When I am before the king and other great ones of the world, I never change my position; wherever I am, in my room, alone, or in society, I behave exactly the same, out of reverence to the holy Presence of God.'

A sister, a portress of the Visitation Order, once said to him: 'My Lord, when you pass through the streets of the town you always keep your eyes cast down.' He answered: 'Must we not do this in order to walk always in the Presence of God and to remain in it?'

'I could not look upon his external bearing without astonishment and admiration,' said our holy Mother de Chantal.

A Spiritual Bouquet

Although those who are blind cannot see a prince if he be near them, they nevertheless preserve a respectful demeanor if they are made aware of his presence. (Devout Life, Part I, chap. II.)

Modesty always beseems us at all times of our life, for the holy Angels are ever with us, yea, so is God Himself, and before His eyes we must always behave with reverence. (Conference on Modesty.)

THE SIXTH DAY

His spirit of Recollection

It would be impossible to express the diligence with which Francis de Sales tended to his soul. He examined himself most carefully about the most trivial faults and the slightest imperfections, firmly resolving to amend them, for he had declared war against everything that might hinder him from becoming more pleasing in God's sight. He kept himself under such constant discipline and custody, that he rarely did anything hastily or inadvertently. His soul was so continually in the Presence of God, and this habit was so firmly established, that all his thoughts, words and works were but an unbroken continuance of thinking, speaking and acting in God, for God, and agreeably to the Will of God.

Just as balsam melts and becomes liquid when the heat of the fire acts upon it, so Francis' heart, being secretly melted by the fire of Divine Love which burned in it, flowed forth into this love with ineffable delight. Hence it was that his eyes, his brow, his countenance and his whole bearing spread abroad the fragrance of the Divine Presence, so that wherever he entered, those who were present felt that God had entered with him. (*Pere de la Riviere*)

A Spiritual Bouquet

Forget not, O Philothea, to withdraw frequently into the solitude of your heart while you are exteriorly occupied with the affairs and the society of other people. This spiritual solitude need not be presented by any of the things around you, for all these things are not within your heart, but outside of you, and so your heart may swell quite alone with God. (Devout Life, Part II, chap. XII.)

THE SEVENTH DAY

His admirable interior peace

What shall we say of that wonderful peace which was the dearest, most faithful, and the most constant guest of Francis' soul, shining gloriously forth from his angelic countenance and from the innocence of his eyes, and proclaiming itself most nobly in the meekness of his words and in his venerable demeanor? This peace had struck such deep root in his heart that all the violence of the world and of hell would not have been able to rob him of it.

Cardinal de Berulle, speaking of Francis de Sales, declares that he possessed imperturbable peace. This cannot be disputed, for although at times by reason of human frailty the slightest possible disturbance may have troubled the peace of his spirit, this was only as it were a slight breath of disquiet which was soon calmed and lasted barely a moment, like the divisions of water, air and fire which soon close again and leave these elements united as before. And this

peace was so precious to him that Francis de Sales esteemed it above everything which is considered desirable in the world.

The deep interior peace which Francis enjoyed was due to the indwelling of the God of peace in his soul, and though he often experienced interior disturbances he showed no exterior signs of them, so thoroughly was Francis de Sales the master of his passions. (*Pere de la Riviere*)

A Spiritual Bouquet

Peace is a holy treasure which deserves to be bought at a high price. Peace is the passport of the child of Jesus Christ; peace is the joy of the child of our Lady.

If the whole universe should be convulsed, we ought not to be troubled, for the whole world is worth less than the peace of the soul.

If it should be the Will of God that our undertakings should not be successful, it is not our will either, and we ought not on this account lose one quarter of an hour's sleep. (Letters.)

THE EIGHTH DAY

His imperturbable calm

Francis de Sales said that he did not know how to do two things at a time. The reason for his saying this was that he did not approve of hurry, which causes much unrest, many imprudent acts, many distractions and faults. Hence he desired to do well what he was doing, and he could not do it well without attention. Hence, it was his custom never to hurry over anything and to arrange his affairs in good order, and to concentrate on his undertakings his good desires, his holy affections, his pious intentions and the experience which he had acquired by his long practice of the spiritual life, to that whatever he undertook might be finished, like some master piece of art, complete in every respect to the praise of his Creator. (*Pere de la Riviere*)

'I know not how it is,' he wrote to St. Jane de Chantal, 'but although I feel myself to be so wretched, this is no source of disquietude to me; on the contrary, it is sometimes a joy, for I think that I am in truth a fitting object for the Divine mercy.'

This perfect scholar of our Savior had acquired such command over himself that nothing disturbed his interior peace; nothing robbed him of his spiritual liberty. Francis de Sales was always contented, for he lived in the peace of the Crucified.

A Spiritual Bouquet

Exercise yourself in interior and exterior gentleness and keep yourself calm in the midst of a multitude of occupations. Beware of haste, which is the bane of devotion, and frequently raise your soul on high, regarding the world only to despise it and considering time only as a means of striving for eternity. (The Spiritual Director of Devout and Religious souls.)

THE NINTH DAY

His spirit of religion

It would be impossible to express in words the interior humility and the exterior reverence with which Francis de Sales thought and spoke of the things of God. He never treated them as topics for ordinary conversation and always spoke of them with the greatest reverence and respect. Hence he was accustomed to say that the Holy Name of Jesus ought never to be pronounced from habit but always with special reverence; also that we should beware of saying things like it is too hot, or too cold, and the like, as by these expressions we imply a certain blame on Divine Providence.

It is also worthy of remark that he had a singular reverence for holy relics. He has been seen kneeling before them with such piety and devotion that those who saw him were deeply moved at the sight.

Francis de Sales always took special delight in hearing the Word of God, and he seldom lost any opportunity of assisting at sermons. He said of himself: 'He has nothing good about him except that he willingly listens to the preaching of the Word.' (*Pere de la Riviere.*)

A Spiritual Bouquet

The special and natural object of the virtue of Religion consists in paying to God, as far as possible, the honor which is due to Him.

We should never speak carelessly of God and of the things which regard His worship, but we should speak of them with the greatest reverence, esteem and love. (*Spirit of St. Francis of Sales.*)

THE TENTH DAY

His dignified bearing in the ceremonies of the Church

The sight of him as he officiated pontifically, either in the evening at Vespers or during the Office of at High Mass on solemn festivals was beyond everything calculated to inspire one with gladness, for he might then be seen appearing not so much a man of this earth as an angel of heaven. At these solemnities he sat down, rose up and stood with a humility ennobled by the greatest dignity and a dignity tempered by the deepest humility. And although by reason of his profound reverence for the Sacred Mysteries he was most recollected and absorbed, he never permitted any mistake or confusion, so attentive was he both exteriorly and interiorly. He had a powerful voice and sang the praises of God clearly and melodiously. In his stall he resembled a statue in its niche, remaining motionless, never moving about nor turning his eyes hither or thither. He was not subject to distractions, for by a special grace he was a perfect master of his mind and when he applied it to prayer he thought of nothing else, but of saying that prayer well. (*Pere de la Riviere.*)

Francis de Sales was ever penetrated with the plenitude of God's Presence, and this caused him to appear luminous and resplendent, especially on great feasts. (Deposition of Sister M. A. Fichet.)

A Spiritual Bouquet

It is true that the essence of prayer is in the soul, but the voice, actions and other external signs are most noble adornments and most useful accompaniments to it. (Controversies.)

THE ELEVENTH DAY

His devotion to the Blessed Sacrament

What can we say of his profound reverence and respect in church on the days on which the Blessed Sacrament was exposed. Those who beheld him kneeling with such profound humility, such modesty in his countenance and such recollection could never perceive that he even turned his eyes aside. He did not cough or move about; he appeared as motionless as a statue. He never covered his head even with a skull cap whatever the weather might be. His head was bald, and though it was often stung by the flies till it bled, he never drove them away, preferring to bear this suffering patiently and quietly rather than commit the slightest irreverence in the Presence of his Divine Master.

Finally, he felt the greatest confidence in the Blessed Eucharist; he flew to the altar with childlike love in all his difficulties, and never left it without receiving help. (*Pere de la Riviere.*)

A Spiritual Bouquet

Our Lord is veiled in the Blessed Eucharist, but this ought not to hinder us from adoring Him there, for He was adored by the kings when he was wrapped in swaddling bands.

Truly we ought to adore this Divine Sacrament a hundred thousand times a day in gratitude for the love with which our Lord dwells among us. (Sermons.)

THE TWELFTH DAY

His devotion to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass

From the time that he was ordained priest, Francis de Sales was most assiduous in offering up the most august and adorable Sacrifice of the Mass. Whether he were in town or country or traveling he would not have felt happy had he allowed one single day to pass on which he had not presented himself at the altar in order to offer to the Eternal Father that incomparable Sacrifice which His Eternal Son has commanded us to celebrate. It was in truth a consoling and edifying sight to behold him as he approached the altar; for in his demeanor he manifested extreme reverence and respect, and in the celebration of the Sacred Mysteries he received from Heaven marvelous lights and favors.

To his reverence for the Sacrament of Love, we trace the great esteem he showed towards all ministers of the altar, especially towards priests because of their close connection with this unbloody sacrifice, and for this reason he would never allow them to render him the slightest service. (*Pere de la Riviere.*)

He acknowledged once that, supposing he were asked what he was doing in the midst of all his business, he should answer, that he was preparing for the celebration of the holy Mass. (*Pere Talon.*)

A Spiritual Bouquet

What the sun is in the firmament that is the most holy, august and adorable sacrifice of the Mass; for it is the center of religion, the heart of devotion, the soul of piety.

Make every effort, therefore, to hear Mass daily. But if you are hindered from assisting at it corporally, be careful that at least your heart should be present at it, and that you should spiritually take part in this Sacrifice. (Devout Life, Part II, chap. XIV.)

THE THIRTEENTH DAY

His tender love for Holy Communion

Once, being asked by a pious soul how to communicate well, he exclaimed, 'Oh! My dear daughter, alas! What a question! Do you not know that we must render ourselves like to God, since God wills to give Himself entirely to us and to dwell in us, and that we must live like Him in order to dwell with Him? My God,' he continued, 'when I think of what I am saying to Thee it feels as if my heart would break, and as if something cried out to me, O Good Jesus! I will not live, and I cannot live but for Jesus! Oh my Jesus! Alas! And what are then? Are we like Thy most holy Mother, who bore Thee in her womb, and who lives as all ought to live who receive Thee in the most pure and holy Sacrament of the Altar?' While he spoke thus, two or three large tears fell from his eyes and he wiped them quietly, saying that he wept for joy, and that it was impossible to refrain from doing so when considering so sweet a subject. (*Pere Talon.*)

A Spiritual Bouquet

Indeed my dear daughter, you should not abstain from Communion on account of this sort of trouble, (dryness) for nothing will give your heart so much of the spirit of recollection as will its King; nothing will warm it so much as its sun; nothing will refresh so much as its balm. (Letters.)

THE FOURTEENTH DAY

His likeness to our Lord Jesus Christ

Having read and carefully considered the lives of all the Saints by whose example he regulated his daily conduct, he set himself to imitate the Saint of

saints. This he did with such success that he presented to his century the most faithful copy of the converse of the Son of God with men; for he was accustomed to dwell ever in His Presence and to conform all his actions to Him. (*Pere Caussin.*)

It seemed as if the Eternal Father had taken delight in forming him after the pattern of His beloved Son, and in making him a most perfect copy of that Divine Model. Hence several persons of great piety and merit had no hesitation in saying that at the sight of Francis de Sales they had felt as if they had seen our Savior Himself upon earth, so faithfully did he, in his words and countenance, show forth the charity and gentleness of Jesus Christ. It would indeed be difficult to cite any Saint who had more perfectly practiced the lesson which our Lord gave in the words "Learn of me because I am meek and humble of heart." And with all this there was nothing about him eccentric or affected, everything was simple and natural and his nobleness of manner was as admirable as his profound and solid humility.

Francis de Sales had no opinion of himself but candidly and simply confessed himself a great sinner. (*An ancient Author.*)

A Spiritual Bouquet

When you have the opportunity of practicing virtue, see how our Lord practiced it when He lived among men, and then encourage your heart to be a loving imitator of Him. Say to it, 'Come, let us by faithful imitation follow Jesus, our good Master.' (Letters.)

THE FIFTEENTH DAY

His humility

Francis de Sales always cherished the virtue of humility and loved it most tenderly. One proof of this was the pleasure which he took in mingling with those of lowly estate, in hearing their complaints, visiting them in sickness and conversing with them like a friend. Thus he never expressed contempt for anyone, but always showed great esteem for everyone, whosoever he might be. (*Pere de la Riviere.*)

Francis de Sales was perfectly humble, not that he adopted lowly attitudes or spoke humbly of himself, for that he rarely did, and only when his heart prompted him to do it. In fact, he spoke very little of himself or his own concerns. He was prone to say that we should not speak of ourselves either well or ill, for self-praise and self-blame may spring from the same source, that is, from vanity. His humility was heartfelt, dignified, true and solid, and rendered him indifferent to either praise or blame. Francis de Sales entertained a very low opinion of himself, loved contempt and abjection and set great store on the practice of this virtue. He told me once that he had labored during three whole years at the acquisition of this virtue, and he prized and loved it extremely.

In his bearing and in all his actions there was a wonderful dignity accompanied by such profound humility that no one feared to approach him. (*St. Chantal.*)

A Spiritual Bouquet

Cling to your lowliness as to the bond of your worth, practice humility, generously in the might of Him who accomplished the greatest work of His power in the humiliation of the Cross.

Be ever lowly and daily become even lowlier in your own eyes. My God! How great is this littleness. (Spiritual Director.)

THE SIXTEENTH DAY

His humble sweetness

Francis de Sales, by means of patience and generosity, overcame all his passions. He said that he had only been angry once in his whole life and that for that act he had repented ever since. He easily gave up his least inclinations and affections and fought manfully against his aversions and repugnances.

He was well pleased if anyone directed his attention to imperfections which they had observed in him, and took pains to preserve at all times, both morning, noon and night, sweetness and gentleness of heart towards himself and his neighbor and to keep his soul in tranquility.

Francis de Sales always sought for and loved his own abjection. His countenance was ever smiling, his words most cordial and full of sweetness. He has told me that during several years he labored at nothing but the acquisition of humility and sweetness. (*Sr. M. A. Fichet.*)

A Spiritual Bouquet

Every morning establish your heart in humility, sweetness and peace; renew this before dinner, again after grace, after Vespers and often during the day. I know well that you only too often have occasion to practice a love for contempt, for rebuffs and for your own abjection, in the vexations which at present so frequently beset you, but do it well, for the chief point in humility is to know how to behave, how to respect others and how to converse with those whom we know to be opposed to us. (The Spiritual Director.)

THE SEVENTEENTH DAY

His invincible sweetness

Some persons have imagined that Francis de Sales was by nature possessed of this attractive quality of sweetness, but they must forgive me if I contradict them; for his natural temperament, like that of the rest of his family, was very choleric; he gained the victory over his fiery disposition by hard fighting; for he labored continually to overcome himself with the assistance of God's grace. Certainly at times he felt movements of anger and violent rebellions in the irascible part of his nature, although they did not appear externally. But the important thing is that he did not allow them to gain the mastery, but checked them immediately.

One day, having gone to visit an intimate friend, he said; I assure you that with a very little more I should have been angry in earnest, I was obliged to fight with my passion and to crush it and to trample it down.

Finally, with the greatest prudence, Francis de Sales always maintained the peace and calmness of his heart in the midst of the storms and tempests of many contradictions, oppositions and persecutions; he was never impetuous, and he never scolded or complained. (*Pere de la Riviere.*)

A Spiritual Bouquet

Be careful to do all that you can to cultivate sweetness amongst those belonging to you, I mean, those of your household. I do not say that you ought to be soft or easy, but sweet and gentle. You should think of this on going into your house and on coming out of it, in the morning, at noon, at all times. (Letters.)

THE EIGHTEENTH DAY

His kindness to his enemies

Everything about Francis de Sales was so perfect that there was nothing that could be made a subject of blame, so that his enemies were obliged to invent malicious stories in order to bring unjust accusations against him, but he never justified himself. On these occasions he was like sweet smelling incense which ascended to Heaven to the Father of light and of mercy, for he rejoiced in suffering for the honor and glory of God and prayed unceasingly for his enemies, following the example of his Savior. His great sweetness and charity were the remedy for all evils. (*Deposition of Sr. Fichet.*)

Those who had long been intimate with Francis de Sales declared that he was so enamored of insult, that in order to gain his favor and to make sure of not being sent away without obtaining from him that which they desired, they had only to affront him and to offer him some annoyance, for after that he would seize every opportunity of honoring and gratifying those who had ill-treated him.

Certain persons, without any reason, annoyed Francis de Sales extremely and gave him great cause for vexation. Nevertheless when their ringleader came a few days afterwards to ask him for some important favors, this blessed servant of God immediately granted him all that he asked for with incomparable readiness and cordiality. Those who know the whole occurrence were astonished at his liberality; but he answered, 'If he had asked me for one of my arms I would have given it to him.' (*Pere de la Riviere.*)

A Spiritual Bouquet

Why should we not bear with those with whom God Himself has borne, keeping before our eyes the great example of Jesus Christ praying on the Cross for His enemies? For they have not yet crucified us, they have not yet persecuted us to the death, we have not yet resisted unto blood. But who will not love this beloved enemy for whom Jesus Christ has prayed, for whom He died? (Spirit of St. Francis of Sales.)

THE NINETEENTH DAY

His charity towards his neighbor

His charity towards his neighbor was grounded on solid spiritual perfection, and the proof of this was that he showed special kindness to ugly, rough and ill-conditioned persons, regarding only God in them.

It is impossible to describe his cordiality and affability to all, however poor and needy they might be. He comforted and advised all who required it, with perfect impartiality; he even spent entire mornings in hearing the confessions of poor and ignorant women; he visited the sick that were wretched and destitute of any human aid, and he never treated anyone with contempt.

He never allowed any detraction or backbiting; never did he accuse anyone, never did he exaggerate their faults. On the contrary, he always excused them. He said that our neighbor's soul was a forbidden fruit and that we could not judge it without offending against the law of God. (*Pere de la Riviere.*)

Francis de Sales was most grateful and affable to everyone. He was obliging to all and gave as little trouble as he could help; and this was done out of kindness and consideration for his neighbor. (*St. Chantal.*)

A Spiritual Bouquet

Strive to acquire sweetness of heart towards your neighbor, reflecting that he is the work of God, and that some day, if it pleases the Divine mercy, he will enjoy the Paradise which is prepared for us. We ought to bear with all those with whom our Lord bears, feeling great compassion for their spiritual infirmities. (The Spiritual Director.)

THE TWENTIETH DAY

His supernatural tenderness

The love which burnt in the heart of Francis de Sales was no soft, effeminate love, but a loyal, generous, magnanimous, royal love, like that of the Blessed that love so much and never weep. (*Pere de la Riviere.*)

'Truly,' he wrote, 'I do not know of anyone in the world who feels more cordially, more tenderly, and, to put it shortly, more lovingly than I do; I am full of love and of loving words, especially at first. You know that I speak of the true and many-sided love that I have for souls, for it has pleased God to form my heart so. But, nevertheless, I like independent, vigorous souls and not effeminate ones, for great softness confuses the mind, and disturbs and distracts it from loving prayer to God. How comes it that I, who am the most susceptible person in the world, should feel this? But yet I do truly feel it, but it is wonderful that I should make all these things agree together, for I believe that I love nothing but God, and all souls for God. (Letters.)

There are so many sorts of troubles in this world and so many people who are afflicted in different ways that we ought to be very glad when we can help

anyone to carry their cross. This was the great daily practice of our most charitable and blessed Father. (*St. Chantal.*)

A Spiritual Bouquet

Alas! If we consider our neighbor outside the Heart of our Lord we run the risk of not loving him, purely, nor constantly, nor impartially. But within the Heart of our Lord, who would not love him, bear with him, tolerate his imperfections, who would find him disagreeable or tiresome?

But our neighbor is in the Heart of our Savior, and he is so much loved by the Sacred Heart and considered so worthy of love, that the Lover dies for love of him. (Discourses.)

THE TWENTY-FIRST DAY

His affability

Francis de Sales received everyone with a serene and gracious countenance, never sending away anyone, whoever it might be. He listened quietly to everyone for as long a time as each one desired. You would have thought that he had nothing else to do, so patient and attentive was he; everyone left him so cheerful and satisfied, that people were very glad to have anything to say to him, in order to enjoy the extreme sweetness and serenity which he diffused in the hearts of all who spoke with him. By this means he drew people on to perfect confidence, especially when the conversation was on spiritual subjects, for he took delight in speaking of devotion and in exciting everyone to practice it, each according to his vocation and state of life.

Francis de Sales' manner and way of speaking were most dignified and serious, but at the same time most humble, sweet, and simple; he was always entirely free from all affectation, mannerism, or stiffness. He was never heard to utter an ill-timed word or to make a remark savoring of flippancy. He spoke in a low tone, quietly, gently, and prudently, and though he never used fine words, all that he said had the greatest effect. I have often observed that he spoke neither too much nor too little, but always said just what was necessary, and he expressed himself so well that nothing further remained to be added to his words. He sometimes related amusing little anecdotes but always with so much modesty that those who heard them were edified as well as entertained by them. (*Deposition of St. Chantal.*)

A Spiritual Bouquet

Gentleness and affability make serious conversation agreeable, for we should avoid on the one hand flattery and affected cordiality, and on the other sharpness, austerity, hardness, bitterness, contempt, and spitefulness. By well-mannered condescension we deal sweetly and amiable with our neighbor, in words, actions, and general behavior. (Rule of Conduct.)

THE TWENTY-SECOND DAY

His obedience

Francis de Sales possessed the beautiful virtue of obedience in an eminent degree, so that we are justified in affirming that his whole life was a continual exercise of it; for among his many eminent qualities he was remarkable for always preferring the judgment of others to his own, and, what is more, for always submitting his own opinion to those who were less experienced than himself, thus showing his docility and his freedom from attachment to his own inclinations.

Further, he very often stooped to obey his servants, even in indifferent matters; thus, once in a confidential conversation with a friend, the following words escaped him: 'I hardly ever do my own will; I prefer to yield to that of others, rather than induce them to do what I wish.' (*Pere de la Riviere.*)

A Spiritual Bouquet

Oh, how good a thing it is to be pliable and flexible with regard to others. Not only the Saints have taught us the practice of giving up our own will, but our Lord Himself has urged us the same lesson both by word and example. But how by word? What means this counsel of self-abnegation, but giving up our own will and judgment on every occasion in order to follow that of others, and submitting to everyone, except when it would offend God? (Discourse XV. Of the Will of God.)

THE TWENTY-THIRD DAY

His condescension

Francis de Sales' voluntary obedience was always remarkable, and he performed wonderful acts of it on all occasions. When he was with other Bishops he remained quiet and collected, submitting to all their desires and deferring to them, to a degree that was almost painful to them. When he was among his inferiors he consulted their wishes as far as it was right so to do, yielded to their opinions, submitted without hesitation to their humors, however rude or disagreeable or intractable they might be, and this he did without arguing or manifesting vexation, for the love of Him Who for love of us became obedient to the death of the Cross. (*Pere de la Riviere.*)

What did he not do to satisfy the querulous disposition of Mgr. Jean Francois, although he was his senior by twelve years? When Jean Francois was his coadjutor he liked him to take precedence. Speaking one day of his inclination for submission to his neighbor Francis de Sales wrote, 'Monseigneur of Chalcedonia (his brother) has corrected me for this, and now I am better behaved, but I often commit some fault, and though it may be a very slight one, the reputation of my old habits clings to me, and one fault is counted as three.'

A Spiritual Bouquet

God commands me to have charity towards my neighbor, and it is great charity when we remain at one with them, and for this there is no better means than sweetness and condescension; gentle, humble, condescension ought to accompany all our actions. God shows me His will in the will of my brethren, and therefore I obey God as often as I defer to them. (Discourse XV.)

THE TWENTY-FOURTH DAY

His prudence

The prudence with which Francis de Sales proceeded in all his actions was most admirable. Nothing could be more deliberate, more carefully considered, or more circumspect than his conduct; he never did anything rashly, thoughtlessly or hurriedly. He willingly took advice, even deferring his judgment to that of others. He was never precipitate in what he undertook, but proceeded step by step, and waited patiently. Thus, if he could not achieve a thing one day, he accomplished it on the next.

His prudence in the management of affairs was all the greater because he never indulged in display; so long as God was not offended he accommodated himself to the time, the place and the persons could be easily persuaded when good reasons were alleged.

This prudence was a proof of the gifts which the Holy Spirit had communicated to his soul, and it led him to do everything quietly and simply without self-seeking, giving all for nothing and doing all for all. His prudence had nothing in common with worldly prudence which pays no heed to conscience, never thinks of eternity and is the enemy of Jesus Christ. (*Pere de la Riviere.*)

A Spiritual Bouquet

The real virtue of prudence ought to be truly practiced, the more so because it resembles spiritual salt, and gives taste and savor to other virtues; but it ought to be practiced in such a manner that the virtue of simple confidence may predominate in it. (Discourses XII.)

THE TWENTY-FIFTH DAY

His dove-like simplicity

Francis de Sales strongly disliked pretense and affectation and detested hypocrisy, but simplicity delighted him; his heart was on his lips and in his actions. He behaved with the greatest frankness towards everyone; in short, his candor and sincerity did indeed resemble the simplicity of the dove.

The soul of Francis de Sales was bathed in the ocean of interior consolations, his spirit soared to the lofty vaults of solid devotion and his heart expanded freely in the joy of pure love. This is why he did nothing by compulsion, but everything from love, and loved God more than he feared Him.

He was not inordinately attached to his spiritual exercises; for when necessity or charity towards his neighbor required it, he interrupted them without

difficulty or regret. He was always ready to leave God for God, and would as cheerfully descend the ladder of Jacob to action as he ascended it to contemplation. He was never disturbed about anything, so long as his Master was served. His soul was like a beautiful standard, emblazoned with the mottoes of the Divine Will, which floated, furled and unfurled in the breath of the Holy Spirit.

In the road of virtue Francis de Sales did not depend on interior communications and consolations; and hence he was always contented and never complained or was disquieted. (*Pere de la Riviere.*)

A Spiritual Bouquet

The soul which is truly dove-like, that is, which loves God tenderly, makes use of the means prescribed for its perfection, without excitement and without seeking other means. It says: 'My Beloved thinks for me and I trust to Him.' (Discourses.)

THE TWENTY-SIXTH DAY

His resignation

The whole life of Francis de Sales was a continual exercise of resignation to the Will of God. This had become so habitual for him that he never formally by any contrary act disclaimed the resolution which he had taken of persevering in this noble virtue. In the midst of untoward occurrences his heart remained undisturbed, and confessing the justice of the Divine judgments, he cleaved lovingly to them and humbly kissed the rod with which his good Master was pleased to try him. Whatever distress he might feel in the inferior part of his soul, in the superior part of it he always sweetly acquiesced in the adorable decrees of Divine Providence. (*Pere de la Riviere.*)

'I may,' he wrote, 'say this word in confidence to you. There is not a man on earth who feels separations more keenly than I do; nevertheless, I consider the vanities of this world as so trifling a matter that I never return to God with greater feelings of love, than when He has struck me or allowed me to be struck.

'I am accustomed to tell the souls who apply to me, that we must lift up our hearts as the Church bids us in the holy Sacrifice. (Letters.)

A Spiritual Bouquet

We must not only submit to God's striking us, but we must submit to its being on the spot which shall please Him. (Letters.)

THE TWENTY-SEVENTH DAY

His poverty

To an utter detachment from earthly riches Francis de Sales added a great self-abnegation which hid from his sight both the conveniences which he

might have legitimately enjoyed, and the inconveniences which he daily experienced. This is why he never asked for a clean shirt, or a hat, or for new shoes or cassock or cloak, but just took those that his servant offered him.

When he was in country places he cheerfully bore all the discomforts that he met with, complaining neither of the poverty of the villages, nor of the squalor of the inns, nor of the ill-furnished rooms or beds, nor of bad food or scanty service, nor of the rough roads, or of the rain. Like a meek lamb he let himself be ruled by those who arranged the journey and joyfully submitted so as to have an opportunity of practicing the virtue of poverty. In order to show how much he prized it, he loved the poor most tenderly, especially those whose poverty was abject, sordid, and repulsive.

He also despised all that is transitory and perishable; wealth, honors and dignities did not allure him in any way; his heart was perfectly detached from them. He aspired only to the glorious riches of Heaven, which so lifted him above himself and the things of the world that he cared for none of these and forgot them all. (*Pere de la Riviere.*)

A Spiritual Bouquet

The man whose heart is in Heaven is not troubled about the things of earth. My greatest wish is to suffer the want of something that is necessary, in order to imitate Jesus Christ the King of the poor, and I am never happier than when I am least well off. (Words of St. Francis of Sales.)

THE TWENTY-EIGHTH DAY

His mortification

St. Anthony of Padua once appeared to Francis de Sales in the church of the Franciscans of Evian, and said to him: 'Like me, thou shalt desire martyrdom and shalt not have it; thou must be the instrument of thine own martyrdom.' 'From that evening,' declares the blessed Bishop, 'U took the resolution of mortifying myself and of making use of all occasions, both great and small, of practicing Christian virtue.'

From this resolution and endeavor sprang the perfection with which he did all things, both great and small, and he often said that the things which annoy us, try us, and humble us, ought to be looked on as our Christian captivity and martyrdom, which, although unbloody, are none the less pleasing to Him, Whose Providence does not put us in greater occasions of suffering. Finally he added, 'He who mortifies himself is quite martyr enough, but as for those who neither mortify themselves nor bear cheerfully the trials which come to them from others, I do not know what rank they can claim in the Kingdom of God, seeing that they will be neither martyrs nor confessors.' (*Mother F. M. de Chaugy.*)

A Spiritual Bouquet

We must die in order that God may live in us, for it is impossible to attain to the union of our soul with God by any other means than that of mortification. (Discourse XX.)

THE TWENTY-NINTH DAY

His fortitude

Francis de Sales was so firm and constant in what his reason showed him ought to be done, that all the storms of hell would not have shaken him. And to speak truly, although he never showed impetuous haste, impatient or violent zeal, he nevertheless had marvelous generosity and the magnanimity of invincible courage. (*Pere de la Riviere.*)

Never was there a more courageous or more generous soul, or one more capable of bearing injuries, nor of following up the undertakings with which God inspired him. He never refused any, and was wont to say that when our Lord has committed any affair to us we must not give it up, but must have courage to overcome all difficulties.

Great strength of mind is indeed needed to persevere in doing what is good as did Francis de Sales. Who has ever seen him draw back or lose a shade of his modesty? Who has ever seen his spirit disturbed or his soul ruffled by anyone? For this reason his heart was perfectly innocent. He never did anything from malice or bitterness of spirit. No, there was certainly never so gentle, humble, kind, gracious, or affable a heart as was his. (*St. Chantal.*)

A Spiritual Bouquet

The gift of fortitude and courage consist in overcoming oneself in order to submit to God, in mortifying and pruning in our souls all those superfluities and imperfections which spring from self-love, retaining none, however small, but aspiring courageously to the highest perfection, without fearing the difficulties which lie in the way of its acquirement. (Third Sermon for Pentecost.)

THE THIRTIETH DAY

His interior life

How admirable was the order which God had established in the person of Francis de Sales! Everything in it was so well regulated and so calm, and the light of God shone so clearly into it that he was able to see his very slightest action.

His insight into those matters which concern spiritual perfection was so keen that he was able to distinguish between the smallest and most delicate details, and his pure soul could never willingly endure anything which it saw was less perfect, for his zealous love would not permit it to do so. Not that he never committed any imperfection, for when he erred it was solely from surprise and infirmity. But I never knew him to allow himself to be attached to an imperfection, however slight it might be. On the contrary, his soul was purer than the sun and whiter than the snow, in all his actions, resolutions, and intentions. In fact it was all purity, humility, simplicity, and union with God.

May I venture to say it? Yes; I will say it. It used to seem to me that my Francis de Sales was a living picture in which the Son of God our Lord was portrayed, for truly the order and regularity of this holy soul was absolutely supernatural and Divine. (*St. Chantal.*)

A Spiritual Bouquet

To live by the spirit is to think, speak and act according to the virtues of the spirit, and not according to the sense and feelings of the flesh. What are the virtues of the spirit? Faith which shows us truths above sense; hope which makes us aspire to invisible possessions; charity which makes us love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves, not with a sensual, natural, interested love, but with that pure solid love which is founded on God. (Spiritual Director.)

THE THIRTY-FIRST DAY

His appearance

In conclusion, Francis of Sales was a great man in every sense of the word, and only small and lowly in his own eyes. His figure was erect and robust, his stature commanding, he had a high color, broad shoulders, a large, almost bald, head; he had curly chestnut hair, an ample forehead, arched eyebrows, blue eyes, a faultlessly cut nose, rosy cheeks, a round mouth, and a thick and rather long beard. His voice was deep and he had a slow way of speaking; his hands were large and strong; he walked firmly and leisurely; his gestures were noble and simple; and his clothes were always neatly arranged. Concerning his mind, we may say that he was a man of deep thought, of most mature judgment, of a calm intelligence which nothing in the world was ever able to disturb, and so orderly and regular that he never postponed till the morrow that which he had to do today, and rarely did today that which had to be done on the morrow, except in obedience to the dictates of prudence. He was an enemy to hurry, patient in all things, despising nothing, however trivial it might be; he was kind and gentle to little children, and in short so perfect in all points as to be truly the salt of the earth, the light of the world and the lamp placed upon a candlestick to enlighten all that were in the house. (*Charles Auguste de Sales.*)

My kind and tender father, is it not your desire that I should utter this prayer from the bottom of my heart? May my soul imitate your wished, run in the odor of your sweetness – May it always love your gentleness, meekness and dove-like simplicity. (*Pere de la Riviere.*)

A Spiritual Bouquet

Read the histories and lives of the Saints in which, as in a mirror, you may see the pattern of the Christian life, and make use of their actions as a profitable example, conformably with your vocation. (Devout Life, Part II, chap. XVII.)

LITANY OF ST. FRANCIS OF SALES

(Approved by the Holy See)

Lord have mercy on us,
Christ have mercy on us,
Lord have mercy on us,
Christ hear us,
Christ graciously hear us,
God the Father of Heaven, have mercy on us.
God the Son Redeemer of the world, have mercy on us.
God the Holy Ghost, have mercy on us.
Holy Trinity one God, have mercy on us.
St. Francis admirable bishop, pray for us.
St. Francis beloved of God,
St. Francis imitator of Jesus Christ,
St. Francis filled with the gifts of the Lord,
St. Francis favorite of the Mother of God,
St. Francis most devout to the Saints,
St. Francis burning with love for the Cross of Christ,
St. Francis most closely united to the Divine Will,
St. Francis vessel of election,
St. Francis light of the Church,
St. Francis perfect model of religious,
St. Francis defender of the Catholic Faith,
St. Francis good shepherd of thy people,
St. Francis incomparable preacher,
St. Francis scourge of heresy,
St. Francis salt of the earth,
St. Francis model of justice,
St. Francis mirror of humility,
St. Francis despiser of the world,
St. Francis lover of poverty,
St. Francis type of sweetness,
St. Francis conqueror of carnal passions,
St. Francis terror of devils,
St. Francis merciful prop to penitents,
St. Francis refuge of sinners,
St. Francis providence of the poor,
St. Francis consoler of the afflicted,
St. Francis example of perfection,
St. Francis ark of holiness,
St. Francis imitator of the purity of the Angels,
St. Francis cherub of wisdom,
St. Francis seraph of love,
St. Francis our holy Patriarch,
St. Francis our sweet light,
St. Francis our mighty protector,
St. Francis our guide in the ways of God,
St. Francis our refuge,

St. Francis emulator of the Angels,
St. Francis imitator of the Apostles,
St. Francis sharer in the glory of the Martyrs,
St. Francis glory of the holy Confessors,
St. Francis teacher and director of Virgins,
St. Francis glorious fellow-citizen of all the Saints,

Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world, spare us O Lord.
Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world, graciously hear us O Lord.
Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.

V. Pray for us O blessed Francis of Sales,
R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let Us Pray*

O God, by Whose gracious Will the blessed Francis, Thy confessor and bishop, became all thing unto all men for the saving of their souls; mercifully grant that, being filled with the sweetness of Thy love, we may through the guidance of his counsels, and the aid of his merits, attain unto the joys of life everlasting. Amen.

* This prayer was composed by Alexander VII, and given in his own handwriting together with the brief of beatification of St. Francis to the Bishop of Puy the 28th December, 1661, in the presence of Fr. De Chaugy. (*Unpublished letters of de Chaugy.*)

PRAYERS TO ST. FRANCIS OF SALES

1. Hail glorious Father St. Francis! I venerate thy holy and innocent childhood which foreshadowed thy saintly life and the virtues which were to adorn it. I implore of thee to watch over all the children of holy Church, obtain for them either the grace to preserve their baptismal innocence or that of recovering it by ardent and perfect contrition. Gloria Patri, etc.
2. Hail glorious Father St. Francis, whose admirable youth was a sight worthy of Heaven. As thou art the perfect model of Christian youth, do thou also be its faithful protector. Obtain for all young souls the grace to imitate thy ardent piety, thy angelical purity, thy aversion to worldliness and thy filial recourse to the Mother of God in the midst of temptation. Gloria Patri, etc.
3. Hail glorious Father St. Francis, model of the holy ministers of the Lord, priest by excellence who at the onset of thy service of the altar, didst say like the royal prophet: 'Thou, O Lord, art the portion of mine inheritance'; I beseech of thee to obtain from God for all the ministers of the holy Church an abundant share of thy sacerdotal spirit, so that their works and their holy lives may glorify Almighty God. Gloria Patri, etc.
4. Hail glorious Father St. Francis, most untiring and devoted apostle, who didst at the price of thy labor and thy blood bring back to the fold of holy Church so large a numbering of wandering sheep; protect thy successors our missionaries who like thee bear the good tidings to them that sleep in

- the shadow of death; by thy prayers obtain for them that their toil may be blessed by God and that the numbers of the children of holy Church may receive a daily increase. Gloria Patri, etc.
5. Hail glorious Father St. Francis, most worthy Pontiff beloved of God and man, who hast enlightened the world and kindled charity in it by thy admirable doctrine and thy holy example. Do thou, who wert so devoted a son of the Supreme Pontiff and Vicar of Jesus Christ, obtain by thy prayers the triumph of the holy Roman Church, and spread abroad throughout the venerable body of the Episcopate thy double spirit of strength and sweetness. Gloria Patri, etc.
 6. Hail glorious Father St. Francis, founder of the holy Order of the Visitation, which was destined to honor and imitate the most cherished virtues of the Heart of Jesus; obtain for all religious Orders, and especially for thy beloved Institute of the Visitation the grace for all their members to sanctify themselves by the exact and punctual observance of their Rules both in their letter and in their spirit. Gloria Patri, etc.
 7. Hail glorious Father St. Francis, admirable Director of souls, who didst, like the beloved disciple draw from the Heart of Jesus Christ enlightened doctrine, and thy holy teaching, obtain for all Christians the grace of true devotion, of generosity in the service of God, together with the virtues of sweetness, humility, simplicity and perfect submission to the Divine Will. Gloria Patri, etc.